

STUART W. GENTLING

25 September 1992

Ms. Christina Ward
P.O. Box 515
North Scituate, Massachusetts 02060

Dear Ms. Ward,

As a result of recent conversations with my brother Dr. Peter Gentling concerning his garden book project and his enthusiasm at finding you for an agent, it occurred to me that you just also might be interested in a publication that my twin brother Scott and I completed in 1986. Our book is a Great Imperial or Elephant Folio titled OF BIRDS AND TEXAS. It measures 23"x30"x3" and contains 50 color plates (10 landscape prints and 40 bird prints) plus 87 pages of text printed by handset metal type and letterpress. It weighs 46 pounds. Scott and I wrote the commentaries to each of the plates, and the highly respected Texas author John Graves provided the main essay titled " Recollections of a Texas Bird Glimpser."

The project took us nearly ten years to create, cost us a fortune and left us exhausted at its completion. OF BIRDS AND TEXAS, however, was extremely successful both financially and in the way it was received by literary, science and art critics. In fact the praise that the book earned and continues to earn is truly extraordinary - and, I think, well deserved. Of the 525 copies printed less than 40 remain unsold. Even though the Texas economy turned sour in 1986 and has still not recovered, OF BIRDS AND TEXAS at the issue price of \$2,500 a copy sold very well. However, because of the huge cost overruns we never did have any money to advertise. Instead we had to rely on the project's newsworthiness to promote the book. Consequently OF BIRDS AND TEXAS never really became known outside outside Texas except for a couple of news stories and through personal correspondence and word of mouth. All in all the project cost us nearly \$850,000, and it took three years to pay all debts.

During all this time our book received only one criticism, that it was simply too big and cumbersome to be easily read. Since it was created as a work of literature as well as of painting, those intrepid souls who did read the book praised the writing and expressed frustration at not having a smaller, more conveniently read copy. Scott and I had always intended to publish a smaller, approximately 10" X 14" version for wider distribution, but the Elephant Folio took all our time and left

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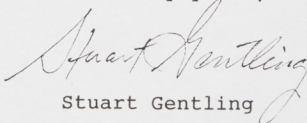
us too exhausted to undertake a followup publication. Besides, I really wanted all the original folios to sell out before we attempted a smaller, commercial version. Now that we have less than 40 copies left I can regard the original edition to be technically sold out. We also have had enough respite from it to finally consider undertaking the publication of a smaller book. Since we are not interested in doing it ourselves, we would like to find an agent to help us find if possible a major publisher with a good national distribution network.

Although our book is titled OF BIRDS AND TEXAS, three - fourths of the birds portrayed in the plates are species which live in the rest of the United States. From the beginning we chose our bird subjects carefully in order to interest a national audience. In addition to the color plates Scott and I have at least 25 waterclors of other American birds, mostly studies, which could be used to create a book with a new format. Lastly, though we like the the original title OF BIRDS AND TEXAS, we are willing to change it to appeal to a wider readership.

I am sending along with this letter a list of critical comments by various important art and book people. They are impressive by any standards. In the next few days I will be sending you additional related material. In spite of certain rather specialized publicity garnered by our folio, the book, as I said, was never advertised outside of Texas, and no publisher has ever been approached about doing a smaller version. In a way our book has a rather unique distinction of having been successfully marketed or market tested and yet remains essentially " virginal " as far as exposure nationally or having been shopped around to various publishing houses.

I really do believe that our bird book could be a successful national publication, and Scott and I look forward to hearing from you and finding out what you think. If you wish to talk to me, my telephone number is (817) 738-4427.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Stuart Gentling". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Stuart Gentling