

Dear Richard,

2/12/91

We appreciate your calling Friday to ask how we are. We are as we were except that Lil got a heavy cold that I got from her, first in many ^years for me, and it is not as uncomfortable with me. She is quite uncomfortable but with no fever, it won't last.

When we spoke I mentioned having what I regard as potentially worthwhile as well as valuable properties. I was reminded of one this morning so I tell you about it ⁱⁿstead of returning to what I've been working on. I won't now go into the details of the real story but will if you'd like. *Wonderful story details.*

We have good friends of a mixed marriage. The woman came this morning, as she does from time to time when she is able, having her own disabilities, to do housecleaning that Lil can't do. When she was a little girl, the daughter of a Catholic Hungarian shoe manufacturer and ~~is~~ going to a Catholic school on the other side of the Danube, what ^{we} believe was the first American bombing of Budapest destroyed the bridge(s) and she wandered through the war, literally, for about two years. When she was about done in she was succored by a black American soldier then little more than a boy. ~~He~~ found her in a boxcar and to begin with saw that she had food and clothing. Eventually they fell in love, two kids, and had to male children. The man, ^{Eddie} Harry, was shipped out. How she managed after that is in itself quite a story. (As I recall, they for some reason could not get married.) She knew where he came from, got the Red Cross to get in touch with his family, and his mother, knowing only too well that a mixed marriage would mean only suffering and trouble, denied hers was ^{Eddie's} Harry's family. Lida, who has limited intelligence but is by no means dumb or retarded in any way, is what used to be referred to as a simple (in the sense of ordinary) person, with great courage, endurance and suffering got to the US after one of her sons was stolen. She found ways to earn enough ^{to} get her and the son to Frederick, where she did find ^{Eddie} Harry. When she tried to get a marriage license she was denounced as a whore. But eventually they were able to marry. Both worked hard. ^{Eddie} Harry had what became a lifetime job in maintenance at local Fort ^{Detrick} and he also got nighttime janitorial jobs with which she helped him. So, eventually were able to buy their own home. The son, ^{Harry,} who served in both the army and the Navy, ^{is} a draughtsman but was not able to get any of that kind of work because he is black. ^{He} was given the job from which his father retired as soon as it was known to ^{Eddie's} Harry's former boss. Such was Harry's earned reputation ^{as} a good and willing worker. ^{Eddie} Harry is a solid, conservative type, thoroughly dependable and a thoughtful friend. He wants to forget the past and a hopeless quest for the stolen son. Lida didn't, and that is how I got her to let me tape her first-hand account of experiences that in themselves make a very attractive story. Six, no, maybe five hours. *Taped.*

⁺ gave the tapes to Walter Glanze, then a Bantam editor. He started to play them and didn't want to stop when he had to. His secretary was crying and so entranced and emotionally involved he let her take Bantam's tape recorder and those tapes home. She got tears in her eyes again when she returned them in the morning.

This was about 20 years ago. Walter, an intellectual German who is now a lexicographer and was a boy under Hitler, also loved what he heard. He then was living with Rosa Guy, a black writer who was then head of the Harlem Writers' Guild. ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ They came down for a weekend visit, met the Orens, and Rosa was very much taken with the story and its potential. Acting as her agent Walter got an offer from Weis, with a \$20,000 advance. He persuaded Rosa not to accept it because he saw movie potential and believed that the advance did not reflect an adequate commitment, one that could lead to a movie deal. Rosa, meanwhile, had to make a living writing so she worked on other writing with a certain market. She did do a little and + have that and the remaining tapes. She lost two or three. + have three.

I decided when Lida agreed, in the hope that attention to a book might lead to the stolen son, to get as much of her and as little of me as possible on tape. So I did not structure the interview. We just chatted. All I really did was get her to talking and keeping her talking.

I think that if anyone were interested, I could play the tapes + have as reminders, with her and a tape recorded, and although she might duplicate much we might be able to recover the parts of her story on the lost tapes.

For a girl it is a truly harrowing story, with the war all around her, wandering she knew not where or why. To ^{be} being with, with another girl. Lida refused to take cover in a bombing raid where the other girl hid and the other girl was killed then.

She has no knowledge of her family. I tried ~~thought~~ the State Department and the Hungarian embassy and the responses can't be believed. The Hungarians have to know whether the street on which they lived or the factory her father had survived, for example.

Lida still has part of a Hungarian accent yet ^{and} if you did not see her you'd believe that you were listening to a black speaking.

She had factory jobs daytimes until on-the-job and uncompensated injury ended that.

What an honest/writer who can be a schmaltz-merch^{ant} could do with this true story!

Best,