

23 October 1979

Dear Harold:

Herewith some clippings which have accumulated. I haven't made copies for Dave because I've been rushed. Leave it to you whether you think he needs any of them. I doubt that he does.

I've been so busy that I quite lost track of the time and was quite shocked to find I last wrote you in August. I'm supposed to work at Hospice two days a week, but usually it turns out to be four because so much needs to be done. In addition I continue volunteer work, both in patient care and in a new area which is being opened up, designing a program to broaden the help HOK gives the newly bereft family survivors. It sounds grim, of course, and at times it is, but there are unique rewards and satisfactions. More and more I realize how lucky I am to have something so worthwhile to do in retirement.

As a patient care volunteer, I lost my first "patient" about a month ago, a retired locomotive engineer with lung cancer. He had no children, his wife had died 30 years ago, and he really was the loneliest person I think I've ever met. No relatives about except a very distant cousin who couldn't see him very often because of her own family obligations. He was grumpy, distant, a complainer, and heckled his nurses unmercifully in the rest home where he wound up. Fortunately I knew another retired engineer from Southern Pacific, and it turned out that my friend had started out as a fireman under Old Tom. He rounded up some other retired SP people, and pretty soon Old Tom was having visitors. By the time he died (peacefully, in his sleep) he was smiling now and then and seemed to feel he meant something to others after all. Wasn't much we could do for him, but clearly it was better than nothing.

I'm now working with a retired carpenter whose wife is dying of some kind of cancer. He's a great guy but has his problems as he's somewhat diabetic, which carries with it its own emotional syndrome as well as physical effects. He's lucky in that his daughter-in-law, who is taking care of the old lady in her own home, was once an x-ray technician and is doing a magnificent job with both the old people.

I have nothing here at the house which lists any phonograph record course for a Chinese who wants to learn English, so I can't make any recommendation about Mike Miao's son. I'd suggest that Jim Lesar or his wife could find out what's available more easily than most. I'm sure there must be something of the sort. Berlitz may have something, but I would think almost any university department of Chinese could point out such a course, or one that could be used to some extent anyway. Actually, he'll probably learn more quickly if the family persists in speaking to him in English after teaching him some fundamental words and phrases and explaining them at first in Chinese, then going over to English and staying away from Chinese except in emergencies or when all else fails.

This method worked best the other way round when I was learning Chinese, and I see no reason why it wouldn't work with the Miaos.

Your accumulation of wood for the winter sounds very impressive. If you're interested in learning how to make logs out of discarded newspapers, I'll be glad to write out the instructions. They burn evenly, do not pop like wood does in the fireplace, and are very satisfactory. I use them most of the time instead of wood because of the non-popping feature. It's a good way to make use of something that otherwise is quite useless. Let me know if you're interested.

Delighted to hear you're both hanging in there. Keep it up, and keep me posted. All the best, jdw