

# Observer: With Ink and Quill

By RUSSELL BAKER

The outgoing mail:

Dear Ollie,

Mother and I are naturally distressed to hear that you are not having a better time at Camp Crazy Horse, but we think you ought to give it a fair try before insisting on coming home. After all, a few bee stings do not make a summer and just because it rained four out of the first five days is no reason to hate your campmates, your counselor and Camp Crazy Horse. Suppose you were in London! It rains all the time there.

I am going to write you a long letter just as soon as Mother and I get tired of the peace and serenity that have been weighing us down here ever since you left for camp. This is just a short note to say that I am enclosing the \$20 you asked for—even though it's against camp rules—on condition that you agree to stay at least three more weeks. Write just as soon as you are having a good time and tell us how happy you are to be away.

Love,

\* \* \*

Dear Jim,

I saw your father last night, and he tells me you are thinking about leaving the country and going to Canada to avoid

the draft. As an old friend of the family, I urge you not to do something you will regret for the rest of your life.

There are better ways of avoiding the draft than running to Canada, you know. Have you considered becoming an all-American athlete and going to work for a professional football, basketball or baseball team?

Cordially,

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Dear J. Edgar Hoover:

I wonder whether, by any chance, you have been tapping my telephone, and if so, whether you have a recording of a conversation I held with my plumber, Gustav Flood, last January 19?

If so, I would appreciate your sending me a tape of this recording. Flood and I have a disagreement about how much he told me at that time it would cost to have a new bathtub installed, and if I had the recording as evidence it would save me \$117.82.

With deep admiration,

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Dear President Nixon,

I don't understand why you are so determined to renew the 10 per cent surcharge on my income tax. It has done nothing whatever to stop inflation. In fact, if my supermarket is a fair

index, it may be a prime cause of inflation, since prices there did not really start to gallop out of sight until the surcharge was enacted.

Since the surtax is not working, will you kindly forget about it and let me have back the 10 per cent that it now takes from my purse? I need the extra money to pay for the inflation it hasn't stopped.

Respectfully yours,

\* \* \*

Dear H. B. Simms:

After considerable research, I have established that you are the president of the Hildebrand Variable Lithograph Disseminating Society, and I am writing about a matter of the utmost gravity to your organization.

Eight months ago I bought a variable lithograph from your society and paid the full amount for it—\$32.89—three days after delivery. I have the canceled check for that amount. Notwithstanding, I have been dunned by an exceedingly nasty computer for the past seven months. This computer claims to represent your organization. Despite my sending it a dozen letters pointing out its error, it persists in stating that I still owe you \$32.89.

The other day it sent me an abusive letter calling me a deadbeat and threatening to

ruin my credit rating. I must warn you, H. B. Simms, that unless your computer stops threatening me, I intend to pay a nocturnal visit to its residence in Armonk, N. Y., and give it a severe thrashing with an axe which I bought just yesterday for this specific purpose.

Lest you think this mere hollow bluster, be assured that I have just been released from a hospital for the criminally insane where I have been resting as a result of earlier antisocial activities with axes.

Sincerely,

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Dear Estelle,

Just a note to tell you I saw Alex the other night. After all these years! How lucky you were that things broke off when they did. You would never have recognized him. What a dreadful bore—not the least involved with his children, except for scheming up ways of helping them dodge the draft. Whining about taxes and computers that disturb his dreary life. Complaining about shifty workmen. It's bad to see all the youth gone out of a man.

Keep your eye on the adventure of life, that's what I always say, Estelle, and life will never lose its glow.

As ever,