

Weisberg says FBI is blocking access to Kennedy, King assassination files

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A local writer who has been credited with being a major force behind the Freedom of Information Act and has been called "the last of a dying breed of investigative reporters," is now tangling with the FBI over obtaining copies of his files on the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King.

In 1978, a federal judge ruled that author Harold Weisberg, a resident of Old Receiver Road, Frederick, qualified for a waiver of duplicating fees for the FBI files.

Taken into consideration in the ruling was the fact Weisberg's only regular income is Social Security benefits. The judge in the case also recognized "the unique role" Weisberg has played in the Freedom of Information Act, and "the benefit to the general public."

Now, the author of seven books on the assassinations and an outspoken critic of the Warren Commission's report, has been told by the FBI he must pay for copies of their files. The FBI did say, however, that Weisberg could use their reading room to peruse the materials.

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Travel to Washington, D. C., is nearly impossible for the 67-year-old Weisberg who is afflicted with circulatory problems, cataracts and other ailments. (See Jack Anderson's Washington Merry-Go-Round, Page A-8.)

Seated in the living room of his home one night this week, Weisberg talked about his work and this latest obstacle. "The truth is, they're out to get me," he said of the FBI, "they're out to stop me . . . I'm 67 years old, I have serious circulation problems . . . if they succeed, there's no way I can afford to get the papers."

Weisberg said litigation in the matter would be costly "and they can waste me, I would spend all my time in litigation."

The author contended the FBI files contain "some stuff that would be deeply embarrassing to the FBI . . . They've done such wretched, rotten stuff, it's unbelievable . . . All this talk about the new FBI and the old — I can't see how

Weisberg

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there's a damn bit of difference."

The basement of the Weisberg home is lined with file cabinets — so many cabinets that it looks like a reference room of a large library. The files are all neatly labeled and organized and Weisberg often has visitors who use them in their own work.

How did he become so involved with studying the Kennedy and King killings?

"I didn't intend to," said the man who has been in newspapering, public relations, was a Senate investigator, worked in intelligence during World War II and was a farmer.

At the time of the Kennedy assassination, Weisberg was in the process of liquidating his farming operation and closely followed the events unfolding.

He said he was convinced almost from the beginning that "the crime was beyond any one man."

Weisberg mentioned the thrust of his writings is to point out that in a "time of great crisis," which the killing of a president is, "the institutions of society failed and have failed ever since."

These are the institutions, he said, that are "supposed to protect us."

The author obviously is caught up in his work and he cited times when he

would get along on two hours sleep or work around the clock when he was on the trail of something. Could this be called an obsession with him?

"It's easy to jump to that conclusion," Weisberg said, "but, no . . . and I don't regard it as a crusade.

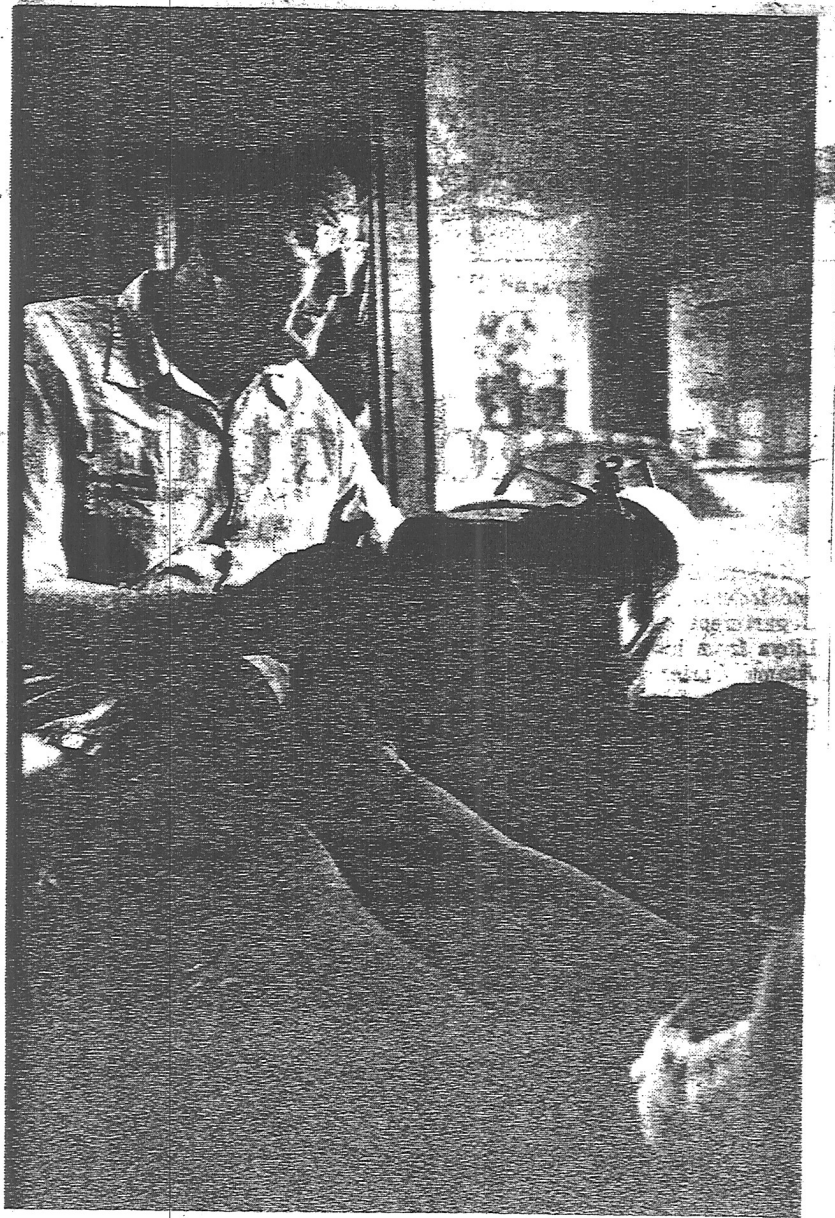
"Each citizen has some responsibility and it's up to each of them which ones he assumes," he said. The author said it's not considered unusual when a doctor gets up in the middle of the night to be with a sick person, nor is it considered out of the ordinary for a farmer to stay with a cow who is having trouble birthing a calf.

"It's not unusual what I do . . . citizen participation — that's all I'm doing," he said. "There are no heroics in it at all. It's the function of a writer to ask questions."

Weisberg does not consider his fight with the FBI over getting their files as being hopeless.

"Does what you see downstairs look hopeless?" he said of his files.

"Don't ever think you're going to be completely satisfied with government," said Weisberg. "I don't think it's not worth the effort to keep trying to improve it."



ACCESS BLOCKED — Local author and researcher Harold Weisberg is currently attempting to gain access to copies of FBI files concerning the John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King assassinations. Circulatory problems make traveling to the Bureau's reading room in Washington a major problem for Weisberg. Evident in this 1978 photo are the surgical stockings he wears, and he has to elevate his legs when he works at his typewriter. (Photo by C. Kurt Roker)