

# Klees leadership bid still on hold for now

*\$3 million war chest building to take on Alliance opponents*

BY LISA QUEEN  
Staff Writer

With a war chest of almost \$3 million, Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees will announce next Tuesday whether he will battle Reform Party founder Preston Manning and Alberta Treasurer Stockwell Day for the leadership of Canada's new right-wing party.

"If I was a betting person, I would be betting on (April) 4th," Klees said yesterday, following the birth of the Canadian Reform Conservative Alliance party over the weekend.

Klees, 49, will be in Quebec City this weekend. And, as Premier Mike Harris' chief government whip and deputy house leader, he will have a role to play when the spring session of the Ontario legislature begins Monday.

But while Klees has been testing the waters for the past several months, he claimed his entry into the leadership race of the new national party isn't definite. He won't make the leap until

he is sure he has the financial backing to mount a credible campaign.

"Our budget for this campaign is \$3 million. It's not all there yet, but we're getting close," he said.

"It's not cash in the bank. It's



**FRANK KLEES:** Oak Ridges MPP will make official announcement next week.

commitments. Until that budget is firmly underwritten and committed, I won't enter the race. I'm not prepared to start something I can't finish."

Klees said attending the convention that launched the new

party was emotional.

"It was exciting to be there. It was clearly an historic event. It's not every day you see the beginning of a new national party."

After mail-in referendum votes were counted over the weekend in Calgary, the ballots revealed 91.9 per cent of 49,000 Reform Party members said yes to creating the Canadian Alliance.

Compared to Manning and even Day, Klees is largely unknown in Central Ontario where the party needs support most.

But Klees said his anonymity is working to his advantage among grassroots members of the new party.

"Our prospects are very promising. Frankly, the role I have been playing (in Ontario politics) is a behind-the-scenes role."

The clock is now ticking as leadership hopefuls launch campaigns in preparation for the June 24 election.

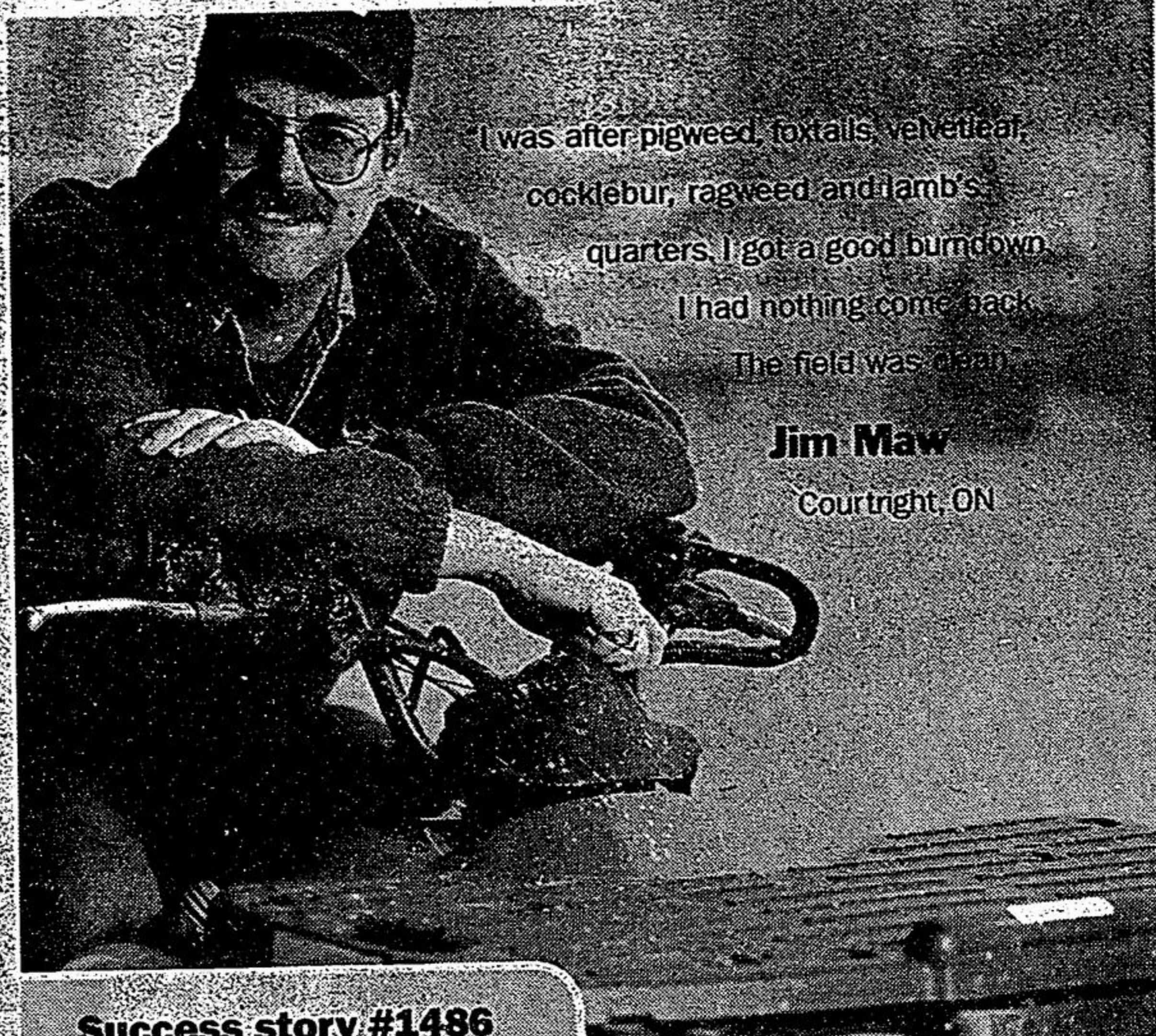
The Reform Party ceased to exist as of Monday, after 13 years under the leadership of Manning.

The Alliance will become the official opposition in parliament under Deborah Grey.

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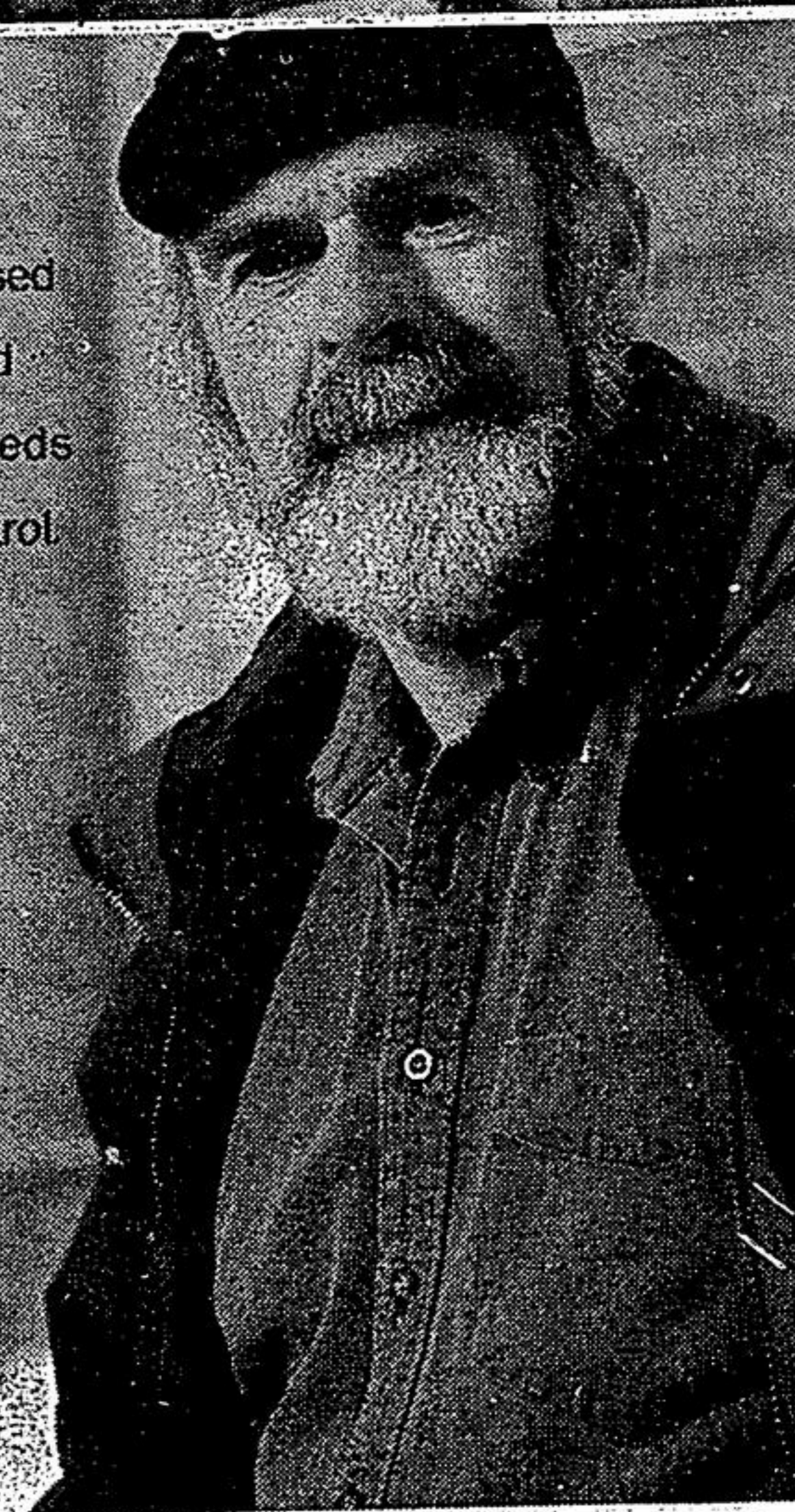
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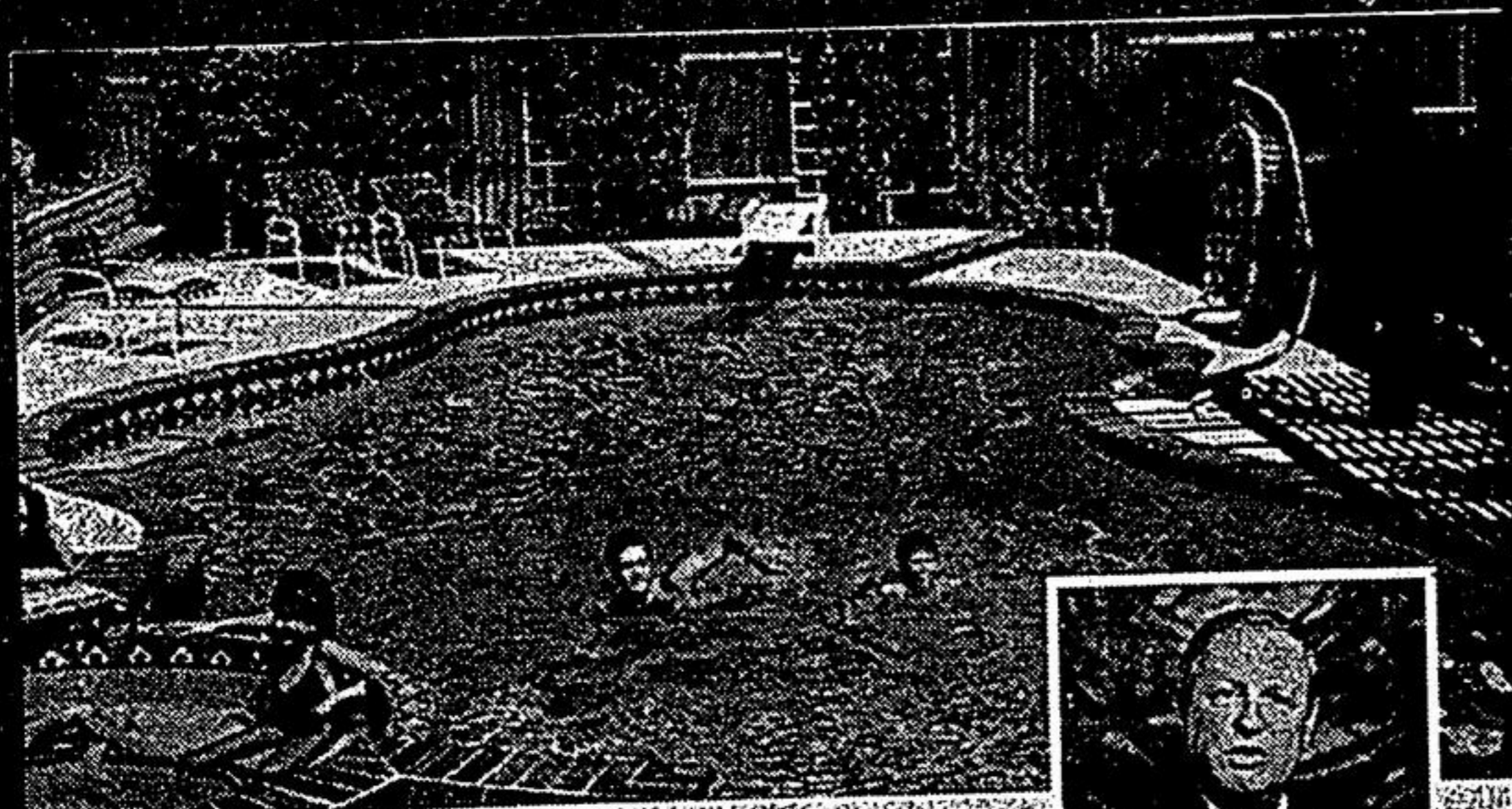


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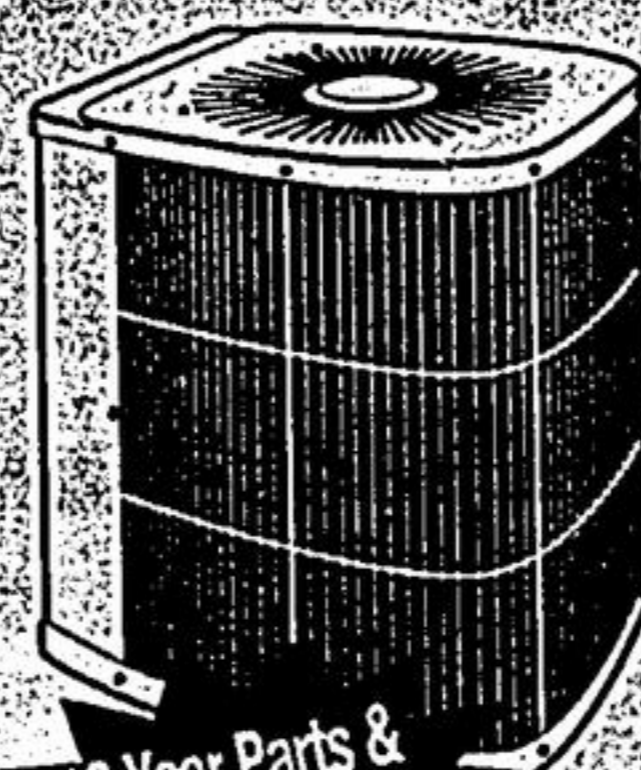
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