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CONSULATE GENERAL
OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Seville, Spain

APO New York 09284

December 1, 1970

Dear Mrs. Ellis:

Can you ever forgive me for my long silence? As I begin to write, I am glancing not only at your lovely letter of last July 9 but also at one you sent right after Thanksgiving of 1969 with a Christmas card. The latter letter has been resting in my work basket ever since it came, with my hope that I would find a quiet time in which to do it justice. The truth is that I couldn't do justice to one of your precious letters, much less two at the same time. But I will try.

Yes, the picture in LIFE magazine of the man telling the honeymoon couple the facts of life is the one and same old me. My good wife, Corinth, tells me that I don't look quite that old and tired. Perhaps not; but my own vanity causes me to mention that owing to the poor lighting in the prison warden's office, one side of my face came out black--and at least some of the lines are due to lightening and retouching of the photograph. All of us who collaborated on the article itself are pleased with the way it turned out--and we already are seeing beneficial effects. Before the warning publicity was published, we had seven or eight drug-charge arrests ^{per month} of Americans in the Seville consular district; we are now having only one or two arrests per month. There has been a lot of additional publicity about the drug problem, including a CBS-TV special (I was not in it) and an article in the Chicago Daily News --which describes the Consul General at Seville as "the fatherly, grey Charles Carson". (All of which reminds me of what an old, former neighbor at Conehatta said last year after having seen me for the first time since I was 18 years old: "But you look so mature, Charles." Well, if I am not mature at the age of 52, I never will be. I didn't look very mature when I first knocked on your door 35 years ago, did I?)

There have been times over the past year when I have had as many as 35 Americans in local jails at the same time. It is a sad commentary on the current day and age, because most of those caught trying to smuggle hash'sh (marijuana) from North Africa into Spain actually come from good, decent, middle- and even upper-class American homes. The trouble is that these young people have had their own way ever since they were born. Some have learned a hard lesson here. Some, alas, will never learn.

The LIFE story also turned out to be a nice personal experience for me. Not only did it bring a letter from you, but there were others from old friends and relatives with whom I had lost touch completely. Our elder son, Charles, aged 22, read the article when in Mexico City. He was at the time en route, by car, from the Panama Canal Zone, on an adventurous trip through the jungles of Central America, to San Antonio, Texas, where he received his discharge from the U. S. Army on June 30. Charles had entered ~~XXXXXX~~ Princeton University at the age of 17. He did quite well the first year, but he stopped studying during the second year, and "resigned" before examinations for which results he knew beforehand that he would be thrown out. He joined the Army, worked hard, got a commission and prepared to go to Viet Nam. Instead, he was assigned to Army headquarters in the Canal Zone where his bilingual knowledge of the Portuguese and Spanish languages qualified him for a job in the Protocol Office where he served as an escort-Interpreter officer between American and South American military officials. He made a fine record and achieved the rank of first lieutenant. He returned to Princeton in September and seems to be quite well adjusted. Whereas he was too young when he first went to Princeton, his Mother and I now hope that he will not get any ideas about being too advanced and sophisticated to associate with the youngsters who are now his ~~class mates~~ associates. I dwell upon the point of education because I cannot help but think that it never would have occurred to me to consider giving up a chance to go to Princeton. As it turns out, he was wise in dropping out when he did. Now, with his GI educational benefits, he can finance most of his education himself. He plans to be a lawyer.

LIFE

Our second son, Winston, aged 20, read the/article in a foxhole in Viet Nam. We can imagine the whoop he let out when he saw the picture of "the old man". (Neither of the boys had known the piece was in the making, so it came as a pleasant surprise to both.) Winston graduated from the Staunton Military Academy in Virginia in 1968 and was accepted at both the University of ~~TX~~ Texas and Texas A&M; but he decided to get his military service over first, and joined the Marines. At the outset, the Marine Corps chose him as a candidate for the U. S. Naval Academy--but he was turned down when the authorities saw that he had made barely passing grades in mathematics at Staunton. He was not too disappointed, because it was something others had proposed and not something of his own initiative upon which he had set his heart. It was, of course, a disappointment to his Mother and me to see him miss an opportunity to go to Annapolis. (He undoubtedly inherited from his father his somewhat-less-than-wild enthusiasm for math. If it had not been for Nova, who lent me a hand one time when she was visiting you, I would still be working on that BU practice bookkeeping set. I never tried the Second Set.) Winston is not enthusiastic about military life anyway. I think he will become an English teacher--and I certainly approve of that. At any rate, he

has done well in the Marine Corps. He returned from Viet Nam in October, is stationed at Oceanside, California, and ~~pls~~ hopes to get ~~his~~ discharge by next spring. With luck, then, he may be able to enter college next September. (Our two older boys have some recollection of Viet Nam as we were stationed in Saigon from 1953 to 1955.)

The other two boys are still at home. Peter, aged 17, and Thomas, aged 15, are twelfth and tenth graders respectively. They are attending a British-run so-called International School in Seville--and getting their high school credits by correspondence through the University of Nebraska extension service. For some reason, Peter has taken a fancy to the University of New Mexico. He has, of course, applied for admission to several others. He wants to be an archaeologist. Last summer he worked with a group of Spanish university students at the ruins of ancient Italica--about three miles from Seville. Italica was the first Roman colony in Spain. It was founded in 205 B. C. and was the birthplace of the Roman Emperors Trajan and Hadrian. It was a great city 2,000 years ago. Most of it now lies beneath olive groves, but there are frequent finds of beautiful pieces of statuary, mosaics, etc., which escaped the destructive wrath of the invading barbarian peoples that swept over Spain in the Dark Ages.

Tom hasn't decided what he wants to be. He is good at music and plays the Spanish guitar very nicely. As a frustrated musician myself, I am pleased with his interest and competence in music. (Charles was good at the piano until he reached the 11th grade, when he decided he was "too busy" to take any more lessons or to practice.) Corinth and I are extremely happy, and grateful, over the way our sons have turned out. We have tried to give them good discipline, along with reasonable permissiveness, and, I hope, good parental example. We have had the same kind of happy, prideful feeling that you have known with your three wonderful daughters--and grandchildren--and, of course, your fine sons-in-law. And while passing out compliments, I would like to mention my own wife who has been such a help and inspiration to me. Our next will be our 24th wedding anniversary. One day I am going to take Corinth to call on you.

You and your family--and Bowling Green--will be a cherished memory for me as long as I live. The time I spent there is somewhat like a tape recording which I can turn on at any time. I often do. Yes, a lot of funny things happened, as you say. Some, of course, are funnier now than they were at the time. I still don't know how I managed to get to ~~XX~~ Bowling Green, since I had never even been on a train until I set out on that trip. I think that if I had it to do all over again, I would chicken out before getting as far as Decatur (Decatur, Mississippi, that is, some nine miles from Conehatta.) I went out to seek my fortune with only \$250.00 borrowed dollars. I, of course, knew that my parents would help if they could later on, but there was no guarantee that they would be able to send anything.

Do you recall the first time you asked me to answer the telephone? I was quite proud of myself when I did and announced, "It's for you, Mrs. Ellis." But when you went to take the call you found the receiver back on the hook. I didn't know about that part. You guessed that the caller was your sister, Mrs. Martin--and you were kind about my ignorance on that point, and on many others in the months that were to come. (Nowadays, of course, we have phones with "hold" buttons and one is supposed to put the receiver back on the hook. Maybe I was just four decades ahead of my time!) Another funny thing--now, but not then--was the time one of the more prosperous of the young student boarders (Duncan, but I have forgotten his last name) gave me a nice pair of brown shoes that were too small for him. They fit me perfectly; and when I sallied forth to school the next morning through ~~XX~~ a light, fresh, feathery snowfall I did not notice that the shoes were squeaking. I was late for class. Mr. Gillespie's penmanship students had already assembled in the main auditorium--and I entered therein--but not, to my dismay, like Tiny Tim tip-toeing through the tulips. It was more like a bull in a china shop. Never before or since have I heard such noisy shoes. Not only did the leather squeak, but the shoes had hard heels--and the more I tried to walk softly the louder they thundered. I could not find the sanctuary of a seat near the rear--and had to wend my tortuous way nearly all the way down to the stage--with what seemed to me to be a thousand eyes staring at me and an amused expression on five hundred faces. Mr. Gillespie, however, was not amused. He sidled over and handed me some sort of penalty slip for being late and said, in what seemed to me to have been an unnecessarily loud voice, "And the next time you are tardy, tiptoe in here." It brought the house down in laughter--and it brought me down in excruciating shame. I thought I would die. And I wanted to die right on the spot. That night I took a long walk up to Reservoir Hill with what I thought was the full intention of drowning myself--but the fence was too high. And the world was too beautiful for me to give it up so soon. The bare trees were covered with a thin coating of ice that shimmered in the moonlight; the air was fresh and pure and clean; and the windows of people's houses cast out warm, glowing lights. I decided that I very much wanted to live. I went back to my room in the basement that night even hating Mr. Gillespie (rest his soul) less. The "flu" almost got me later. Remember both you and I were down with it. Another funny thing--now but not then--was the time I indulged myself with the extravagance of an underarm deodorant (called O-dor-nox, which I think is off the market now and if not it should be) that I didn't know how to use and, which ate the armpits right out of my only white, Sunday short. Yes, I used to think the "Johnson Family" radio program was funny--but the NAACP certainly wouldn't think so now. Which calls to mind dear, little black Minnie--and Florelle.

I like to think that the B's no longer exist -- but glad to know that Western took the remains.

But the funniest, and best, and most treasured memories now are those of the dear hearts and gentle people who lived in your house. Your sister, Aunt Lena, can never be forgotten for all the nice things she was--her strong character and will, her love and loyalty to you and your daughters, her articulateness. She could turn a phrase that ~~had~~ had a bite to it--in the nice way that fine, aged Cheddar cheese has a bite. Aunt Lena called a spade a spade. She told it the way it was, as they say nowadays. Then the incomparable Miss Mantie--who at 90 could see a car all the way from your house up College Street to the Hill. She thought I was real mean to let her pay me a quarter to take her to church. Little did she know how important those quarters were to me. I often think of Mrs. Breedlove who liked nothing better than a good cry. Remember how she used to provoke Miss Mantie and Aunt Lena into a sharp answer so she could enjoy some "hurt feelings" for a while? I think often of the special kindnesses to me accorded by dear Mrs. Steele and her daughter Miss Cora. Miss Pearl Holman was nice--but somewhat hard to get to know and kept much to herself. Then there was Miss Betty Drake who used to enjoy classical music and good books. There were, of course, others among the senior citizens. Of the students, the one I knew best was Pauline Outland (and I have often wondered how she fared in later days after her personal misfortune). My favorite still, although I have not been in touch with him since I left, was Ira Ray from Maceo. Besides the people, I look back upon the memory of your kitchen and all the good things produced therein. As I have mentioned in previous letters to you, I shall never forget the bushel basket of apples always under the work table in winter; the "country" butter; the salt-rising bread; your famous fresh, roast ~~XXXX~~ pork which you cut with scissors; your hot biscuits--either plain or with whole wheat flour in them. Food like that is not to be had these days. So, Bowling Green is so near to me--yet so far. Several years ago when on an air trip from Washington to Dallas my heart skipped a beat when the pilot announced that we were directly over Bowling Green--at 30,000 feet. That is the nearest I have been since 1938. But I do so hope to take a sentimental journey back after I retire. I am planning to retire, and return to the old family farm at Conehatta, in the spring of 1973. I will be fifty-five years old. Sixty is the compulsory retirement age, but I would like, hopefully, to have that extra five years of freedom to work in my flower garden and grow some vegetables to put in the deep freeze. Although Corinth is a city girl, she loves Conehatta and is anxious to live in the country.

This has been a long, rambling one--and you will, I know, excuse the haste and bad grammar. With it, Corinth joins in sending best wishes for Christmas and the New Year to you and Miss Lena ("Lena Ellis" as you used to say) and to Nova and Creel and Dorothy and Mac and their children. You know that I hold you very dear..

Sincerely,

Charles