

4504 WEST SECOND AVENUE
VANCOUVER 8, BRITISH COLUMBIA

March 26, 1970

Dear Conroy:

Mother came and gone. Against the Season revised and ready to mail this afternoon now that the copy is out of the New York post office. Time edgy with contact and off hours where I have not only most business but a number of good friends. I had rather hoped to have this week about one of several projects, and, of course, there's been nothing. Thank heaven I don't have much to do with Montreal just now!

so Mike and I are both to suffer through the Jack Bannay comedy of being 39 together. We are having a small dinner party for wine on Saturday night with Alvin Ballin, director of CBC art gallery, who will be 49 same day. We used to celebrate also with an ancient and beloved Venice psychiatrist, Eda Lindenfeld, who also shared our day, and they were always crazy, to wit, we likely ~~enjoyed~~ ^{enjoyed} last year she was dead, and Alvin had an opening ~~that~~ ^{that} night; so we had a respectable ordinary sort of party, at which several people who should not drink got drunk, and, though it wasn't any sort of disaster, it felt to me a sad wake. Anyway, we've added very good friends, a couple, to fill out the table, and it should be an easy, old friend sort of evening. The man Alvin lives with is in Europe for the year; so he needs clearing up occasionally.

Yes, Bob's deal was a real shocker, and it must
have been a nightmare for Anna, so far from home.
We had dinner with her a couple of weeks ago ~~and~~ at
John & Elaine's, just the 5 of us, and she was remarkable,
talking about what Pura their holiday had been, how
much of life he'd had. She's a Scot from French
Canada, and somehow she's got both reserve and warmth.
I like her very much. Elaine's father was there in
the process of a very uncomfortable dyep, which he
finally accomplished last week, and Anna was as
gentle about him as if she had all sympathy free.

Now I must settle to my side of town. I have
only 2 more classes to teach, but I must settle them
to evaluate their work, a job that seems to me
frivolous and irritating. I don't give grades all year,
work on competence instead. It seems to me too much
competence is simply the teacher's justification of the
grade rather than something really useful to the student.
But now grades have to be turned in, and god ones are
worth money as well as being important for gradeable
school. When I was in my 20s, I thought tough grading
was part of good teaching, setting high standards and
all that. Now, since I have to set standards —
backward — by other means all year, the final evaluation
seems to me a time to be as generously descriptive as
I can. But I really don't like to do it at all, ~~which~~ wish
there were a pass-fail system, if there has to be one.
Competition, whether in study or jobs or sports, seems
to me an ugly specter in our system of values.
I would, for instance, love watching the Olympics if I
didn't have to see the winners and losers. What if the
tradition was that the athletes themselves chose
among their number those to represent them at the Olympics.

Then why have contests? Why not simply exhibitions of their unapologetic skill? The desire to compete may be part of human inheritance, but other societies have made less use of it.

I suppose both writing and teaching appeal to me partly because competition is irrelevant in the basic patterns, only quoes at the edges.

A very good thing has happened in one of my classes this year: students have begun to write for each other, often begin presenting a paper with something like, "This is for Jan, really, because she asked me the other night why I talked the way I did about war rape." or "This is for Ms. ~~_____~~ though I'm going to disagree with him." And they intercept a reading to take delight in a really good sentence. I wonder, if they were used to comparing grades all year or if they thought I marked on a curve, if they'd have been so generous with each other or learned to deal with topics so personally involving. Anyway, it's been a lovely bunch to deal with, no remarkable students but a lot of good hard working ones.

— Pause while I faced sideways. I usually go when it's nearly empty, once a week, half an hour. Today everyone out because of the holiday. I was resigned, but I'm glad it doesn't happen often.

Easter is an odd holiday, really, once you're outside the church, which I didn't leave for good until I was in my 20s, and the word-myth-insight of this particular time - much more than at Christmas - are still in very scarce of things. I suppose I'm as much aware of the rhythm now of the life of contemplatives as I am of ordinary Christians, their long Lenten

Let's capture evening toward those 5 hours on Friday. After Easter I will have letters or cards, many simple, but sure in the release and wonder of Easter. I don't feel any sense of loss. What is significant of the experience is in the world everywhere - simply, the garden is again full of flowers. And watching people off to church is rather like watching children off to school - one hopes it will be a good experience for them.

No Easter egg hunt this year since the children we know are getting old for it. So we don't have to worry about the weather. If it's good, we'll probably garden or walk on the beach. Then out to dinner with friends.

Still haven't sorted out all dates for the trip, but we do know that we must visit a place from England in Toronto on the 24th of June in the early evening. So we may come up from Rochester on either the 22nd or 23rd, depending on what business I can get done. Anyway, I hope some time soon there we can arrange to meet. I will be much more specific in May when I've got hold of more people.

Time for lovely mantles. It won't be long before we can have them in the garden. And this year we must get new garden furniture. Ours was seen better days.

I hope you have fine, happy places for the Easter holidays.

affectionately,

Jane