

January 1, 2004

Dear Wendy and Bob,

In December of 1999 you wrote me a beautiful (in penmanship as well as writing style) handwritten Christmas letter because you power had gone out. This morning I was planning to reply to your <sup>recent</sup> letter and our power went out about four-thirty in the morning, in the middle of my 20-minute period of sitting (in a chair) meditation. I decided to finish the period in the dark, which turned out to be a pleasant experience, and then lit the propane lamp and laid and lit the fire in the wood stove and finished my hour session. The program I find works best for me is 15 minutes of Moving Mindfulness, a blend of yoga, tai chi, chi gung, and adaptations of those, and twenty minutes of sitting meditation, and ten minutes of Moving Meditation (kinhin and bowing) and another fifteen minutes of Moving Mindfulness (some balancing exercises and some different stretching exercises adapted from sensory awareness movements).

So I wrote the first draft of this letter by hand, but my handwriting is so messy I can barely read it, so now that Jack has been up for an hour and has gotten the generator going I'm taking advantage of the hour he plans to leave it on (to keep the frig and freezer cold) to copy this letter on my Word Smith (combo typewriter and one-line-long word processor).

In an interview of Billy Collins, 2002 poet laureate of the United States he was asked, "Do you write on computer or by hand?" He answered "By hand. I like the scibble and cross-outs. Good writing arises out of a big mess." I might add that good writing sometimes arises out of a big mess. Other times the only thing emerges is a headache.

We enjoyed the sheet of snapshots you included with your letter <sup>so much</sup> this year <sup>SF 00125</sup> that I decided to pick out a few to copy at the stationery store, the next time there's a break in the weather after the New Year Day Holiday, to include with this letter. I picked out a picture of Jack and myself where we were wearing out "town clothes". Usually I send snapshots taken on picnics or hikes. The photos of Jack's junk assemblages are just a few of those he's made over the last couple of decades. (MY CHOICES) THE Spanish Balloon is a long term project (6 years so far) but almost finished.

Jack was interested in the photo of your sail boat and your project to restore it. We have had our 14-foot Gregor outboard parked in our back yard ever since we moved here. Crescent City, 5 miles away, has a harbor but it's kindof small. Smith River has good boating if you own a jet boat, and the ocean is not Jack's cup of tea at his age. We have a boat loader we used to use on top of our Ford pickup but we have a camper on the pickup now and it's too big a project to take it on and off and replace it with a shell. So our baby waits in limbo year after year. But we're too attached to it to sell it.

We skipped our trip south this year because of political uncertainties ~~and~~ but we hope to make it this spring. Every time we have an occasion to unlock our Wilderness travel trailer and spend a few minutes inside we hear it say. "I'm ready to go. Let's go!" Staying home, except for a quick trip in the camper to an old mining claim Jack's father used to have in the mountains south east of here, has given Jack time to catch up on repairs to the house and property and us both time to have a lot of dental work done.

I was 80 in March and feel like 50. My long-term writing project continues to progress s l o w l y but steadily. I've given up comparing my productivity with other writers, or with the my own when I was writing THE ZEN ENVIRONMENT. It took me two years for the first draft of that manuscript and another two years to revise it after Jim Landis? (Bob's Editor) recommended I send it to Elizabeth Pomada and Michael Larsen. Just ~~having~~ the possibility of having these agents ~~reading~~ the manuscript motivated me to rewrite it again. Maybe, when you reread your novel with the possibility of sending it to Elizabeth, it will motivate you to try a new draft.

In an interview of Norman Mailer in Jan. 27, 2003 issue of Newsweek about his book on writing "THE SPOOKY ART" he says, "Since at my age [80] you begin to forget all too much, I..hardly remember what I had written the day before. It read, therefore, as if someone else had done it...I could ~~not~~ proceed to fix the prose. The sole virtue

of losing your short term memory is that it does free you to be your own editor." I discovered this at age 50 when my short term memory began to fade. In any event, the second draft of your novel-- if you are moved to revisit it again--should be enhanced by the years of Zen life you've experienced since you set it aside.

On the other hand your "autobiographical work" sounds intriguing. Maybe you'll continue working on it, or maybe your local historical writing will keep you busy and satisfied. Or, maybe you will discover a way to synchronize all three forms of writing into a new literary expression as you did in your theatrical presentation of the history of Portsmouth pioneer families.

Whatever your first choice of your possible writing projects I think you will enjoy yourself more if you consider it a supplemental Zen practice like your tai chi rather than <sup>AN ORDINARY MOTIVITY WITH</sup> ~~the~~ ordinary goals of most writers. If you do it for the sake of itself rather than for fame or fortune it will give you a lifetime of satisfaction. You will return to it day after day, month after month, year after year as an opportunity to discover hidden aspects of your self and others and honor your craft as one of your most challenging Zen teachers.

Suzuki-roshi said, "Which is more important; to attain enlightenment, or to attain enlightenment before you attain enlightenment; to make a million dollars, or to enjoy your life in your effort, little by little, even though it is impossible to make that million; to be successful, or to find some meaning in your effort to be successful?" The only way to really enjoy any activity of life 100 percent is to do it for the sake of having the opportunity to do it NOW with as much enthusiasm and attention and appreciation as you are able to muster for this moment, and not because it might be appreciated by someone else in the future.

I hope Nell is well on her way to full recovery from her operation. Keep warm and dry.

Love,  
 Marian & Jack