

John Howard Griffin

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September 2, 1970

Dearest Beloved Nell,

I am enclosing a little note I wrote Dr. Tenery about the situation here. I did this really for two reasons: the main one being that I feared he might think there was something really extraordinary about this case and waste his time inquiring only to find it is something he has done many times himself as a surgeon. The second reason is that I am just being harrassed by journalists, would-be journalists and the world in general, who want me to see their doctors, who want to write articles about my health, etc. Their intentions are all good, but the pile-up is quite fierce. For years I have sort of turned myself inside out to let medical men study me: at Yale, Nobel Prize-winners in medicine in Europe, etc. All of this I have done because I would not say no to anything that might be useful to them. Now in today's mail alone there are six letters from nurses, medical students and doctors who want information about me and specifics about my condition and I have suddenly become revolted at the idea that nothing physical about me is private anymore.

I do not mean this for friends, heaven knows. I mean the strangers, the utter lack of tact in journalists' questions (How much of my income goes for medical bills; how soon will I die; how much plastic and metal do I have on my insides - that kind of thing.)

So, I have answered that I will no longer discuss such things now will I authorize my physicians to give out any information except to other physicians. We are worried about this situation. The doctors feel this is serious surgery for me and things have to go well for the next couple of months. But really all of that is serene compared to these groups of "interested persons." I am not very wise about this. It seems obscene to me. When my brother's wife died, a group asked permission to come and observe her expiring. An old friend of mine is now dying of cancer of the brain here in Ft. Worth, and a similar group has asked the same kind of permission. Yesterday a man called offering to sell my wife a headstone for a 200.00 reduction in price because I am a veteran. Finally all of this has given us ~~me~~ the screaming meemies and we have decided to end it, and just try to find tactful ways of telling them all to mind their own business and leave me in peace. None of this refers to friends. I would feel terrible if they did not ask and keep informed and pray for me during this time when all could go well or bad. But the others - no, we can't take that anymore. My internist, ~~xxx~~ the one who directs everything and has done a marvelous job, is with me in this, except he thinks I shouldn't be tactful at all!

Erin Bagwell
author of *unto*
The Chalk Garden

1901 5 18

Well, dearest Nell, I should not be blowing off steam this way to you. It is not really all that important. They have just been pushing us too much - the bedlam of the modern hospital, with TVs blaring from every room; the seeming ache of a lot of "sympathetic" strangers to get me into an early grave so they can write their papers and theses and obsequies; the headstone peddlers, the whole works. I am going to refuse to put out anything to them henceforth, knowing full well they will interpret that as something really terminal. Well, they can interpret whatever they want - at least I will have all that time wasted answering their questions to get my work done. I have had two calls by phone from journalists wanting to get their "break" by doing a big story on me. I told them I was too ill to see them and even if I weren't I was never going to give another interview and they would have to find their "big break" somewhere else.

We have really been shocked here by the number of acquaintances who should know better and who go consult their friends, ~~wife~~ witch doctors, horoscopes, god-knows-what and then call to tell Piedy to insist my doctors give me baby food, Vitamin B12 shots, some exotic interveinous preparation to reduce calcification (when my problem is almost the opposite!) and are quite adamant about it. Piedy tells them I get the best possible doctors and obey them to the letter and that is that. But how insistent they can be. One man in Dallas is literally begging us to drop the doctors and go to a naturapath he knows in Arkansas - even offering to gather the money to pay the trip. I finally had to write him a note and tell him to knock it off.

Well, as I say, none of this is really important - not important enough to waste your good time reading it and my time pouring it all out. It is even interesting in a macabre sort of way. Some day when I am well, I will write an article about this, about the pressures brought to the sick by all these elements. It is probably good in the long run. They make me so mad I refuse to accomodate them by dying one minute sooner than the Lord wishes. I told one reporter who came here obviously to gather material to update their obituary (but who denied that): "You're wasting your time. I'm not about to die and you'll just have to update again later." He was quite pained and of course interpreted it as "bravery" and told me how much he admired that. You can't win. A monsignor, elderly, wonderful old man came this week, told me he would offer Mass on Oct. 27th for me. When I told him later that my new book would be out October 26th, he sighed and said: "Well, I hope what happened to Copernicus won't happen to you. You know, he received a copy of his book the day before he died." This is one reason I just tell people I am too sick to receive visitors. What I really mean is that visitors like that don't ~~help~~ help and I get very angry, and that doesn't help. They let these thunderbolts slip right before my wife and children.

Enough. I must stop all this and get some lunch and then get back to work. You can see I am getting much better by the anger, which I was too weak to feel much until now.

Great love to you
JL

Darling Barky -

Please return
This after reading
it I know
you will agree
with his feelings.

Lillian leaves
tomorrow - but
until then I am
almost without a
moment to myself.
She looks at least
20 years younger
than when she came
and walks without a
pain - or limp. Does