

4/7/71

Dear Jim,

A friendly voice is always welcome, more when it is a surprise, even more when it announces a great ~~kindness~~ kindness and most of all with the timing of your just-ended phone call, which I'll explain after explaining why my bad typing is rougher than usual.

When the Feebs awarded their special attention to me in May of 1968, it included rather adept work on my cassette recorder from which it has never completely recovered and the total destruction of a new Royal typewriter, all except the case, which emerged unscathed. My friend who runs the local typewriter shop counselled that while this can never be completely avoided, the chances of accomplishing as much, or rendering the typewriter completely beyond use, would be diminished by getting one with no plastic. On his recommendation, and because I was then going to N.O. whenever I could and needed a typewriter, I got a Hermes 3000, a beautiful, all-metal machine. My old Underwood, which I bought second hand and when it was already quite old, before World War II, had never needed a repair. Once a guy who owed me money overhauled it, about 1955. When I learned parts were no longer available, I latched onto an identical machibem for spare parts, of which I used only the?/ combination when that flew off and got lost. But, mechanical marvel that it has been, and how many millions of words went through it I can't estimate, it got to where it would stick all the time. So, not being able to afford even a second-hand upright, I decided to use what I was hoarding, that Hermes. It got the first ribbon change about three weeks ago, it was used that little. But I did notice the gradual accumulation of fine black dirt, which I attributed to thesecond-hand carbon paper I'm using up. Only when the damned thing would not move did I discover that the ribbon had worn through, entirely. So, I took it back and learned that the ration, with what was described as the Cadillac of portables, is one ribbon, one platen. Believe it or not, without use and in but 2½ years, that damned roller had hardened to the point where it caused this and required replacement. Which is called progress. In all those years, that old Underwood never got a new one, unless the friend friend who did the overhauling provided one and I forgot.

So, I borrowed a rental machine until Monday, when mine is to be ready, got it home, and found the tab set stuck a third of the way accross. They were nice and loaned me this one, which worked well all day, and just before supper developed the same jam. It just unjammed itself. See, you bring me good luck!

Your kind gift, as you both know, would always have been something that had to mean much to me. The timing makes it more. The balance of my advance was due two weeks ago today. No word. The quarterly interest payment to the bank is due tomorrow, Friday being a holiday and Saturday, the due date, one on which the bank is closed. This morning I had to go there and explain that I'd probably be a bit late. They were, as when in the past this has happened, very nice. Now tomorrow is not just the bad-news day. It is also my birthday. So, you have given me not only a valuable present, but the only one I'll get. You know, I am sure, how much I do appreciate it.

And the more I can get around, the more I can use it. I can't go into details, but I seem to have established a kind of rapport with the bird whose cage is not gilded, and from behind it I get little dribbles of usefulness. My one trip to Memphis was perhaps the easiest and most successful investigating trip. I will have to find ways of getting to Atlanta, Birmingham, Mobile and certainly New Orleans. The first three will be a good idea, the last essential, and the dangerous one. Again, sincere thanks. Best from us both,