

Sept. 13, 1971

Dear Marge:

It is so good to hear from you, particularly when I don't deserve it. And what a lovely place you are living in, a kind of Shangra La way up above the murk of things. I only hope your companions are worthy of your mettle. I myself have always been afraid of other senior citizens, thinking, in all my usual but very human vanity, that I am not really an old, shuffle-board playing senior citizen and that my opinions and adaptabilities are just as flexible as my muscles. At which point I come close to tottering, so there goes my metaphor. On the other hand I have seen colonies of old people all astride bikes and apparently still bound to get involved in the physical work and all apparently happy as little bees, which is a lot more than can usually be said about me. I don't know about the getting older bit, except that I don't like a bit of it. Everytime I try to find the compensating considerations things don't seem to balance Get old along with me, the best is yet to be. Where is that best, what's it like? Maybe, Marge, I need religion. But then I'm not a religious type. I believe in something amorphous but nothing nicely concrete about an identifiable hereafter, where people meet like at a class reunion. I comfort myself in the highly dubious immortality of living in the minds and memories of my fellow man - which is what every other greedy ambitious person does, I suppose. I've thought, lately, that great writers reveal their overweening vanity by yearning more than most for an eternity of life within their writings. Hemingway used to talk a great deal about how writing if it was good would last a good long time; words like forever are used lightly in this context; and yet the desire to live forever in the minds of others for whatever seeming reason is I must confess a vanity equal to that of the pharaohs and all their pyramids. They were smarter, I guess than Hemingway, because what our mutual friend didn't take note of is that the fickle language we use will make chancers of even the best of our writers and eventually even the chancers will be forgotten in the unintelligibility of a long ago living language. If a man wishes to be remembered, he must write in a dead language, like Latin, which is the only kind of a language, oddly enough that will live. Anyhow, in 5,000 years, at the rate our language is changing, people who care will have to read translations from the primitive Shakespeare or Hemingway, while those pyramids of Cheops will still be there posing behind people on camels, that is if somebody doesn't drown them in another reservoir for an Aswan dam. And in all of this I forget the little threat of the big bang in the sky. Well, to end this dreary essay, I suppose the object of a man should be to do something that feels enduring during his lifetime and to hell with what follows because he can't help that and, what is most important, he won't be around to fret about it.... Are you still with me? Nothing really new, Marge, except that it is unlikely we will be down there. Going to Peoria for some books and that's about all. We might get to Va. for two winter months. Book biz continues bullish. We both well. Danny now gone over two years. Love to you.