

Bill Rea ? Wondering who killed JFK



will be up-front right from the start.

I am a man who generally has very little use for conspiracy theorists. Yet we seem to be surrounded by them.

I have heard charges of nefarious behaviour being involved in the outcomes of sporting events and elections ? So have you! And there are those who maintain there was some kind of high placed conspirators behind such events as the death of Princes Diana and the 9-11 terrorist attacks. I buy none of it.

Yet I am in that group who believes there was something very fishy about the events that took place 50 years ago tomorrow (Friday). I refer, of course, to the assassination of American President John F. Kennedy.

Like most people who were alive, conscious and living in a civilized part of the world at the time, I have very clear memories of where I was and who I was with when the word of the events in Dallas reached my ears.

I was only five years old at the time (55 is the answer to the mental arithmetic some of you are doing right now), and I doubt you're going to find many people younger than I who can remember that day.

I was with my mother, standing outside my aunt's (my mom's sister) apartment. We were picking her and my seven-month-old cousin to go to a bazaar at Royal York United Church in Toronto (when was the last time you spent a Friday afternoon at a church bazaar? ? How times have changed). My aunt lived on the fourth floor of the building that still stands on Bloor Street, near the banks of the Humber River, and my mother, who was into physical fitness at the time, relished the thought of walking up four flights of stairs (these were the days before parents were inclined to solicit the opinions of their kids on such matters). And lucky for her, there was a maintenance man working on the elevator which happened to be parked at the fourth floor. He evidently had a transistor radio (remember them?) playing as he worked, and apparently heard a bulletin being broadcast. It was he who broke the news to us, poking his head around the corner of the hallway.

?Did you hear President Kennedy's been shot?? he asked.

And that's how we got the news. Even the five-year-old kid who was myself understood something very bad had happened.

Like everyone else in this hemisphere, I watched lots and lots of the detailed coverage on TV, largely because there was nothing else on that day (I remember the frustration in my brother's voice when he realized the Mickey Mouse Club would be pre-empted) and I had not yet learned how to read. I heard a commentator announce ?Oswald has been shot,? not yet appreciating who Lee Harvey Oswald was or the significance of his death. I watched the proceedings at Arlington National Cemetery, getting shushed up by my mother when I asked her if they were going to bury the flag draping Kennedy's casket.

As the years went by, I heard a read a lot of stories about possible conspiracies, not believing any of them.

It wasn't until the 25th anniversary of the assassination that I started to doubt what I had believed for almost my entire life.

There was an evening that week that the Rotary Club of Palgrave hosted an expert on the assassination as their guest speaker. The man spoke for almost two hours, with no one in the room making a sound, and as soon as he sat down, there was a mass stampede to the washrooms. No one had wanted to miss a word.

The story I wrote in the aftermath was memorable, both for it's length (I believe it was the longest single story I have ever written), and the fact I started writing as soon as I got home that night, was still firing on all cylinders at 2 a.m. when I finally finished.

Seeds of doubt were planted in my brain, prompting me to question many things I had believed.

The upshot is I do not know what to believe, except that I don't believe what we have been told through official channels, such as the

Warren Commission, for some 50 years.

Like so many other factors that combine to make up earthly existence, I believe history is constantly evolving, following trends and fashions, much the way the rest of society operates.

For many years, it seemed society was prepared to accept the version of events that it had been given by the Warren Commission; namely that Lee Harvey Oswald had acted alone. If memory serves, I started hearing thoughts to the contrary during my teens, during a time when people (especially Americans) started wondering how dirty the sitting president's hands were over something known as Watergate.

Yet I have seen many documentaries, including one in the last couple of weeks, that seem determined to restore the Warren Commission's verdict.

Is the pendulum swinging back?

One of those documentaries was shown about 10 years ago, and hosted by the late Peter Jennings, a broadcast journalist I always had time for.

One of the very heavy issues conspiracy theorists latch on to is what's commonly referred to as 'the magic bullet.' This bullet wounded both Kennedy and Texas Governor John Connally, yet it was recovered in pretty good condition (history has used the word 'pristine'). There was also a lot of speculation that it did some pretty weird maneuvers in mid air as it travelled between the two men. The documentary Jennings presented did a pretty good job of explaining the problems with the bullet's path. Theories had always been that Kennedy was sitting directly behind Connally, but in fact he was seated more inboard in the back seat of the car. But there was no explanation of the state of the bullet. I admit I am no expert in such things, but I would argue that a bullet that traversed the torsos of two grown men, broke the wrist of one of them and then lodged in his thigh would have ended up looking like a hunk of well-chewed bubble gum.

That is why I'm inclined to believe there was a conspiracy. But I'm only one man, and everyone else will have an opinion.

As for the other issues involved in the assassination, although I think there was a conspiracy, I do believe Oswald was involved to some extent. I believe Jack Ruby was exactly what he presented himself to be; a grieving man who was avenging the murder of his president.

I also believe we will never know for sure what really happened that day in Dallas, or who all were involved. There is probably a lot of evidence that's sealed away somewhere, and it might be released at some point down the road. But the last 50 years has offered lots of time and opportunity to doctor this evidence, so what proof will we have that it's legitimate if it ever is released.

I personally believe Kennedy was overrated as a president. He came around at a time of great ideals and notions, and he certainly had a way of inspiring people, especially the young, I think there was an irresponsible streak in him that could have put his administration at risk.

But no matter what I might think of him, I believe the world has a right to know what happened to him 50 years ago, and we probably never will.