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WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

BOWLING GREEN, KENTUCKY 42101

May 21, 1969

Dear Kelly,

This little skit, intended as a portion of the DIARY TO KELLY, is being mailed right now, for I want it to reach you as soon as it can. It is a lame sort of thing, but its sincerity is above question. In the hundreds of pages of my DIARY TO KELLY I have said these same things again and again, but I never tire of saying them again. And yet I realize each time I try to say how much I appreciate you, my words seem colorless and stilted. But I know you will understand; really great ideas cannot be expressed in words.

As always,

Gordon

May 21, 1969

Just as I finished my dinner, not long after noon today, I turned on a small radio to hear the last of the news items. I got only a portion of a concluding sentence, something about President Thompson. At once I began calling various people to find out what had happened. All lines were busy. Fortunately, one of the younger members of the English department, Dr. Wilford Fridy, called me and gave me the small bit of the news that he had heard, since he did not arrive at the general faculty meeting until it was nearly over.

On very few occasions in my long life has any such news so floored me. I told Mrs. Wilson that it was almost like a death in the family. The only comparable event in scholastic circles, so far as my life and my department were concerned, was the resignation of James P. Cornette. I had learned to depend on Jimmy as on a second self; I admired his plain common sense, his marvelous calm in trying times, his wide-ranging scholarship. Away back in my mind I dreamed of his taking over the department when it was advisable for me to step down, at whatever age was appropriate. I have never quite got adjusted to our loss of Jimmy. I appreciate the fine work done by Willson Wood; I am sure that he has done as well as Cornette could have done. But when Jimmy left us, I just did not know Wood so well as I came to know him. To me he is one of the solid rocks on which Western is built.

To try to say in words what I feel about you has always been difficult. If I had been called on at any time to evaluate you, I would have felt strange stoppages of speech or of written words. It has been impossible for me, ever, to say how much you have pleased me as one of my boys, how I have rejoiced at every good thing that has come your way, how my wife and I have suffered with you and Sarah in your sorrows, how we have felt like the guests of some magicians as we have watched the university grow right before our eyes.

Since 1929, when I first met you, though I had already heard about you through faculty and students while I was away at Indiana University, I have felt that in you Western had had a reincarnation. You seem to me to be almost unbelievably the epitome of Western, from your earliest student days on up to your present great position. Just to mention Western seemed, even long ago, to assume that Kelly Thompson was somewhere around. You know my own faith in the man who chooses to stay put, to devote all his energies to his chosen spot, no matter how small or remote it may be. I am sure that you can say as I have said many times: I never had a desire for more than a few brief moments to be anywhere else but here, and that runs back to January, 1908. And it has given me great satisfaction to watch younger fellows who literally dedicate themselves to our corner of a mighty big world. In A. L. Crabb's chapel speech in which he said ^{farewell} to Grise, Canon, and me he stressed the great importance of a man's choosing a place and occupying it, through all sorts of offers to go elsewhere, to stay rooted to some spot until it became associated with him and his ideals. A generation younger than are the three people whom Crabb praised, you deserve everything he said and more, for it has been your unusual opportunity to accomplish in a big way what the very best of us have only dreamed of getting done. As was said of one of the ancient Roman rulers, you found Rome a city of wood and left it a city of marble.

Since you are merely a little past middle age, you have enormous opportunities to render great service to Western and the world. I hope you can rest up for a while and allow nature to do some of her magic healing. Then you should have twenty more years of active service, with some fewer strains on your body and your health. And, whether you stay around the campus or elsewhere, you are still my former student, my former president, and always my personal and highly valued friend.

Sincerely,

Goodwin Wilson 403