

11 November 1978

Dear Harold and Lil:

Since returning on the 1st I've been preoccupied with cleaning up the camper, returning it, retrieving Sootyfoot, and in general picking up the pieces, including the Hospice volunteer routine. However I might as well get the enclosed on its way to you, despite the fact that the unfinished series of frothy nonsense by Tad Szulc will leave you cruelly dangling. I'll be sure to pick up the rest of it when it comes in, if any more does.

I had the usual lovely time with the Wrones, and this time didn't talk myself quite hoarse because I'd have to stop and think now and then whether I was repeating myself. Their reception of the violins can only be described as reverent, and they lay in their cases on the living room floor just where they'd been opened, apparently too sacred to be moved, until I left. After I got back here, my sister was mightily pleased to learn that young David had claimed the instrument my father made. She thought that would have pleased him.

The family plans an expedition to Milwaukee instrument dealer to get them inspected and restrung. Meanwhile they are fending off Miss Eber, the kids' violin teacher, who is perishing to get at them. I gather she won't have a chance until they're in tiptop condition and ready to be tested. She's a large, formidable lady of German descent toward whom the older Wrones are cooling, it seems, and plan to abandon in favor of another teacher when the time is right.

Both kids appear to have grown about two inches since I was there last April. David is much less of a little boy, and while Elizabeth also has shot up dramatically she still carries an air of thoughtful calm very reminiscent of a picture I used to have of Jenifer at that age. A matter of vibes, due to intense activity upstairs.

Elaine says Elizabeth has perceptions neither of them can explain, which supports the impression of her resemblance to Jenifer.

Most of our time was spent talking, as you will readily understand. I learned more this time about how lonely Dave feels on this campus, ~~and~~ and told him he'd feel the same on any I've ever seen except the one I was fortunate to go to in 1932 at Yenching, which had^{an} international faculty where there skimpily was little room or time to indulge in petty pedantry, the thrilling clash of cultures was being so intelligently and busily resolved in fresh new concepts. Yenching was only one of some 26 universities and colleges in Peking at the time, with scholars and teachers from all over the world, and Dave would have been deliriously in his element.

One day we all went to Madison, where Dave had to check on something in library and make the rounds of the books shops. In one I found a copy of the Chinese cookbook from which we learned Chinese cooking -- what little we did learn -- and presented a copy to Elaine.

After we got back to Stevens Point, Elaine dusted off a wok she ~~never~~ never had got around to using, and after a shopping trip for vegetables I was impressed into producing a Chinese meal. Ch'ao mien (noodles with vegetables and meat) is about the easiest deal under such circumstances, so I duly produced a large wokful of stir-fried vegetables and meat which was dumped on a large panful of ~~stir~~ soft-fried noodles. It vanished as snow before the chinook, even young David, who HATES vegetables, cleaning up his plate. Said he, brightly: "It wasn't nearly as bad as I'd thought it would be."

While in Madison Elaine looked longingly at a Japanese automatic rice cooker, which I was able to persuade ^{her} to pass up since it is based on a dry-cook method which is no improvement over a simple pot. She abstained after I promised to look into the situation here. She did succumb to a large and murderous-looking Chinese cleaver (the kind with which Chinese cooks traditionally run amok ~~with~~ in Chinese newspaper stories) which she'll need for slicing meat and vegetables and which, if the usual pattern holds, she wind up using instead of almost any other knife. It's sharpened on only one side (for slicing) and thus presents a problem when it comes to sharpening it. I promised also to find her a proper sharpener.

On the way home I found a small sharpener that will do, and after I got back I went into the little new Chinatown out in the northwest part of San Francisco and found exactly the same automatic rice cooker The Mattoses brought back to us from Taiwan. It uses a steam-heat principle which makes it impossible to burn the rice, and since I know how well it works and could clarify the rather awkward instructions (in English, but translated directly from Chinese and therefore hard to understand) I acquired one without delay, packed it and the sharpener and sent them off with proper explanations as a small thank-you for the lovely time I had with them all. I feel pretty smug about how well it worked out.

I had to hurry home to make a speaking engagement in San Diego on the 7th and because I didn't dare dawdle too much along the way because of the advancing cold and stormy weather. Anyway, the drive looked quite different than it did six months ago, and I enjoyed finding a new way around to the north of Great Salt Lake, thus avoiding that 120 arrow-straight miles across the salt flats west of Salt Lake City. It took me past a huge fresh water lake (Bear Lake) which I'd never noticed on the map, and down a spectacular canyon (the Cache River) into the Nevada desert. That too had changed. Was I seeing it with different eyes?

At San Diego I spoke to the staff and volunteers of the local Hospice, a new one just getting started, and gave them the usual routine about how Hospice looks and what it means from the receiving end. I stayed overnight at the home of one of their staunchest ~~volunteers~~ volunteers, an unbelievable woman who is the widow of a Quaker pacifist whose name I've known for many years. We found many mutual acquaintances, including Ed Snow and the like. They have a good project going down there. I learned a lot, including some trends in which the local Hospice people here are much interested.

Nearly all next week will be spent doing various volunteer chores, so you can see I keep busy. And the Mongolian grill is due for some more workouts in the weeks ahead before it gets too cold and rainy (none yet). Keep me posted, and all the best to you both.

Doris