

July 6, 1974

Dear Marge:

I hope you are used to my belated answering nonsense. It is a sad unfortunate characteristic of mine that has disappointed mothers, sisters, girls and friends for a lifetime. I don't know why I have been cursed with this character defect. I suppose it betokens something else that I am possibly not aware of. I tell myself that I put off letters until I am ready and able to write a good and worthy one but I suppose this is rationalizing rubbish like a lot of other excuses I make for myself. I so envy Ruth, who plumps herself down at her desk while I am doing the necessary reading of the paper, and by the time I am through there is a tall neat stack of envelopes waiting to be warmed on top of the television set. I think you have Ruth's ability to express yourself readily and easily and effectively so that it sounds like you with no frill added. Those of us with super-heated imaginations have trouble bringing the writer and the expected writer into proper register, and usually wind up doing less well than the pragmatists who simply set it down and get it done with and don't worry about being arty, so you can see some more rationalization at work now can't you.

It was truly good to have your letter. Both to simply get it (A) and to relish its quality (b). Not that I had any doubts after talking to you over the telephone, but I had been a bit worried about what had taken place and where you were etcetera etcetera etcetera. And so it was nice to have the reassuring Florida dateline and the familiar handwriting and the incisive thinking. As for Georgiana writing me, I suppose that might seem bothersome, but from her point of view I'm sure it was the loving thing to do. I wrote her back telling of my great talk with you and she responded with a perfectly wonderful letter or long note. I've never met your daughter of course but I imagine she must be quite a gal -- and I can't forget that she was the one who encouraged you to pay attention to me in the first place.

Now I hope there is a certain stability in life and that things are all right, although if things are absolutely all right you will be one unique human being. I really hate the business of getting older even though I don't feel emotionally old. I keep telling myself how beautiful it is to mature and all that mallarkey but somehow I don't believe it. Still, I must be wrong. Being older is a dignified part of life even though the flesh is not as firm as before and there is no reason why other values can't take the place of all the store we have put into muscles and grace and all that there kind of stuff. Ah me. All my life I expected to become a wise content old man passing out wisdom to appreciative people and feeling all cuddly with the world, and it hasn't turned out that way. As I may have told you before all that I have become is an old boy without that great sagacity and with some of the memories gone glimmering rather than merging into a kind of homogenized wisdom. However, I don't state this as a kind of charge against the world. It is merely something peculiar about me. I see old those silver airstream trailers on the road, each of them filled with a tidy man and woman of about 65 and both of them apparently happy as hell with themselves, each other and the world. So it must be there. I do believe, as the old dady said, some people think too much and it ain't good for you.

Ruth and I are both well but over us lurks that demon fear of getting catastrophically unwell at some point in this inflated \$120 a day hospital world, and so we have just quadrupled our Blue Cross so as to be sure not to have enough money to spend for ordinary things. Makes sense doesn't it?

We keep going in the book business. I have just completed my 7th catalogue since starting about three years ago; and Ruth is working on her fifth. We have a lot of customers now and have developed ways of selling books; all that is lacking is a regular way of acquiring books, but we do get them in dribs and drabs even if the libraries we aspire to seem continually to elude us. By being in this business we are able to buttress our social security position pending the guillotine fall of age 65 -- although I could begin to get some money at age 62 if I so desire it. I must say the detail required to be dealt with in selling books by mail to about 1,000 people are not the best thing for the mind, or at least that's the way it seems to me. Let's see, that book somebody wants, do I have it, or did I just see it in somebody else's catalogue or did I have it once, etc. etc. I don't know whether the brain fails or whether I am simply not accustomed to this kind of detail.

Yesterday Ruth and I bought a chain saw for \$149. It is of Swedish manufacture which I regret since I am against the Swedes for several reasons. But it seemed the best buy. I am hoping to win out over the power company this winter by burning mostly wood in our stove and using our two electric systems only as supplements. We have been regularly charged about \$25 extra as a fuel surcharge over our regular electric bill, and this really infuriates me. We were sweettalked into putting the electric in and then when the crunch came we were sandbagged. I found out last winter, however, that I could heat the house pretty well with one big old stove that we found upstairs. I bought three cords of wood for \$90 and this lasted almost the whole winter, but not quite. Of course I am spending more than that, for the saw but there will be a shorttime satisfaction in it and a saving in the long run, and some needed exercise too. All the wood I can possibly use has been made available to me in a standing or fallen condition by a European friend with hundreds of acres in the next town. I go into all this so you will possibly get the flavor of our life in "coping" which used to be called "living."

I miss Harold Loeb very much. He was a grumpy, sometimes insulting man, but he was an original and, I suppose most important of all, he seemed to like me and want me around, and he encouraged my writing, which now I am afraid has become defunct. I don't seem to write about our old friend, Hem, any more, but I still collect him, although not quite as passionately. Hem is in a decline now, it seems, critically that is, and, to a lesser extent, collectingly too, but he is still tops with me. I know his limitations but then I can't stand Faulkner or most of the others. Hem was a tortured guy, I guess, but he swerved the world a bit in passing which is about all you can ask of one man. What really turns me off are the gushings of some of the academics who prate about his "death" at 30 and his self-mimicry and his fallow after years -- as if we should not be grateful for what he gave us and for the muscular influence that he has had on writing and the reduction of garbage and rhetoric in ordinary language.

Hemingway complained about his mind "working" right after WW I, and I think he may have been partially uneasy for a great deal of the time after that. Well, if that's what it takes to produce what he did perhaps we should prescribe "workings" in the mind as a creative tool.

Well, anyway, I would sincerely like to see you again and wonder how it could be done. It will be done I'm sure. Meantime keep well -- and cool.
love,