

3/30/72

Dear Js,

In my haste in writing Paul Valentine last night before I went to get Lil I didn't make one of the points I had in mind, that if the police flubbed what should be an easy case I gave them, the paper could do a helluva story on school drugs, because what I got is almost everything except the name and address of the suppliers, and on the heroin I got pretty good leads and where he stashes the stuff. On the mesc and the red devils and such I learned the mechanics of hiding it, enough so that with three or four decent and inconspicuous kids with different cars it would be a simple matter to tail them to the general area and then return and spot the place, to make arrests. My chief concern was a mean of protecting the kind, who is overloaded with troubles not of his making. They have led him into a kind of criminal career. He has not committed and crimes but has been an accessory in two because his car was used. He is alienated, comes from a home to which he can feel no attachment, is utterly lost. While getting him to talk, incredibly and happily, because I have seen little of him in years, I seem to have earned his confidence, from a long conversation with his mother last night. She has taken the keys and tags to his car, he has left home and moved in with the character who seems to be ringleader, and I'm playing a hunch that he will see me again soon when he has transportation of will call me. Meanwhile, I got hold of the commanding officer of the local State Police Barracks, told him that in two days, with this kind of stuff, I hadn't heard from the adjoining-county barracks, that I had given the only copy of my notes to his boys, and I want a copy and I want to hear from the other barracks. He promised me both for today, which has not yet started, but neither Lil nor I could sleep, although she is still abed.

There is a little human interest behind this that might interest you. I can put it on paper in the time remaining before I can dare go out and see if the paper is here without risk of running over a skunk.

He is the adopted son, the child of one of the women in the very large family from which his father comes. His father's father had three large families by different marriages. When his father and mother by adoption were childless, and knowing the bleak prospects of any kid in that cracker family, they offered to adopt him when he was born. The natural parents were delighted to have one less on their backs. Almost as soon as this infant was up here from that cracker factory, he had a strike. For years he was on phenobarb to reduce his activity, and when he visited us at the farm, he had to be watched with care. He survived that and is over 6 feet and fat today. The father had a third-grade education, ran away from home as a kid, became a drunk and an alcoholic, but that was a day when a man could always keep himself going on corn on labor. He became a truck driver and a mechanic. He has a natural mechanical genius. The first time I saw him he had an old Studebaker and a broken left leg. So, he had welded an old gearshift lever to the clutch pedal so he could drive without lifting that leg. There came a time when he decided that he had to stop drinking, and he did, but the damage to a powerful physique had been done. He got a job at the Naval Ordnance Laboratory, working in the shops, in time it took him on field trips, so he could get a better understanding of what he was into. Soon thereafter he was solving problems the college-trained PhDs of various kinds couldn't begin to fathom. With a third-grade education. It hurt him to have to throw away so much material, because accounting systems had grown so expensive that it was cheaper to throw stuff away, and on each job in the field they had to draw from supplies more than they expected to have enough. Beginning with this, he started devising uses for the waste. Before his retirement he had developed a number of patents from waste. It became a serious problem for him, for when it was necessary that he retire, they tried to hold onto him, and he had to retire under conditions that give him an income only as long as he lives. He has been seriously sick since long before retirement, with emphysema, complications and other things. Two years ago he had a stroke and a heart attack, since then a series of each he has somehow survived. He had one this past weekend when he was on leave from one hospital and was rushed to another. But in 25 years he hasn't taken a drink, and helps countless others, yet he has no interests, no knowledge outside mechanics, and it is in this barrenness that the kid has grown up, with little bond to the father except through cars. I can see now. Best,