

1 July 1981

Dear Harold and Lil:

Herewith the latest offering of bay leaves, including some that dried on the tree and fell off. During these hot dry weeks in the summer (when it never rains) the sap apparently does not reach many leaves, which then turn yellow and brown and drop to the ground. They seem more aromatic than the green ones that I pick directly from the tree.

I tried some bay tea and have to report it's pretty pallid stuff. I found it was necessary to break up the leaves in small bits to get enough flavor from them to make any difference.

Let me know which, if either dry or green leaves work for you, and I'll keep you supplied. Or with both, if you'd like that. The supply is unlimited.

The two weeks I worked full time while the other man was on vacation turned out to be the hottest for this time of year in most memories and all sorts of local heat records were broken. Nothing like the humidity you have there along with your heat, but it was not pleasant. This week, however, we have returned to the normal Northern California pattern of foggy mornings and clear afternoons, when it may get up to 75 in the shade but rarely higher. This is a most comfortable state of things, but very dry and the fire hazard is extreme. They had a bad fire last week in the mountains just to the east of the Napa Valley in which

dozens of very costly homes were wiped out. Another more recently in the Big Sur country just south of Monterey. In the old days the Indians deliberately burned off the brush on the hills so that accidental fires had nowhere to go, but the palefaces are only beginning to conduct controlled burns to any great extent. Until they do, every summer there are very bad fires in the hills, and in very dry years a constant danger of widespread conflagrations.

At one time or another I may have mentioned that our best friend in Peking during the 1930s was Edgar Snow, the American reporter who put the Chinese Communists on the map. When he was dying of cancer nearly 10 years ago in Switzerland Mao Tze-tung and Chou En-lai discharged what they could of their debt to him by sending a medical team of three doctors and three nurses who provided much the same loving care to their old friend that Hospice does here today. He died just as Nixon was leaving for Peking, on a journey that would not have been possible without Snow's work. His widow, Lois Wheeler Snow, was here last week, plugging her latest book, "Edgar Snow's China," which is based on his efforts to report on China from 1928 until his death and consists mostly of excerpts from his many books and articles during that period, plus more than 400 photographs, many never published before. Random House did a good job on the printing, and the book is a very useful summary of some superb reporting and of how it was mostly ignored. Lois is a fine person, in good shape, and is planning another trip to China next year.

I have a big job coming up here; a concrete pier under the house is sinking and must be corrected and supplemented with another pier to take some of the weight. A contractor is coming around soon to look it over and give me the bad news.

Otherwise, everything fine here. Take it easy and accept my best,

 jdw