



AIR CONSERVATION COMMISSION
of the State of Missouri
Jefferson City, Missouri 65101
Phone: 635-7015 Area Code 314

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ADDRESS ALL COMMUNICATIONS TO
THE AIR CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MISSOURI DIVISION OF HEALTH

E. F. PORTER, JR.
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

7-29-66

Dear Papa --

Nancy informs us that you won't be at the island this summer, which is too bad. The three eldest boys left last Sunday for Isle au Haut via Bangor to stay with the Spragues for a week or so and then to visit Bucks Harbor (the one near Machiasport) to stay with the Molloyes. Jane, Anne and Alex are leaving the day after tomorrow to follow the same route. I face a fortnight of bachelorhood after which I'm going to drive to Machiasport where we'll be for a week. We hope we will all be able to get to the Island for a few days before we have to start driving back. Nancy has assured us we'll be able to find room somewhere.

I can't remember whether I told you -- it must have occurred while you were at the Galapagos -- that I quit the Post-Dispatch in February to take a job running the state air pollution control program. It was with great misgivings since I loved the newspaper business in principle and miss it sorely. But I found life at the Post-Dispatch intolerable. The life of the bureaucrat has its discontents but at least I am largely my own boss and the restrictions are those imposed by a sleepy and unimaginative state government which I can ignore most of the time. . . unlike a sleepy and unimaginative city editor.

As I gather you have heard I had a drink -- several drinks, in fact -- with David Brower in San Francisco last month while attending a meeting of the air pollution control association. He showed me some rather fuzzy, blue prints of the Summer Island pictures and reproached me for not taking more interest in the Island. He must have gotten this from you because I detected the same tone of reproach in your article in Natural History. And so did Jane and it made ~~her~~ her furious, or as furious as Jane ever gets.

I love the Island as much as anybody ever has. When I was small I didn't want any one to touch any part of it. I remember considering it barbarous even to tread upon a patch of moss and leave footprints, to clear trees or pull up seaweed. Later when I was an adolescent, and conscious -- too conscious -- of people, I used to ~~consider~~ consider devoting my energies to acquiring sole title to the ~~is~~ Island so that I could evict everyone else. The apparent apathy of most of the people to the natural surroundings horrified me.

It was quite recently that I came to realize that change is as much a fact of nature as it is of man, the difference being, I suppose, that nature handles it all with more style and taste. The meadows, which seemed so natural, returned to alders and spruce. The flounder, clam, osprey and seal populations waxed and waned. The birch in front of the house is dying. The death of a pasture is the birth of a forest; growth and decay are sisters under the skin. Both are beautiful.

But we all have other concerns and my opportunities to spend as much time enjoying the island were never so great as yours. When we are there it is often as guests and never as proprietors and we have other useful, important worlds we must attend to.

AIR CONSERVATION COMMISSION

We have not contributed anything recently to the support of the physical plant of the Island and we never contributed much but this has no relation to my feelings for the Island. For one thing the annual dues are largely allocated to the artificial amenities and while they make ~~there~~^{it} more comfortable and and pleasant they are really the least important part of the whole ball of wax. For another, precious as the Island is to me, I have very limited resources, both in time and money. I have an obligation to Jane and her parents who have a place to which they are as devoted, and with as good reason, as we are to the Island. I have an obligation to provide something like the good life for the children during those 10 months of the year when we could not conceivably be at the Island. I have an obligation to try to lead a satisfactory life while I am still young enough to do so.

Perhaps I feel these obligations more acutely than did your generation of Porters. Perhaps this is due to the very limitations of resources I mentioned. It is easier, far easier, for the rich to be sensitive and civilized than it is for the poor. One's ~~own~~ vision tends to be narrowed along with one's choices.

You know, I once contemplated giving up a conventional existence and retiring to the Island to occupy myself entirely with watching the seasons change. It still crosses my mind from time to time. But it ~~xxxxx~~ occurs to me that it wouldn't work, not for any of us. It would be too much desert and it would cloy. I'd get restless for a taste of the world, not because the Island would become less precious to me, but merely because the best of life is best taken in small, slightly tantalizing, doses. Maybe I was wrong. I still wonder.

I hope you'll stop in St. Louis when you next come through, east or west. Though my office is in Jefferson City and I spend much of my time here, we still haven't moved and we aren't sure we will.

Best to all,

Baba
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