

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

THE PULITZER PUBLISHING COMPANY

jan 4

Dear Pa,

I'm very glad you've been able to re-establish communications with Tony, or at least his family. I managed to reach him and Kent just before Christmas by phone and made essentially the same discoveries you did: That Kent is doing well as an editor at Houghton-Mifflin and Tony is driving a cab. Tony sounded better than he has in more than a year: not more cheerful, but more realistic about himself and his future. He said he is trying to save enough money to pay tuition at a trade school and that, perhaps as an alternative, he is interested in teaching primary school. He seems quite tough-minded about both prospects and realizes, for example, that a primary school teaching will not allow him to live in the manner to which he once thought he was entitled. He seems, in other words, to be setting about methodically to pick up the pieces and I was very encouraged. I'd like to help him if I could because he seems now capable of putting assistance to constructive use. Unfortunately, however, things are a bit lean here, ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~

It has been a rather complicated, and expensive, fall. Jane came down with what was thought to be appendicitis in Machiasport last August and had an operation at the little regional hospital there. By the time we got back to St. Louis it turned out that it wasn't appendicitis at all but a massive infection of her lower abdominal cavity of which the infected appendix was only one, relatively minor, result. She was quite sick and underwent a five-hour, four-surgeon operation which ended in removal of every scrap of reproductive apparatus, plus, I was told, about a liter of pus. The infection seems to have originated with an irritation caused by an IUD. She had mentioned some discomfort several times over the past two years but her gynecologist, an expatriate Ceylonese with an impatient manner, repeatedly told her it was a routine menopausal symptom. We are toying with the notion of litigation.

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In the midst of all this, Jane's father died, of cancer. He had been ill, but ambulatory, for some time but he suddenly took a turn for the worse. It was very hard on the kids, to whom he had always been very kind and companionable.

We had a very good Christmas, nonetheless. Jane's mother came to visit us for a couple of weeks, and all three of the elder boys came home: Boxie from Haverford where he is a freshman, Jack from the Art Institute School in Chicago where he is in his last year and E. F. from Boston University, where he is also in his last year and doing very well, apparently. He was nominated by his department (history) for a Rhodes but missed out apparently due in part to his own absent-mindedness -- he neglected to get his application in until the last minute and thus was unable to polish it as it ought to have been. He'll probably go to graduate school for at least a master's in history, though his obvious first love is music. His lessons, from the first bass of the Boston Symphony, eat up all his spare resources.

I wish he'd chosen a more portable instrument. The dimensions of a bass are such that it often won't fit in the back seat of a taxi without opening the window. Travelling by air means buying an extra, half-fair ticket and finding a ^{two seats} ~~seat~~ at the forward end of the cabin just aft of the bulkhead. I've offered to make him a sturdy case so that he could check it through, but E.F. says that it would ~~xxx~~ have to be so heavy, and ~~xxxxxxx&xxx~~ large, that it create more problems than it would solve. There are such cases, apparently, made of fibre glass or aluminum (something like a Haliburton case) but the are extremely unwieldy.

Jack is becoming quite accomplished, as well as being totally dedicated. He's sketching and painting continuously and is always in a rush to get back to his apartment in Chicago where he can work in peace. His work is representational -- he's fascinated by what he actually sees, like Hopper, his favorite. I can't tell whether he'll be successful, though the current revival of representational painting gives him an advantage he wouldn't have had say a decade or two ago.

Boxie is doing adequately at Haverford, though not so well as he would like.

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He says he has two problems, both of which should iron themselves out in time: he was unprepared by the University City public school system for the intellectual rigor of Haverford and his curiosity about just ~~xxxx~~ about everything distracts him. He has my sympathy, especially with regard to the second problem. I think college and the demands it places on certain types of kid is very hard. It is difficult for some people -- I'm one of them -- to concentrate and perform in the absence of a certain kind of necessity, that necessity being the expectations and convenience or safety of others. Being responsible for someone else is easy, for oneself is difficult. I wonder why that is.

The Post-Dispatch, as you may have heard, has been struck, first by the pressmen, a la New York, and now by dock hands ~~xxx xxxxx~~ delivery drivers, since Thanksgiving. For about two weeks, a small group of us ran a small interim tabloid ~~xx~~ called, with deliberate lack of imagination, the St. Louis NEWS but it folded for want of advertising, chiefly. It was fun while it lasted and I can say, without embarrassment (as well as humility) that pound for pound it was the best newspaper St. Louis has seen in the last two decades. The publishers were a group of young businessmen and lawyers who thought they were seizing an opportunity to capitalize on the ~~xxxxxx~~ strike and who hired us (mostly Post-Dispatch people) to deliver news and editorial copy while they handled the business and ~~production end~~. The fact that they failed to hold up ~~their~~ end of the deal lets me and my colleagues morally, if not economically, off the hook, I suppose, except that if I'd really had my wits about me I would have insisted on a voice in the business side of the operation and perhaps would have been able to ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ prevent the paper's death.

The experience made me rather more contemptuous, even, that I already was of the way the Post-Dispatch and most other dailies are run. It is not ~~ix~~ ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ difficult to run ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ the news side of a newspaper if one chooses one's staff carefully, and listens carefully to their ~~xxxxxxxx~~ counsel.

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The role of managing editor, which was mine, is largely one of adjudicating differences of opinion among one's lieutenants -- a sort of mental coin-flipping operation, which ~~usually~~ naturally depends for its success on the quality of the lieutenantry, which in our case was superb. One really rather stands on their shoulders, a feeling I'm sure all good presidents, generals, ships' masters and the like share. I'm afraid it rather spoiled me for any other job at a newspaper and I find myself wondering wistfully if there isn't another paper somewhere in the country that needs someone to run it. Is the Santa Fe New Mexican for sale?

Since the demise of the News I've been rather at loose ends. Christmas festivities consumed some of my attention for a time, but for the last few days I've been sitting around indolently, reading Barbara Tuchman's new book about the 14th c. (fascinating compilation of facts and lore but less convincing in its general observations than her previous works) and thinking about finding a job. Next week, I'm afraid, necessity will prevail and I'll have to start shopping.

We had a good Christmas, though, as I said, and of course your Christmas check was very welcome and we are all very grateful for it. The Antarctic book was wonderful and the photographs marvellous, though almost incredible. I wish some of the small ones had been larger.

I wonder if I could ~~xxxxxxxyxxx~~ talk you out of some prints of some of the pictures. E.F., Jack and Boxie, I know would love to have some, as would Jane & I. I think my favorite is the seal on the black sand.

I don't know yet about our summer plans -- we may be too poor to make any -- though E. F. and Boxie ~~xxx~~ have expressed some interest in repairing Boondoggler, for speculation if for no other reason. It is, as E.F. points out, a very fine craft for its purpose and it would be a pity simply to scrap it. It saddens me that no one else seems interested in the project.

Please let me know if you'd like to try for another tour of the Ozarks in April or early May, or any other plans you might have. And please give my love to Aline, Pat and J&Z.

Love,

B

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