

October 26, 1979

Mr. Eliot Porter
Route 4, Box 33
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501

Dear Mr. Porter:

Thank you for your reply letter dated September 11. I have kept it and thought often during the intervening weeks about what you wrote. I decided to write you again to reaffirm my desire to work with you, to explain further my reasons, and to present you with more information about myself. I think you will agree that there are certain parallels in our histories.

I learned that you earned a M.D. degree many years ago and, after a number of years of teaching, began to devote your full time to photographing nature, especially birds. I possess a similar background, although I am not a medical doctor. I came to Madison, Wisconsin, from California in 1976 to begin graduate study in oncology at the McArdle Laboratory for Cancer Research, University of Wisconsin. I was supported by a National Research Service Award from NIH. I remained a graduate student for just over two years, deciding last year to terminate my fellowship. (I am still employed as a research specialist at McArdle.) I did this because I found the extreme intensity of tumor virology very stiffling. After lab work, coursework, and keeping abreast of the enormous literature, no time remained for my other pursuits that bring me true enjoyment: being out of doors studying nature, especially doing nature photography. I felt then and feel more strongly today that to be maximally productive and happiest as a person, I must mold a career out of these more intrinsic interests of mine.

After ending my fellowship in oncology, I tried to find a graduate program in, say, vertebrate zoology (ornithology) that would enable me to seriously study birds using an approach that would involve a lot of photography. I was unsuccessful. As I stated in my first letter, it seems that graduate departments at universities are mostly interested in training researchers, not nature photographers.

Frankly, I find the experience of living to be infinitely fascinating in its variety. I have been well endowed with an acute mind and serious temperament that has enabled me to delve avidly and successfully into a wide spectrum of subjects over my lifetime. I suppose I am what is termed a "renaissance man" who enjoys the arts and the humanities as well as the sciences. For example, I love classical music. I enjoy great literature and great art. I have read widely about several periods in world history and have also read works by the renowned naturalists. I am an accomplished performer on the Scottish bagpipe, having studied this instrument for the past fourteen years.

Aside from the above, for as far back as I can remember, my two most innate qualities have been an artistic ability and a passion for nature. I started birding at age eight when I received as a gift a copy of Birds of America (not the Audubon portfolio) and a pair of binoculars. At a young age I had acquired an extensive field knowledge of birds, insects, botany, and rocks. I showed considerable artistic ability by age six and, I must confess, regardless of what I have done throughout my life, I have always applied the artist in me to the task at hand.