

Olsons relieved, want facts

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After 22 years of "shrouded mystery," Frank Olson's family is now experiencing "great relief" to know more of the truth than ever before, "renewed deep sorrow" at having to recall sad memories, and newfound disbelief that their husband and father had died in such a "bizarre" and "pointless" manner.

"The most secret part of our lives for all these years," eldest son Eric said Thursday, "is about to become our most public. We do this because there are many things we still do not know and because we want the full story told of what we thought all along to be a suicide but which turns out to be one of a series of CIA atrocities."

Back in 1953, when biochemist Olson never returned from a New York psychiatric visit, widowed Alice Olson was left to rear children Eric, 9, Nils, 5 and Lisa, 7.

For 22 years, the mother and her children labored beneath a cloud of uncertainty and reoccurring moments of self-doubt that Olson's suicide may have been their fault in some way.

When playmates asked the Olson children the painful question about their father's death, they didn't know what to say.

Alice Olson admitted she always had doubts about the circumstances surrounding her husband's death, and,

believing it had nothing to do with their homelife or marriage, had only his highly secretive work to blame.

For 22 years, the Olson family, while knowing of some sort of CIA involvement with Olson's work and presence at his death scene, never realized or suspected the bizarre story which they first pieced together from June 11 newspaper accounts of the Rockefeller Commission report studying domestic activities of the CIA.

"A neighbor called me the morning the reports came out in the papers and asked me if I had seen the stories on Frank's death," Alice Olson recalled. "There was never any doubt that the stories, without mentioning the name of the 'LSD suicide victim,' were about Frank's death."

Thursday, the scene around the Olson's home which Alice and Frank had

built back in 1943 when they first came to Frederick, fully depicted the abrupt changes the Olsons now face as they prepare to take on the CIA in a court battle to obtain the truth surrounding the biochemist's death and secure payment for damages.

Seated at a family picnic table where, perhaps, the family, in more private times, enjoyed casual picnic dinners, the Olson children and their mother faced the microphones and cameras of most of the major networks, newspapers and wire services.

"We feel that this is an intimate family story," the Olsons said, "and, while a very sensational story, we are concerned that neither the personal pain this family has experienced nor the moral and political outrage we feel be slighted."

Eric, now 30 and a research assistant at Yale and graduate student at

Harvard, spoke of how he thought the death of his father had affected the family member's lives.

"If you look at us," he said, "it seems we have all chosen work in helping professions. My sister, Lisa, works as a speech therapist at the Maryland School for the Deaf. Nils is a dental school student at Maryland, and I am working in psychology."

The Olsons presented themselves to the national press corps assembled in their backyard as a determined close-knit family who had decidedly made up their minds to seek the truth both, as they said, for their own satisfaction and for the reason of making the CIA responsible and accountable for their actions.

At times, Mrs. Olson was asked by

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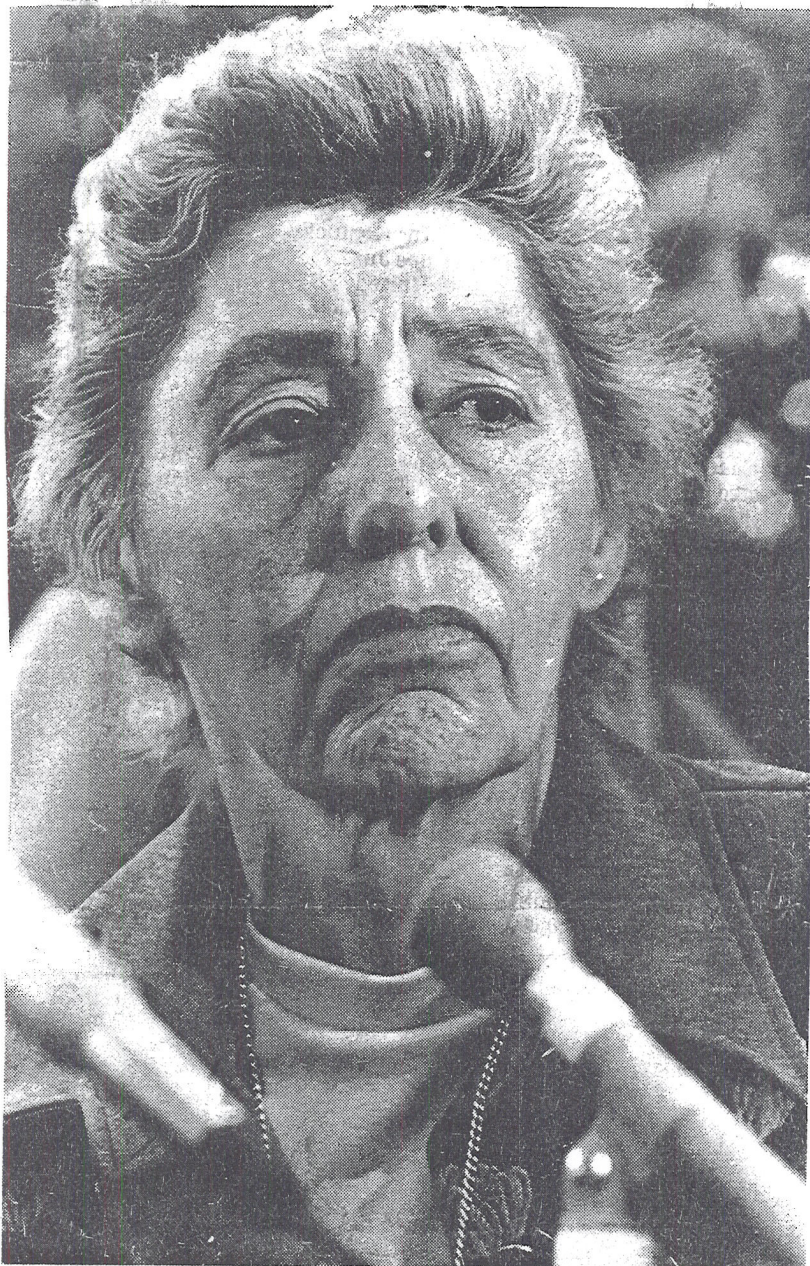
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newsmen to recount incidents around Frank's death and his behavior the week preceding his fatal plunge.

"He returned from a weekend retreat very silent and not at all like himself. I remember him saying he had made a mistake, but he didn't say what kind," she said.

"Then, one day, he returned home from work early and told me he had been advised to seek psychiatric help. He said that his colleagues feared that he might do me bodily harm.

"A car driven by a special operations division employe came soon after that and I accompanied Frank to Washington where he departed for New York. I never saw him again."



What killed my husband?

Mrs. Alice Wicks Olson, wife of a former biochemist at Fort Detrick, ponders a question at a press conference at her home in Old Braddock. She wants to know more about her husband's death in 1953. Reports at the time of the death said Dr. Frank Olson committed suicide. Mrs. Olson charges the CIA with "illegally and negligently" administering the drug LSD to her husband shortly before his death. — Photo by Neil Sandler