July 21, 1973

Dear Marge:

I hope you never judge our relationship by the occasional infrequency of the epistolary exchange (ugh). It is not the way I judge it. I kind of treasure you out there in TV-Land and hold you in reserve. And I am always so damn glad to hear from you.

Your latest letter with the accompanying correspondence from Joy and your daughter was most gratefully received. Of course I am intimidated by Joy's linguistic abilities. The only way I can rationalize it is that she's younger and perhaps is forced to work at it more constantly than I was. My handicap was an English-speaking wife, as opposed to the sleeping dictionary type of companionship which I am told produces results far better than even Berlitz could hope to achieve. Of course the flaw in this is that Joy does not, presumarly, have the advadvantages of this kind of dictionary, although her husband may be that great exception to the ranks of Americans overseas - someone who really tries to learn the local language. I am absolutely fascinated by Joy's background. It is of the stuff that unbelievable novels are made. Perhaps we will hear from her in the years to come. I am sure she is a great comfort, a gal like that, to remind you of your beloved friend.

As to getting over there and paying a visit, that seems out of the picture now; but if they are to be there three more years who can tell what will happen. I am so glad they love that southern sector so despised by so many persons, including most northern Italians. I don't know if I ever told you that I was of Italian origin; that is partly why I have been so humiliated by my inability to learn the language. My father was born in Sorrento, a suburb, you might say, of Naples; a thousand years ago, in the last century he came as a young college professor to the land of the golden streets and married my mother, whose name was May Donaldson. She was about third generation scotch. My father taught at Adelphi College and CCNY, spoke 19 languages and won the World Prize in Latin. As far as I know, he spoke English without an accent. I was six when he died of the flu in 1918. He was a true genius and my only regret is that I did not inherit his brains. I mean this. For years, under the accepted programing, I felt most secure in my scottish background; [illegible] I attributed all my bad characteristics to the Italian side. Now I am not so sure. In retrospect my scottish relatives were a pack of oafs compared to my father but society of those days ordained it otherwise. I have subsequently traveled to both places, Scotland and Italy, as you know. I felt pullings in neither place, just strangeness. But if I had to choose between the two I would pick Italy because the gloom of Scotland and of many Scots is too hard to take in the advanced stages of life. Once I witnessed a soccer match between Scotland and Italy and was totally unmoved. Italy fought for a tie and was deservedly whipped. My name is a legal translation of San Giovanni. So now I have told you the story of my life. I already know yours, being a more snoopy sort than you are.

Nothing else much to report. We continue in the book business, giving it all our time. We were spared by the floods. There is a new Hemingway bibliographical supplement coming out from Princeton in October and I am helping the bibliographer a little. Believe it or not the Hem bibliographer is a woman. This process has tended to get me back into Hem again. I had drifted some. I would like to do some more Hem writing. Don't have the kind of guts needed to do what you imply, some writing of my own. Wonder when we will meet again. You are always welcome here, Marge, by both of us. Thanks again for writing and much love,