

3816 W. Biddison  
Fort Worth, Texas 76109  
December 13, 1966

Our beloved Nell,

Your wonderful letter is just here with the beautiful and mature letter from Chris to you. Yes, we know a great deal about him from Penn, who was tremendously impressed by him. Penn was also moved and delighted that Chris sent him the photo of Don Quixote.

Yes, much in the way of photographic books floods the markets, some of it beautifully printed and plated. But you are unique and make this look like the shallow "reportage" it is. You must do your books. They are like Merton's contemplatives: "Invisible trees in the night that purify the atmosphere." And while I think of it, I did not answer your question about possessing your books. Yes, we have them all, as you must know from the tape we sent you about them. We want more books to come from you. The photographic atmosphere needs purifying desperately. This is one reason I try to keep Gregory from any direct contact with it today - its seductions to slickness and shallowness have become something they still call photography but which has nothing to do with what photography can be and is in hands like yours.

I showed your work to Mark Haron a few weeks past. He said he was going home and start all over. He was breathless at one of the pictures in the Bare Feet - the one where you have just the suggestion of the church interior...certainly one of the most ravishing things I have ever seen.

We have your mother and child photograph hanging now on the wall of the living room, at the side of the piano - that piano that sings so much Bach - and it seems the perfect spot and full of significance. Like the works of Bach, it grows and grows and shows us new things every day. Elaine de Kooning was here the other night. Studying the picture, she said to me: "You might as well quit, you'll never do another to equal that." I hold her it wasn't mine, but yours, and to my delight, she tried to wriggle out of that by telling me, quite truthfully, that I have at least something to grow to.

Christmas is almost here. Its brightness already fills our home and our activities. The children put the tree up last evening and decorated it and the windows; stacked the fireplace with wood and called me from my work back here every five minutes to come and see it and wheeled me in to oh and ah at their handiwork. We are aware that we live precious hours with them, that we are incomparably blessed by these flawless hours when the interplay of love fills us with strength and enthusiasm and charity. And you must be aware that you are with us in all of these things, in the very heart of them and us.

Have a Merry Christmas there in your beautiful woods.

Love from all of us, John