

8 February 1981

Dear Harold & Lil:

Thanks for your good letter of Jan. 27. It's most reassuring to hear how you're working within your limits and coping with your problems. I know several people who could take lessons from you (but they wouldn't, of course). Best of all is your word that you feel okay. That's half the battle.

We are having the same drought here that you're having. Rainfall thus far is only half the seasonal total for this time of year, and while that's more than we had before the drought of several years ago it means that unless very heavy rains fall during March we'll be in for another year of water conservation. The stingy rainfall is nationwide, as I understand it. A broadcast I saw a week ago explained it as being due to a shift of the eastward jet stream from across the Pacific to a path several hundred miles north of its normal course, taking the rain-bearing cloud fronts into Canada instead of here where they're usually dumped. Dry weather prevails across the entire northern half of this country as a result except for a few spots in the northernmost states where eddies from the storms sweeping across Canada swirl down below the border. A high pressure ridge several hundred miles off our west coast just sits there, shunting what cloud fronts that do approach this area far to the north. No one seems to have an explanation for the shift in the jet stream. For weeks now we have had cloudy, cold weather, but rarely more than a drizzle except for a three-inch rain a couple of weeks ago. The snow pack in the Sierra which melts to water the Central Valley during the summer is only a fraction of its usual depth, and there wasn't enough to ski on until a couple of weeks ago.

The part-time job has kept me quite busy since it began late in November. It takes up Mondays through Wednesdays, of course, and the rest of the week is spent keeping the house going and reasonably presentable. I never have the thermostat higher than 60°, and the gas bill has been gratifyingly low -- less than half what it used to be despite a couple of hefty rate hikes. At some time during my four days off I usually spend a day or two at Hospice, doing whatever needs to be done on a volunteer basis, which includes now and then minor jobs in patient care or bereavement support. I think you understand from your arthritic neighbor that in doing things for other people it usually is the simplest, seemingly insignificant things that mean the most.

If I haven't mentioned Libby recently it is only because we've both been too busy to spend much time together. She's writing a book, drawn partly from her own experience and partly from research suggested by it, on how a widow can take over and manage her own affairs. For my part I've been getting a troublesome personal chore out of the way -- dismantling a journal we kept through the years which included a great deal of nonsense -- whatever amused us at the time -- and saving the worthwhile pictures for a different sort of scrapbook. Jenifer wanted me to destroy the whole thing, and this I'm about to do except for a chronology I've excerpted and the pictures which I'll assemble in the new scrapbook. There were nine looseleaf volumes of this stuff to work through, beginning in 1934 and extending through 1974. Anyway, it's about done. I do see Libby each morning I work at the parking lot, as she drops by to get her mail at the postoffice next door and always steps over to say hello and exchange the latest.



Gradually, steadily, she grows more cheerful, and probably is making more progress than she herself thinks. In any case she keeps busy with her family and her rather complicated business connections, but never too busy to stop and talk and discuss or consult. You read her correctly: she's a fine person, steady, sensible, totally unpretentious but with vast experience from which she has emerged with unusual grace and dignity, without any trace of stuffiness. From the first, we have understood, trusted and relied upon each other, partly, I think, because she's done quite a lot of writing and reporting herself and enjoys being with media types, and partly because I was a year ahead of her in the grief syndrome and was able to explain some things and reassure her at a time when she needed that kind of help. At the time she said even her best and oldest friends didn't understand how she felt as she did about losing her husband. For her part, she readily grasped the essence of Jenifer's unique character and what it meant to me, so that we both found in each other an understanding we encountered in no one else, really. It's a rare and reassuring thing, each knowing the other is there.

Thanks for telling me about the MASH reruns. I find they're on here at 9 p.m. on Mondays, so will try to catch one at the first opportunity. Some time in the past I saw a televised version of the original movie, but have seen only glimpses of the series rerun, usually while hunting for something else. I have a meeting tomorrow, so will miss that night's episode. Maybe next week. Like you, I watch very little television. I usually try to catch the so-called news and the McNeill-Lehrer Report on PBS, which is not exactly an earth shaker but often does have interesting guests. Aside from that I usually try to look in on the Muppets to see what they're up to (once in a while they have a jewel of a program such as the recent one with Jean Pierre Rampal, the distinguished French flutist who thoroughly enjoyed himself) but aside from those meagre choices I rarely turn on the set. I can't stand professional sports of any kind and the rest of it is mostly junk. There's one UHF station in San Jose which comes in well and which runs practically nothing but old movies. Most of them real dogs, naturally, but now and then they run something I missed during the 1930s while out of the country.

I'm glad you didn't find the notes on the China visit overwhelming and that you caught some of the profound encouragement I found there. You are of course welcome to show them to the Miaos and the Lesars --- or anyone else you think might be interested.

I haven't seen Lifton's book, but did see one brief review of it which made it very clear how far he was reaching, although not as graphically as you do.

Tomorrow begins another week, and I have to get up early, so I'll knock this off and go to bed. I'm very grateful to know you're doing so well, and it was good to hear from you.

All the best to you both,

  
jdw