

Not sent

Mr. Walter Zacharias
Zebra Books
521 Fifth Ave.,
New York, N.Y. 10017

4/26/77

Dear Walter,

Week before last we left it that you would write me a week ago yesterday, putting your newer offer in writing, after which I would send you an outline and a sample chapter. If you did write the letter has not reached me.

Although this offer began with half the advance you had offered when you were here I did accept it because of the promises you held forth for the future.

Everything you have asked of me I have done or agreed to with one exception. You now recognize that my not agreeing to your first offer was to your interest.

You wanted Les Payne to read copy. We agreed. You wanted me to have an editor near here. I obtained a former Washington Post editor. You agreed I should have an assistant and I've found and lost several candidates because you have been stalling.

I went much farther on my own. I arranged for a competent local person to do the initial reading and I arranged for Howard Roffman also to read copy. Howard writes well, is trained in evidence and is more familiar with my writing than any of its critics. I also bought an expensive copying machine so I could send you copies of each document cited, eliminating any worries, including those of your counsel Jerry.

Now I am about to lose another promising prospective assistant. The college semester is almost over. He and Hanrahan have families to support. I told you long ago that Hanrahan's work would last through this month and that he'd then need immediate employment.

Martini Madron once told me "You trust everybody." Apparently he found it hard to believe. It is more true of those who impress me favorably, as you did.

However, when I deal with a grown man, a publisher, I cannot deal with the assumption that he says what he does not mean. At the same time I do what is possible to keep my word. Sometimes it is not easy.

You seemed to be trying to explain something to yourself when we lunched at Paul Young's two weeks ago. At one point, related to nothing, you blurted out that "Everyone I talk to says you are impossible to deal with." I did not argue. Whether you spoke to wealthy men who have gypped me out of small sums or publishers who have not supplied accountings or any of the self-conceived subject experts who in almost all cases are nuts on the subjects with which I work or those with the need to explain to themselves how they could have made the mistakes against which I cautioned or those whose asses I have saved when they had nowhere else to turn or those whose strange egos drove them to abuses that became intolerable I am confident you were not told this by those without their own pasts to live with. I am also confident that you were not told this by those who are in regular association with me.

But were this true is it so unusual in any business, particularly publishing?

Is it really a factor weighed against what is totally unprecedented in publishing, what I am offering you? Measure it as you will, in social, in commercial or in prestige values the potential of what I have been offering you is the stuff publisher's dreams are made of. Except for those who call fiction non-fiction.

As you have blown hot then less hot then cool I have found myself wondering why and comparing this with my estimate of you. I find no satisfactory explanation.

Knowing the crappy manuscripts and the bullshit artists and other more dubious types you have been dealing with has not deterred me. I have been open with you.

Publishers have to consider everything - at least initially. But the two names I gave you are not all I could have. I picked them because I could win libel suits against you and those works.

But one of my thoughts, whether or not accurate, is that you were almost embarrassed to come up against a solid work in the field in which you have become interested.

Of course everyone considers himself an expert in this field.

Another is that you have suddenly come to realize that maybe, just maybe, your decisions and judgements based on which you have committed large sums of money do not now seem as promising as they once did.

What I have learned about you is accidental. I have sought to learn nothing. If I can see a pattern it need mean nothing. But I tell you without animosity that from what you have told me you are into what at its best is scrimshaw.

I am too conservative to put my money into such ventures, particularly with those changes in national and media attitudes that have come to pass.

If Dick Curtis did not go into this with you at some length it is not because I did not inform him and ask him to.

There is no point in the other possible conjectures.

What I know is that if you had been decisive you'd have had a manuscript by now. I think it would have been a promising one. I know the timing would have been excellent.

What I want to know is, if you are willing to share it, what is really in your mind.


Particularly as it relates to me.

Your written proposal is a week overdue. Are you going to make it or are you not?

If you are and you have problems of which I am not aware, give me a date.

After our last meeting, which did leave me uneasy, I did discuss this with both my wife and my lawyer. I am going ahead with the book, with or without you.

Sincerely,



Harold Weisberg