

May 3, 1974

Dear Marge:

-- It was great talking to you all-the way across the continent the other day. The presence stuck with me so much, I'm afraid, that I let the letter-writing part drift away - as I always do. You did sound strong and cheerful and as always, and it was with a-kind of effort on my part that I - had to tell myself you were in the hospital. It's so strange; we've known each other so long and yet I have seen you just those quick first two times eight years ago. Still and all-the correspondence has been more than usually passes between cosmic strangers. The letters have been good and the talk the-other day was great and yet you always keep in reserve the possibility of seeing, and I hope that is not-too far in the future. I find myself drifting at times, especially since the book business started three years ago; the Hemingway research and related experiences hover in the background whimpering at me to be done, but somehow I manage to ignore such impulses. I am a great man for rationalizing myself out of doing something difficult (or maybe impossible) - after all, I must take care of the birds, whether they need it or not, and help spring find its way back and analyze the state of the world and do little jobs for Ruth and work on my book catalogues and drop everything at the slightest (or even bogus) interruption - and somehow in my stoic wretched improvident way I plod the irreversible course knowing that I am probably pretty much everyman and that while the time for setting the world on fire may be past I may well be, without

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knowing it exactly - a pretty happy man. I doubt the days are really wasted. I doubt the little time tables and goals we set ourselves have true validity in the overall sweep of things. Sometimes I think it is better to live life as fully as possible on a kind of open-ended basis without subjecting ourselves to comparison with totally arbitrary standards.

The weather she has been great of late. We had a nice two-day visit from Harold Loeb's widow, Barbara and her mother Mathilda. The latter had come over from South Africa and is rather anxious to get back. I am a faulty Republican, as Ruth would tell you, but I had to practice self-restraint while listening to her tales of the rightness of the separation of the races. (I put it that way because I can't spell apartheid.) Yes, did you know that colored are the issue of browns and whites and are not, repeat, not to be confused with blacks. Mathilda, who is a middleclass English woman of perhaps 75, spoke fondly to me of a colored who has cleaned for her for ten years. She would relate little stories but somehow all I remember is the "madame" that came out of it all as the way Mathilda was addressed. I think that "madame" meant a great deal to this lady. You know she always says that Harold Loeb, a Jew, was in favor of apartheid, and she quoted him as saying that the Jews were the first people to practice this custom - the rest of the world being the other race.

Ruth had suffered quite an injury, I think I told you, but she is almost fully recovered now and once again hauling the books up and downstairs. I hope you are feeling better, Marge, and that you will write me when you can. Meanwhile, much love to you from both of us,

Don & John