

Route 1 Box 167
Carmel, CA 93921
Nov. 24, 1974

Dear Laura:

Heavy news: Mary and I are separating. We've come to a kind of crossroads in our lives where it has become clear that the different life goals each of us is pursuing are no longer compatible and that our tenacious needs for different kinds of fulfillment were making excessive demands upon our marriage. We have separated with a solid understanding that we are perhaps losing a partnership, but have renewed the hope for our individual lives. Thus we are perhaps more in love and better friends than we've been for years. We certainly intend to go on sharing very much of our lives with each other, but in those areas where we were in conflict we will go "private" and try to work out our destinies alone or in partnership with others -- hopefully for both of us, the latter.

So, I am writing not only to tell you that unpleasant news, but also to indicate that somewhat as a part of that information and as a precipitating factor, was my rising interest in a possible career change...at least that part of my career that earns the living. I have long felt that I had been in a kind of cul-de-sac with my own photography, with such tight emotional ties with the West Coast School (!), but with no really deep-rooted conviction and certainly very little drive that would have made it possible for me to really function in that tradition. I suspect you've known something of this in me, that I was groping for a kind of way out, to sever that emotional tie which was standing between me and any real self-discovery. I've put all this in photographic terms, but actually the problem was deeper than that. I finally had to put my whole life direction up for reexamination. It was in that process that I realized some drastic surgery was necessary and I think I've now begun to take some of the necessary steps. Mary has been most sympathetic, but we've had both come to the conclusion that there was no way out except the one we've taken...but I am straying from what I started to say.

Part of my "new direction" in photographic work has involved embracing many cinematographic influences. I am sort of embroiled in concerns with time (NOT a la Wynn Bullock!) and various odd ambiguities etc. that cause me to think a lot about cinema. Anyway, this has thrown me in with some filmmakers and I think for awhile at least I want to get some film experience.

In this connection I recently met a young lady filmmaker named Gretel Ehrlich. She has a lot of award-winning films to her credit and was once an editor for National Educational Television. We were kicking around various projects in which I might get myself involved in film and in that process Gretel mentioned that someday she had hoped to make a documentary film about Laura Gilpin! I told her I knew you and that I thought such a film had fantastic possibilities, not only because LG was such a marvellous person and would be super-cooperative, but because of the backgrounds, the scenes that would be possible, if we could get you at work in

Canon de Chelly. Then, as you might have guessed, Gretel told me that Canon de Chelly was, of all places in the world (and she's been to most of them!) that which moved her most profoundly. So we got terribly excited about the idea of making this film... tomorrow, if possible! Gretel is sure that she has plenty of contacts to put up the money and that it could literally begin at once. She'd (we'd...I have already inserted myself into this thing as still photographer and assistant cameraman!) like to get the spring awakening on film.

What we need to really get this thing in motion is very simply an agreement from you of your willingness to participate (with, of course, all sorts of supervision on your part to assure that the thing is faithful to you), and that we'd have exclusive rights to make the film and market it. As there is very little probability of significant profits being made, except possibly for the producer who puts up the money, we all do it for expenses and very moderate salaries, and I would not anticipate any money coming to you from the film. But I needn't belabor that as I am sure so many practical benefits would flow to you from the wide exposure the film would be sure to get in film festivals, colleges, short-subject showings, etc. etc.

It is hard for me to imagine anyone more suited to making this film than Gretel. She is real pro and would bring the highest filmmaking technique and standards to the work. But more importantly, she is a person of the earth, with deep involvement in all the things that make Canon de Chelly so profoundly important to you and to me. There is the potential for a kind of affection, a kind of rapport, an understanding that would flow through it, to make this film a real milestone in films about photographers...and about photography, and about a place.

So, Laura, please give this some earnest thought. Your positive reply to me would assure this project being given #1 priority with action to begin this coming Spring. I hate to pressure you, but there is some real need for haste, as money is crucial and some time is needed to get it together. So write as soon as you can. If you want any more details, feel free to call me collect (408- 624-6858) and make it person to person since with all the upset around here I just may be out more than in.

I know this is a crazy letter with two such disparate messages. But nothing ever happens to me except in big batches! Please do not fret over what happened to Mary and me. I assure you it was for the best. We are both freer, and when the sorrow of parting is past, and we find how much we are still sharing together, I am sure we'll both be very much happier and creative. This is not meant as any kind of pressure on you (please be sure of this), but your participation in the film project would give me a much needed chance to get back to work on something that could be very important towards launching a whole new approach to my own photography (and my life!). But please, and promise me, don't do anything on that basis!

As ever,

Bill