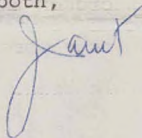


Your clippings were not only ~~interesting~~ of interest, but also of use. I had just discovered a young woman, returned to ~~ASTORIA~~ Astoria ~~after~~ after years in England and some more years in South Africa--Port Elizabeth--who claims to have been thrown out for saying the wrong things... I called her and asked if she would like to read the ~~clips~~ clips. We met and exchanged books, pamphlets, etc. and sniffed each other out. She's really astonishing. Once a cheer-leader--a pom-pom tossing teen-age beauty--in Astoria High, she is now the sort of difficult to handle radical on South Africa --and through that on all political/economic power struggles--that I left behind me in Chicago and Los Angeles.

I really want to tell you about her, but I can't stand the way I type. There's a new, "wonder-working" machine in picking boxes in my ~~study~~ study. If Ray Merritt (my electronically literate neighbor) and I get it up and running ~~tonight~~ tonight, Maybe I'll finish this letter some day soon. Not if the work of being mayor has made too big a backload..... The horrors of being an addict!

Love to you both,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Janet". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large loop at the end.

October 17, 1987

Dearest Hilda:

Your note with the horror clips came just when I was getting prepared to start the letter I've had in my mind to write for--well, since immediately after a letter from you (in June!) that starts with the sentence: "I have been wanting to write this letter for some time..."

Now there are so many other things to say that I'm disciplining myself to respond to that time before I catch up to this one. I read The Essential Gesture and shared it--without arousing the enthusiasm I felt. Nadine G's style is a bit turgid for my younger friends, who don't like to admit that the complexity of the syntax puts them off and prefer to blame their luke-warm reaction on other things. Like you, I admire Gordimer--but not as an essayist. (She doesn't weave sentences into Spanish bowlines when she writes fiction. I wonder why she does when she's wrestling with "thought.") But as a person she's a beacon of hope. I'll read A Guest of Honor if I can get hold of it here. The other one--A Sport of Nature--has been much reviewed, so I'm sure it's at our Astor Library, but I hadn't heard of the Guest, so maybe it's not yet published on this side.

AGING--Osteoporosis vs arthritis is the problem with me. I seem to have staved off the genetic threat of the former, only to pay for it with something nearly as bad. The other day I fell--(I've taken to falling quite a lot lately, apparently because I'm always running and not as agile as I was when I formed the habit)--and caught myself with one wrist. It was x-rayed, and the report came back: "There's so much arthritis it's hard to say whether there is or isn't a fracture." I now wear an athletic bandage which interferes with my wrist watch.... I report all this only to encourage you to fight the osteoporosis. That same down-putting report said the bones in the area looked "quite dense." So all my year's of prophylaxis are worth something.

Joseph is no longer a program director. (It didn't pay even his idea of a living, and it took as much time as a "real" job.) He has gone back to college to get a nursing degree. This is not as bizarre as it sounds. For one thing, his new love is a nurse practitioner, and he has observed how few hours she works and what she earns. (Also she is standing by to encourage him when the school routine is either too dull to stay awake for, or too confining to be endured.) Also, he has a turn for "nurture". His stints at Mother Teresa's gave him some "hands-on" experience, and he was not turned off by the down side. Male nurses are at a premium in certain aspects of the profession, and he may well end up teaching--which is his real bent. (One of his old friends, who is also a nurse, says he is less likely to be able to put up with

the authoritarian nonsense of hospital routines than anyone she knows, but maybe he can find a non-hospital assignment.)

Current news: Mary called the other day to say that Hetty's sister has come back from a visit (?) with word that Hetty has Alzheimer's disease. Mary finds that unbelievable. (I think because it let's Bernie off the hook for having been off with his current paramour when Hetty had a heart attack, etc, etc.) But from my experience on our trip I'd say she exhibited all the "classic symptoms", including the sudden onset of nastiness--in Stromness. Actually, I don't see what difference it makes what they call it, so long as they know she can't be left alone. Mary says Bernie has now taken over and is "looking after her".

Footnote to that: Tom Gladwin, whose book I guess you never did read, has fallen victim to Alzheimer's and is devastating his family. Part of the time he's normal--bright, concerned, involved, etc. and must be treated as himself. Part of the time he sits like a vegetable, not responding to people and needing total nursing care--incontinent, etc. etc. And at unpredictable intervals, he becomes a raging madman. His wife, a marvelous, creative, socially useful person with her own work, is immobilized by his demands, really unable to cope alone, and having trouble admitting it. There are worse things than boring degenerative bones.

I'm going to see Mary in February--which brings me to my travel plans. When you asked, I thought I'd never have any. But it came over me a month ago that if I don't go to Mexico pretty soon, I'll never get to see the old friends there. So I signed up for an Elderhostel trip that includes one week of "international living"--meaning that one stays with a Mexican family and speaks the language. (My Spanish has got pretty rusty, and I long to oil it.) I wrote all the old friends to say I was coming, and sure enough--the one I wanted most to see has died since our last exchange of letters. Her son and husband wrote, urging me to come to see them --and adding that at Luz's request, her remains were cremated and deposited in the Cathedral in Mexico City.

This hit me like a stone. I've been sloughing my way through a book called The Mists of Avalon which is a dreadful piece of pulp, but is also a provocative revision of the Arthurian legends. The critical conflict of the plot is between the forces of the new Christian religion and the Druids. At several points, the struggle is over where and how people are buried. My friend Luz was a dedicated Communist--a New Mexican version of La Pasionaria--and I can't believe she asked to be handed over to the church, which in Mexico is not leavened with "liberation theology, as some of the South and Central American churches are. I'm left wondering whether she suffered some sort of spiritual (and mental) disintegration in her last years, or whether this is

what her husband (a Spanish Civil War vet) and son thought would save her from purgatory.

When your clips about S.A. torture arrived, I was worrying about the winds blowing over southern England. Nothing was said about Hereford, either on American radio or BBC, so I'm hoping you only got a side blow. And that Rusty had the roof bolted down. Although I don't deserve it, I wish you'd drop a post card to say that you're all right.

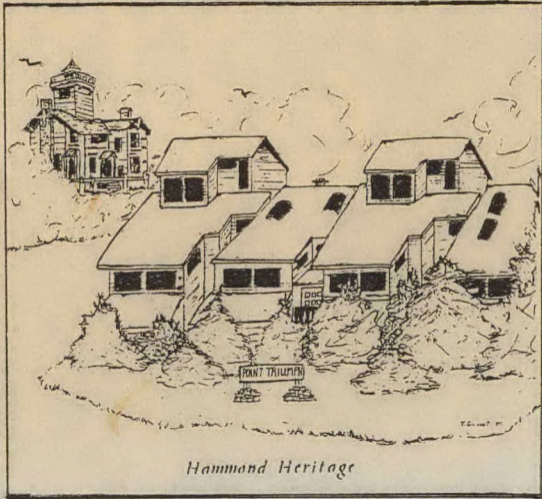
And if you do, please include the names of Toni's films. Some day they may turn up on our public TV.

My own creative output has been "zilch" for months now. I expend all my energy on the civic chores of the little town. And on the Women's Political Caucus. The former is beginning to give me back some satisfaction. (I think the turn-around has been achieved, and that the town will survive--maybe even flourish--instead of going out like a candle in the wind.) The latter is my reward for all the things about life I don't like. It's not only doing well; it's beginning to do it without me. My conscious goal has been to get these wonderful young women harnessed to the wagon they want to pull, and that's happening on every front. Best of all on the radio program I initiated. It has become a half-hour weekly of news and discussion of "feminist issues" (which I stretch to cover all the issues I'm interested in). There's a possibility of its being syndicated through something called WINGS (Women's International News Gathering Network Service). And best of all, Karen Mellin (the one was kicked out of S.A.) has learned all the skills (except choosing the subject) and is gradually taking over the bulk of the work.

So maybe in the next few weeks, I can try to get back to writing. I had given up at one point, written myself off as "written out," but last night I did a lecture/ reading on Departure and realized that all this being too busy and too "fractured" to write is just another of my cop-outs. It's time to get back to work--real work--and either finish my unfinished novel--or start something fresh. Having written this to you may shame me into going through with it!

Love to you both,

Janet



Hammond Heritage

Season's Greetings -
to all the Benestries -
and peace in the new,
as yet unrolled year.
how.
Janet

December 3, 1987

Dear Hilda:

My annual Christmas grunge is about to catch up with me, so I'm using my new note paper to write a letter before my mood gets gritty. Also to give my new paper a launching.

(The artist who drew the sketch is our new Deputy Town Clerk, who moonlights as a small press. It was her idea to include a lighthouse that was torn down long before our condominium was built. I owe her too much for work done above and beyond the call of duty (and/or her job description) to risk hurting her feelings by censoring her passion for the "heritage theme.")

My own job description has changed in the year that's almost over. I began by trying to keep order at monthly meetings of the Town Council, make order out of chaos in the back room (where old records are stowed in bulging cartons) and lubricate interpersonal relations. I learned how to do the first, gave up on the second, and am working on the last. But these days my dominant activity is "economic development," something I've always thought was the province of the Chamber (or the Secretary) of Commerce, not local or even state government. But if it was, it isn't.

I'm not sure I approve. I am sure I don't like doing it. But apparently it's the only way to keep this little raft of a town afloat, so I work hard--reading reports written in bureaucratese, writing or rewriting "proposals", going to seminars taught by aging baby-boomers on subjects like how to "sell" your city to industry and/or tourists, and trying to sound like a hustler. Or do I mean huckster?

I need a vacation before I face the second year of my four. So I'm going to take the month of January off and see if I can relearn Spanish by staying with a Mexican family (as part of an Elderhostel trip). My original idea was to combine this "work therapy" with visits to old friends in Mexico City and Cuernavaca, but alas, one of them has died, and the others don't answer letters. So it looks like I'll confine my base-touching to Los Angeles, where I'll see Mary and Ben and other survivors.

Family notes: Joseph has begun a two-year nursing course at Clatsop Community College, and although he insists he hates it, he is doing very well indeed. I held my breath for the first few weeks because I didn't think he could hang in there through the dull parts, but it looks as if he's settled in. He's in love with a public health nurse, and that makes it easier to keep his eye on the end game.

Ted is still stuck in New York, publishing and working for publishers, threatening to give up his a cappella madrigal group because "it's like pushing Sisyphus's stone up a hill." He's "solvent (which is prosperous by my standards) but confused about direction." That goes with the territory, I guess. I wish he'd change territories, but New York is addictive. Once hooked, the victim finds life elsewhere inconceivable.

Dear Hilda - I want you to know that I learned enough about civility from your lesson to be able to watch it - with pleasure! - on public TV here. My son says you accomplished the same for him. Thanks!

Limited Edition for
Janet Stevenson
Hammond, Oregon

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