

Dear Jim,

2/26/75

I have looked forward to attempting to make a fitting response to your entertaining 2/21, which came yesterday, early this morning. But I slept too late because I was physically tired and the call referred to in the enclosed letter to Lesar kept me awake too late.

I'm writing this with an ear on the morning TV news while Lil puts herself together for her day's work.

The man who lives rent free in our Hysattstown property, a mason, came yesterday to do a job necessary before we lay the living room floor. It took more work than we'd expected because of the insane way the people who built this house wasted money in a psychological drive to save it although they were wealthy. They wanted a very large hearth, maybe seven feet deep and six or more wide, raised a foot and a half. Instead of putting up a subfloor and laying the slates they used on it, then put in a foundation that would hold a solid concrete hearth of this size. Instead of paying for all that concrete, which I was sure the cheapskates wouldn't, they used up all the trash from the outside masonry. They paid people to carry in massive stones many so large I could carry only one at a time as I hauled outside all we took from the part of the hearth we are eliminating. (It will give us that much more floor space.) So many half bricks I can't imagine that many as the normal by-product of running the outside walls. And all sorts of stones and pieces of mortar. Anyway, I carried all this in 5-gal buckets and used all that would fit without breaking to fill the turnaround I'd worked on when we had to replace the innards of the well and put in a wellpit that this place never had. Tons of stuff all except that requiring breaking in place. I am glad to get the exercise, don't mind that it tired me, but am again farthur behind in otherwork. Today I have to make a trip to Rockville on personal business, a matter scheduled for return from New York and no extra driving this past Monday. Tomorrow a special trip to DC for the TV show and rushing back to be able to answer any calls on the Ray decision. (Lesar expects me to get some, I don't, and I believe they should go to him although most will go to Bud. Jim will be with Bud. It is best that I not be.)

What I was getting to is another matter. We are not being improvident. By this I mean for us, not for people on general. Ordinarily there would be no such question. We are spending relatively small sums on what is not absolutely essential with a future that holds no promise of decent income or retirement benefits and galloping inflation certain. What we are doing is trying to make our daily lives just a little better. Lil will probably have less income from her tax work, which does not supply nearly what it should for the tremendous effort it requires and is less than a quarter of the year. Business is bad. Her's is the only office in this franchise that is holding up. The others have laid people off! But she is not up to her last year's rate. However, the sale of the older books is holding up. What I'm doing is using that money instead of paying the printer, who knew I might not be able to pay him. We do without other things, accumulate small sums of this, and use it. The floor is one such expenditure. And it will make it less unsafe for Lil to tend the fireplace, which has given us a good fuel saving. I'll have a step up to what remains of the hearth when I'm finished. She fell getting off it some years ago and hasn't been up on it since, remembering the six weeks on crutches that fall meant.

This also went into my getting the new tape recorder on which I report, with thanks for your efforts with Mark. I faced an emergency need when I got to NYC because Rogert and Jerry both failed to do what I'd asked, bring and lend me a tape recorder when they met me at the station. A full attache case and a bag were all I wanted to carry. I had wanted to shop around for the recorder in NYC, but I needed one for an interview that night. Both have at least two and neither bought one. So, from the station we went to a store in which Robert gets a discount because his firm does business with them. It turned out they had made a special deal with Sony on the TC 55. I'd fallen for the 45 when I looked at them locally. Locally there was no 55. There is to be a \$20 increase in the price of the 55, I got it for more than \$45 off list, and the salesman at that store, who knew I was going to buy and had them all, said they had had no single case of trouble with the 55 because of any reason and none from mineraturization. It thus cost me \$20 less than the 45 would have cost me locally. My initial reluctance was over what you had once cautioned me against and what you repeat from Mark. It was overcome by three factors. I did trust this salesman, who has sold many of them; the machine, while smaller, is actually heavier than the others, indicating more substantial materials; and the smaller size and better controls arrangements is an asset.

It turned out that I did not need a recorder immediately. What I did was to take my bags to the friend with whom I stayed, a senior editor at Bantam, who lives uptown, near the Geo. Washington bridge, then rush back downtown, to Grammercy Park, without even taking this recorder out of the box but with a pocket full of new cassettes. However, the woman I went to see, knowing I wanted to tape the interview, had her ~~own~~ own machine set up. I didn't know she had one. She even had a supply of tapes and she taped herself for me. She was cooperative in every way. She is a former reporter, was married to a reporter, and is sympathetic to my efforts. (I had to wind up teaching her how to clean the machine, which jammed on the last side of the last tape because she did not know it needs cleaning!)

Tomorrow I plan to try another use for which I think the smaller machine will be better. I expect a confrontation with Harris over what he is and has been up to and I'll not be able to tape the show off the air. Nor will I be able to. I can't depend on Bud. I've asked JL to take his machine to the studio, where he'll join me but he may not be able to get into the studio. And as I've learned in the past, particularly once with Lane, what is said during breaks can be very important. So, with a single C120, I should, with luck, be able to get it all and inconspicuously.

More about Harris another time. Or with a dub.

If the built-in mike is sufficiently sensitive, it should be okay. That on the TC 40 is superb. Better than any external mike I've tried, including your extra one you were kind enough to send me.

The one temptation I resisted was to invest the saving in what the salesman tried to press on me as a special deal and a real economy. The rechargeable pack is now \$35 complete. It takes 100 charges. However, I can often get A cells very inexpensively and on the really important interviews I use the alkalines, which are not economical but can go for four hours. Today I'll be buying a spare supply of A cells @ 4 for 22¢! These are regular cells, not alkalines. Generally good for 2 hrs and thereafter for some radio use. I never buy new cells for radios and I have two partly-operative sets that use 4 A's. If you use alkalines and radios that take batteries, my experience is that when alkalines have been used as much as is safe in the recorder they may easily have the life of fresh ordinary cells in radios. The old set I use for early a.m. news while I'm shaving and making coffee and while I'm bathing, AM only but with good volume, has been going for about three months on a set of alkalines Lesar used up in his TC40A. And you can now get AC adapters for 6, 7.5 and 9v, if you are interested, with three types of connectors, for about \$5.00

Before I get to other work, I found one other advantage on the TC55. Its pause switch is not spring loaded. The others were, meaning they have to be held for the duration of the pause. For the kinds of uses I would have this would mean no pause control at all.

I don't think you will need this intelligence but I pass it on, with thanks for the time you took. I did not expect to buy in such haste, did not expect the need to, and hope I made the correct decision because the money is much for me.

Money: I ~~spare~~ splurged for Lil, which gets to your calculator game. When I got what Q&D owed me last year I got her a supposedly good and rather expensive one that prints a tape. She then decided she did not want a window feature because she'd always need tape. These have become inexpensive in the smaller models, less than \$15 here. There was a loss-leader sale on Royal's, which carry a year guarantee and came with the battery eliminator for less than \$30. She has trouble with arthritis when she uses pen or pencil continuously, so I persuaded her to let me get this Royal for side calculations. She finds it worthwhile in the time it saves with the larger machine. So, when she read and enjoyed your letters while I was talking to Kabak she worked it out and came in and wrote "Shell Oil" for me. Pretty good.

The (perhaps) cloutless,