

Family of CIA Drug Victim Remembers

Puzzlement Turned to Anger at CIA

By Susan Axelrod
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FREDERICK, Md. — On weekdays, Frank Olson's mind was occupied with the science of biological warfare, but on Saturdays he put aside thoughts of deadly germs and took his children on outings.

"His family was his hobby. He was the most devoted father I have ever seen," his wife, Alice, said yesterday.

Suddenly, Frank Olson's personality changed. He became "uncharacteristically quiet and melancholy" and sought psychiatric treatment in New York. It was in that city 22 years ago that Frank Olson, then 43, jumped to his death from his 10th-story Hotel Statler room.

THE MYSTERY surrounding Olson's death lingered with his family, and especially with his wife, who said she felt he must have plunged through the window "in a state of panic brought on by I don't know what."

When the Rockefeller Commission, in a report published last month, disclosed an "LSD suicide" that was the result of a secret CIA test on several unsuspecting persons (who were not identified), the pieces fell together for the Olson family.

Through one of Olson's former colleagues, the family ascertained that the person who had approached that window at "a full run" and who had crashed through a shade and the window panes had been the same "devoted father and wonderful husband" Alice Olson and her children had known.

THAT OLSON was the victim was confirmed Wednesday by David Befin, director of the vice presidential panel which investigated CIA activities.

At a press conference held in the tree-shaded backyard of their ranch-style home near here yesterday, Mrs. Olson and her three children, Eric, 30; Lisa Olson Hayward, 29, and Nils, 26, called Olson's death "a CIA atrocity" and said they are going to sue the intelligence agency for "several millions of dollars."

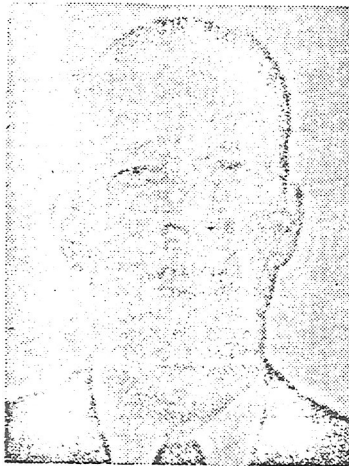
Lisa Olson Hayward told reporters that her father had been given a dose of LSD in an after-dinner drink of Cointreau at a meeting of the Special Operations division attached to Fort Detrick, then an Army biological warfare research installation. It has since been converted into a cancer research facility.

At the time, Olson was a civilian biochemist and a high-level research scientist at the Army base who did research on lethal microorganisms such as those that transmit bubonic plague.

MRS. OLSON said the two CIA agents, working as liaison men between the Fort Detrick project and the agency, were called Robert Lashbrook and Sidney Gottlieb. A spokesman for the CIA would not comment on whether the two men were former or current agents, and neither could be located in the metropolitan area.

The weekend after the meeting, Alice Olson remarked to her husband over dinner that "the adults in this family don't seem to be able to communicate." She said by Monday Olson had decided to quit his job; then he changed his mind.

Tuesday morning Olson came home from work and told his wife he had been advised that he needed to



FRANK OLSON
Received LSD in cordial.

see a psychiatrist. He told her his colleagues feared he might do her bodily harm. "I had to sit down then. My legs wouldn't support me," Alice Olson recalled.

SHE ACCOMPANIED Olson and another man to a Washington airport where they left for New York City to see a psychiatrist with a high-security clearance. On that day Nov. 28, 1953, Alice Olson was the mother of three children under the age of 10. She never saw her husband again.

"I remember he called that Friday, the night before he died," she said yesterday. "We talked about his coming home the next day. It was not a farewell conversation."

The circumstances of Olson's death were difficult for the family to live with. Lisa Olson Hayward said she used to tell her friends her father died in an accident. "They assumed

he died in a car accident, and I didn't correct them," she said. The entire family had to think up new reasons when it realized that a person doesn't die from a nervous breakdown, she added.

In suing the CIA, the family said they are most interested in a full disclosure of Olson's death. "Without disclosure, there will be no settlement," said the Olson family's lawyer, David Rudovsky. He added the suit will be filed within two months in either Virginia, Maryland or the District.

ERIC OLSON said that, even after the Rockefeller Commission report, "there are many things we still don't know. We have a lot of doubts about the story as we now know it. There is no reason to believe my father's death was not accidental, but it's possible," he said.

He said he tried to meet with the New York psychiatrist, Dr. Harold A. Abramson, but the doctor "was very curt on the telephone and said, 'how do you expect me to remember that — it happened 22 years ago.'"

Mrs. Olson said when she heard the findings of the Rockefeller Commission she felt "tremendous grief, almost as much as the day he died. Then I felt relief to know he didn't commit suicide, and then anger that we had been lied to for 22 years."

She said the "trauma and day-to-day consequences" resulting from her husband's death were compounded by trying to be both a father and mother to her children. "I wanted them to have as normal a life as possible," she said.

NILS OLSON, a dental student at the University of Maryland in Baltimore, said none of the children had ever taken LSD. When asked if they had used marijuana or other drugs, he said "the question isn't relevant to the issue."

He described his family as a close one. "We are all very strong and very self-reliant," he said.

Nils Olson said his mother did not remarry because "she was married to an extraordinary person, and it's hard to find another extraordinary person."

A graduate student in clinical psychology at Harvard, Eric Olson is the coauthor of a book entitled "Living and Dying." On the fly page of the family's copy, he has written:

"For Mom, who knows well that in a dark time, the eye begins to see."