Excerpt from letter 10/17/1959

Dear Bob . . . . . .

[Paragraphs about AMA business, finances.] I hope I haven’t painted too gloomy a picture of my life. It has been rich, and full, and wonderful. And it’s not over, by heck! I’ve had a great love, travel, adventure, lots of responsibility, work I’ve loved. The only important thing I’ve missed has been children. Of course, millions of women are childless. By life has always been lonely except for ten wonderful years from the time I was 18 to 28. Love! But you know, one can be alone without being lonesome. Lindberg wasn’t lonesome when he flew the Atlantic, though he was alone. I’m not in a blue funk in the evenings when I’m alone. I have fun, all by myself. I don’t feel the need of just people. I’d give anything to see once in a while six people who are important to me and who are scattered far and near. I don’t have any social contacts with men because Bill doesn’t have any men friends. I know four women on a social basis in Washington, but see only two of them. The very most I’ve ever done is entertain these women one at a time during Christmas week. Bill doesn’t like to entertain. Not very exciting, all this. I have many professional contacts, not at home, but on the telephone or by mail. I’ve suddenly realized how important they are to me – extremely. I correspond with doctors all over the country who tell me their woes and ask my help. I don’t discuss my woes, except superficially. You are the only one whom I use as a safety deposit box for woes. Poor Bob!

Years ago, I forget how long ago, I heard you speak at the annual dinner of AAPS. You had your audience in stitches – me too. It showed your sense of humor to be well developed. It’s a grand thing to have. The Irish half of me keeps me highly entertained inside even when I’m looking solemn as an owl. The Irish helps me to get over the one-quarter English and one-Quarter Methodist Puritan. It’s like living with Kilkenny cats inside.

On and off, as the spirit moves me and time permits, I’ll tell you a bit more about myself. My childhood, with so many tragic elements in it, was made quite endurable by a kind, but almost illiterate woman who befriended me from the time I was five. She was my second mother and her home was more home to me than my own. We lived next door to each other for seven years, just across a fire-escape. There I had my toys and Christmas tree. (Father opposed Xmas trees). This kind woman, Mrs. M., taught me to cook, and sew, and iron, and clean, and shop. She dressed my doll and curled my naturally curly hair. She and her husband gave me warmth, love, a hearty welcome, and an abundance of companionship. They didn’t have a book in the house and neither had finished grade school. He was a letter carrier who in youth had sailed the seven seas. They had no children. They loved me as their own.

When I was five, mother had had to go to work because of my father’s invalidity. Mrs. M. agreed to look after me when I returned each day from kindergarten. Mother’s instructions were explicit as she arranged to leave some crackers and milk with Mrs. M. for my luncheon. I was to be quiet! I was not to sit near the table when they had luncheon or cast longing looks in that direction. I was to mind and not talk. I could have my doll and would best sit in a rocker with her, quietly. On my first day with Mrs. M., I ate my crackers and milk and sat down with my doll. I answered in monosyllables. Mr. M. came home for luncheon. Something smelled awfully good, but I didn’t look at the table. My nose, I’m sure, quivered like a bunny’s. Mr. M. said: “Hey, Kid, pull up your chair and have something to eat.” I explained my instructions. He exploded: “Well, I’ll be damned if I’ll have a kid around who can’t eat at my table. Now you just pull up your chair and I’ll fix things up with your mother.” Mrs. M. seconded the invitation. Joyously I pulled up my chair and fell to on a plateful of good and nourishing food. From then on their home was my home. When I was 12, we moved two blocks away. My responsibilities at home became heavier and it was after that that I used to spend many afternoons perched on top of the icebox with Robinson Crusoe. Mrs. M. died this past January. She was all the family I had. We never had a quarrel in 64 years. When I was 8 or 9 my mother had cerebral meningitis. She was not expected to live and worried terribly about me. Mr. and Mrs. M. (on a salary then of $18 a week) promised mother that if she died they would adopt me and give me the education she had planned for me. She pulled through, but I never forgot that offer.

I mention this because you can see that I have had substitute relationships to make up for the natural ones that weren’t all they should have been. And I’ve had high adventures, including a 2,000-mile hike. I’m interested in lots of things. In 1939, I bought two very old houses on an acre of ground, one-half hour from the Capitol, for investment. I already owned a beautiful building site where I expected to build. However, I had to sell that site to pay for Bill’s cancer operations. So, I remodeled the two old houses, one for a home and one to rent. I drew plans, served as my own contractor, hired subcontractors, and picked materials. It turned out to be a prodigious undertaking because of the interruptions caused by World War II and Bill’s successive operations. Anyway, the avocation gave me a whole new world of interests – blueprints, architectural magazines, building materials, and plans. So, in addition to gardening I have the hobby of drawing house plans and studying blue prints – at midnight or after. Actually, if I am forced out of my present profession I expect to go into building. I’ve learned a lot and have loads of ideas.

Now, just to indicate that life has not been dull, there is a long, long chapter about the drunken actress I adopted for a year. I was then a dyed-in-the-wool paleontologist. Ivory tower and all that. I had a darling little 4-room apartment. I literally bumped into the actress one night on Broadway, N.Y. She was a gorgeous blonde; beautiful, dead drunk. I later learned she had starred on Broadway, was a protégé of the late George M. Cohan. I looked after her for a year in my apartment and sent her back to Broadway sober. But what a time for me! And didn’t I learn a lot about life that wasn’t in the text-books on paleontology! From these little samples, you can see my life has been far from dull.