Excerpts.

1/19/1963 Sat. afternoon, 3:30 p.m.

I must tell you about last week. Last Fri., Jan. 11, the telephone rang and a woman said: “You haven’t heard my voice in 50 yrs.” Twas true. The experience was extraordinary and gave me quite a jolt. To go back to the 1880s, my mother finished high school at 16, by which time she was already a brilliant Latin scholar. Her mother, who must have been a remarkable woman, insisted that she go to N.J. State Normal School. She did, and graduated on Sept. 17, 1884. She then taught the last year in grade school until she married. During that period she had a friend who taught kindergarten. The two teachers must have married at about the same time. Both lived in N.J. and were close friends. I was born in 1890 and within six weeks my parents moved to N.Y.C. Mother’s friend, Mrs. Gibling, moved to Staten Island when she had two daughters – the oldest three years younger than I. She was named Sophie, after her mother.

Mother and Mrs. Gibling remained good friends all through my childhood and we used to spend nearly every Christmas at the Gibling home in Orange, N.J., where they had moved from Staten Island. I loved Mr. Gibling, an Englishman who was very kind and outgiving (sic). I sure wished I had such a good and affectionate father as he was. I had a marvelous time in their home and even remember the children’s grandmother. Well, the relationship continued till I went to college. Sophie went to Smith 5 yrs. later. Dorothy, her sister, was two years younger, but actually the one of the two that I liked better.

I didn’t see Sophie after I was maybe 15 or 16. She married in 1919, a very famous Viennese architect, at one time a partner of Lloyd Wright. She had one son and shortly thereafter got a divorce. I didn’t see her sister after 1919. She later died at age 41. I did see Sophie’s parents once in Chicago and once in Wash. in the 1930s. Then a great silence fell. Sophie’s mother died and I wrote once or twice to her father. He died. Sophie lived in L.A. Sophie and I did not communicate in any way from 1906 to date. Then came her voice on the telephone last Fri. a week ago. “This is Sophie.” Can you imagine the drama?

Sophie called me at 3:00 p.m. and said she was leaving Wash. early that evening. I persuaded her to stay over till the next day and invited her to Silver Fox for 6:00 o’clock dinner. Can you imagine meeting someone whom I’d last met when I was wearing curls and she was in pigtails? Boy oh boy! It was really exciting. Well, when she walked in I could see she had had all the advantages which money gives. She was beautifully and tastefully dressed. Well groomed. Just out of this world. At 69 she could have passed for 59 or less.

You can imagine what a talkfest we had. Actually, to my great surprise – for I had never suspected it in the least – she had always looked up to me as a great brain and child wonder. I’ll swear, I never had any idea of that at all. She, her sister, and I used to play all sorts of games all over their nice big house in New Jersey. It was a rare treat to have youngsters near my own age to play with. I had a perfect time with them, as always. I sure never thought of myself as a brain. The thing Sophie remembered best about the few times she and her mother had visited us in our drab apartment was that we lived on the top floor and there was a bannister one flight long (in our walk-up) down which you could slide! Well do I remember that!

Sophie couldn’t drink because she had diabetes, but she had fruit juice and I had one cocktail as we talked for two hrs. before Burrus and Helen came in. My were they impressed by her appearance, as they told me the next night. You know, you can feel breeding and all the assurance that a life-time of access to money can give a women. Sophie is a widow and I gather is a very wealthy woman.

I was a bit abashed to find that Sophie still looks up to me. Heaven forbid! After dinner I brought her home and we talked till 11:30 p.m. when I took her to 16th St. and she caught a cab to her hotel. She was on her way to N.J. to finish up some work on settling a relative’s estate worth 1/3 of a million. Her son is now 40 and she has three young grandchildren, all in L.A.

The way she came to look me up was that she found a letter from me to her father. That showed my married name and she resolved to hunt me up when she came on here. There was one strange feature about all this. Some months ago I had come across a photograph of Sophie’s son Marc, taken 35 yrs. ago. Her mother had written his name and age on the back. I had stood it up before my desk and had said: “I must check on Sophie in L.A.” But when I got to L.A. my thoughts were elsewhere and I completely forgot Sophie.

While she knows nothing about me from the time I was 15 to now, she is the one person now alive whose memories go back to my earliest days. We can fill in things about our mothers before they were married. And we can check on our own early memories of good times together. It was really quite a remarkable experience. She is most anxious to have me spend some time with her in L.A. She has a very large house, designed and built by her late husband. She knows – or did know – nothing at all about me save that I had taken a Ph.D. in paleontology. She thought that’s where I still was. She was terribly surprised at the way I had developed. She said as a child I had been so much the “brain” that she was astonished to find me so full of fun and the joy of life.

Of course, we have lots of more ground to go over by mail. One subject I shall never mention is my scientist. You are the only person who knows about him and no one else ever will. Let the dead past bury itself.

That brings me back to the two letters I sent you and which you returned. I have a bit more to say and shall drop the subject forever, I hope. Perhaps I was very foolish to send you those letters. It seemed like a good idea at the time. But often in my personal life I find that something I do which seems a great idea at the time, takes on a sour look a little later. I’m telling you, when I bumped into those two letters while looking for a bank book, I really got a jolt. I didn’t know I had them. I had never shown them to B. They were in an old steel file. When I read them, 40 yrs. rolled back. I saw myself as I was in the 20s.

I was so young for my yrs., so inexperienced, so much in love. It was cruel to have turned me loose then in a world for which I was not prepared. I was so idealistic, full of dreams, and romance, and starry-eyed thoughts of the future. I was so truthful, so honest, so truly innocent. My scientist was the first man who kissed me. Love went with that kiss and I felt I would love him through all eternity. For the next 15 yrs. no other man kissed me. Even after I broke with him I thought I would never love again. I had a feeling that love was forever. I didn’t need any marriage vows. I was steadfast and loyal.

I suppose I have been my own worst enemy. I love too much. I give too much. I do things with all my heart.

I was never able to love B. in the same way. He lacked stature. But I did my best faithfully – for 38 yrs., 33 of them in marriage.

From time to time I have mentioned my scientist. I wouldn’t have you think I am secretly longing for him. I’m not. Nothing is so dead as a dead love affair. I saw that when I last met him in 1934. I even wondered then how I had ever loved him. A girl of 18 or 19 is very impressionable and is likely to fall for a dashing man of the world, a man of charm and experience. I was in a particularly vulnerable position because I hadn’t gone around with boys. I felt more at ease with older men who could meet me on an intellectual basis. I came in time to feel he had taken advantage of my youth and inexperience, as indeed, he had. He explained long afterwards that he loved me so completely he didn’t want anyone else ever to touch me. I never had any reason to doubt his love.

I shall never know whether I made the right decision. Certainly my life has not been what I wanted. Perhaps few lives are. I glimpsed something wonderful – or so it seemed – and then I rejected it. For years I floundered around like a lost soul. I hiked; I slept under the stars; I walked all day; I went into business. Finally, I married. B. adored me, and it was nice to be loved again. In my mind, it was second best, but I loved as much as I could and I sure got little enough out of the marriage. If I erred in treating my scientist so cruelly, then I paid, and paid, and paid, for marriage gave me none of the things that a woman is supposed to reap from marriage – children, security, and a home. I did have love and devotion. Finally, largely through my own efforts, I acquired a home.

If B. had only let me have one child! I have nothing.

Actually, I don’t think much about the past. That’s a futile occupation. Coming upon these two letters as abruptly as I did, shocked me. I probably should have burned them then and there. But you are so near to me, so dear in every way, that I wanted you to see them. I wouldn’t have shown them to anyone else. Perhaps I was foolish to take you time to read them (sic). But I thought they’d make you understand me better. Every human being likes to have at least one other person understand them. I suppose I set too much store on your understanding me, but it does seem very important. I have been so very much alone for so very long. And I do value your friendship so very much.

I guess I owe you an apology for spoofing you so about your “Warm regard” letters. But I love to joke around with you. You always seem so gay, so full of fun, so able to meet me half-way in jesting. I always laugh when I sign “Warm regards.” It seems so stereotyped, sterile, and stilted. I can think of a million more fascinating things to sign. But I’m not going to be forward.

Imagine writing me one whole letter on Kiplinger after not saying boo for two weeks! You should be shot at sunrise! What a way to treat me! You son-of-a-gun!

A am faithfully rereading the Raj and marking it. It’s a fascinating book, but slow going. I’m beginning to wonder if you have lost all interest in Pakistan and fertility control. I’m a sort of slow browser. I get on a subject and dig deep. Next thing I know you are off on a new project and have lost all interest in the project that was your heart-throb but a short while back.

You might at least tell me when you change your course. What about Pakistan and fertility and aerospace?

Oh! I almost forgot. Sophie was here till late Fri. night Jan. 11. Then, on Sat. Dr. Savarese called me from hospital and asked if he could stop by to pick up stuff on Cohen. He’s a stout supporter in the District, but I’ve never met him. I thought he was about 50 and fat. When he arrived he turned out to be tall, slender, and 35-40. Anyway, he stayed two hrs. Nice guy. But oh my poor voice. So tired. Then, on Sun. arrived the British doctor from Pa. and his wife and scientist friend. Another two hrs. in talk. I didn’t let on how terrible I felt. I coughed some, but passed it off lightly.

Five people in three days was going some for me. Never has happened before. I never have visitors.

Now I must stop. Have some work to do before mail time. I was awfully all in when I started to write to you, but now I feel fine. I haven’t coughed once. Partly, I think, its’ because I’ve finally straightened out my mailing problems. I’ve spent endless hours going over corrections to the mailing list and apologizing to subscribers. I do aim to give deluxe service and I hate to be thwarted by some no-account addressograph operator.

I shouldn’t have written this largely personal letter to “Warm regards.” But gosh! I’m human, even if you aren’t. Every day I think about so many things I shouldn’t think about. After all, each day, several times, I sit in Perky’s chair. Can I help thinking of Perky and wondering how he’s getting along? I’m not a glacier on the side of Mt. McKinley.

Bye now, Precious!

“Warm regards,”

Stereotyped, sterile, and stilted

(signature, “Marjorie”)

Marjorie Shearon, Ph.D.

I love to dance all over the lot making marry (sic) with you. I could have danced all night, And done a thousand things I’d never done before – like spoofing you.