

St. Louis

Oct. 12

Dear Papa--

In the event you're not still in Kenya when this arrives, I'm sending a carbon to Santa Fe. If you are still in Africa, I hope you'll be able to stop by on your way home. We live at 341 Westgate (St. Louis, 63101) not more than a few hundred yards from where we lived before we moved to Jefferson City. The kids -- except for E. F. & Jack, who are in jr. high -- attend the same school and have the same friends. So, by and large, have we.

I'm now assigned to a newly established environment desk -- situated in a windowless, airless little cubbyhole know (what else!) as the eco-chamber. We put out a page twice a week which is better in appearance than in content, I fear.

Thank you for writing, Pa. It was a wonderful letter, not the kind one gets very often, from anybody. It's true things were not very happy between me and Jane and it's true ~~they're better~~ they're improved, though I think Nancy inferred the latter from my quick reassurance this summer when she asked. Mike had just died and I didn't feel in a position at that time to impose my --or our -- domestic difficulties on her so I just said, as anybody would have, that everything was perfectly in order.

That Nancy should have asked at all, I attribute to Margaret's breach of confidence, ~~which~~ which I find just a bit annoying. In confiding once to Margaret, and in Margaret alone, I suppose I should have borne in mind that having no family of her own, she would eventually convey to Nancy what she'd been told. She confides in Nancy the way children do. I guess we all remain children at least until we have families of our own.

Jane & I never came to the point of separation, though we discussed it often. I don't think Jane ever took the whole thing very seriously: with the uncanny intuitive perspicacity that women seem to possess, she probably knew that sooner or later I would realize, apparently as you did, that my fundamental first loyalties were my family and my children.

I know exactly what you mean when you say that your letter to Steve was in a sense an apology to him. Perhaps the single most important factor in my not leaving Jane was my desire not to destroy the esteem of the children. Growing up is difficult enough without having to apologize to oneself for one's parents: one has to make -- to learn to make -- allowances enough as it is. To have to make that ultimate adjustment, the ~~deliberate suppression~~ of questions about one's ~~parents' affections~~ parents' affections, is too much to ask of them. If I have any regrets about the past three years it's for the extent to which the esteem of the kids, ~~especially~~ especially E. F. 's, may have been impaired.

For difficult as it all has been, I have no other regrets. It may sound cruel, but I truly believe that Jane is unscathed and unchanged. She is, and always was, decent, uncritical undemanding -- and a little private and ungiven.



When you spoke of emotional aberration, my first reaction was to regard that as a little callous. I hope I never regard my feelings about Sally as aberrant. But on further, and more generous, reflection I can imagine considering any sentiments that ~~will~~ mask from oneself that which is most important -- the children -- as out of character and out of tune.

I cannot say with absolute certainty that Jane & I are perfectly in accord yet, or that we ever will be. As I say, she is unchanged and the same roots of dissatisfaction are there. Perhaps when we are both older, and the children are bigger, we will be separated. I just don't know.

It's curious, though, how difficult it is to realize of what small and seemingly frivolous elements contentment is composed. We have a fireplace in our new house and we had none in Jefferson City. Last night, sitting in front of the fire, reading the Times, with the kids wrestling on the rug, I discovered I was feeling more serene and satisfied with life than I have in 36 months. I tried to locate the difference and the only factor I could identify was the fire. It came to me, in one of those insights one has as one grows older, that the hearth is not perhaps the stilted literary image I always thought it was, that perhaps it's neither an image nor a symbol, but a concept of value per se.

I mentioned it to Jane and we agreed that we should never again live in a house without a fireplace. If we find ourselves forced to buy such a house, we must remember to require ourselves to have one built, quite irrespective of the cost, before moving in. It is more important than indoor plumbing, or a rainproof roof.

No, I have no regrets either. The experience of the last three years could have provided no other way. I don't believe in fate, or historical inevitability, but I think, all the anguish notwithstanding, that it was a necessary episode. For me, if not for Sally, or Jane. It probably sounds incurably optimistic, but it seems we gain wisdom and insight when we need it, no sooner, no later. I don't believe that the owl of Athena flies only at dusk, when the day is done, and nothing can be done, though it sometimes seems that way when we think we've made a discovery too late in our lives.

~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ If I were younger, I'd be Sundered by remorse, not only for the pain and insult visited upon Jane, but for consuming three years of Sally's life which could have profitably employed looking for a real live husband. At the risk of sounding unfeeling, I think it is fair to assert that both J. and S. did what they did, (or did not do what they did not do) for their own reasons which were no less self interested than mine. Both ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ have seen as many years go by; both have as great a freedom of choice and as free a will as I. They did, or did not do what they wanted, or did, not want, to do.

To assume responsibility for the happiness of other adults seems almost a renunciation of responsibility for one's own. Which is in turn an abrogation of one's responsibility for others. Sally taught me that. I wouldn't repudiate a second of it.

Thanks for writing, Pa.

your devoted and admiring son

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