

CHAPTER FOUR - The Navy

John Lake came of age while stationed in Pearl Harbor from 1951 until 1955. During those four years, as he pined for post-military life as a journalist and developed a distaste for authority, his jangled emotions became steadier, and he grew from lonely seaman to happily married petty officer (first class). A smart, skinny boy became a wiser, more cynical, less skinny man.

My father loved Hawaii and his new wife, but he abhorred the military, and he worried that his professional growth had been stunted by the interruption. Ironically, this segment of his life, often marked by these feelings of frustration, ambivalence and self-doubt, brought me the most gratification, largely because of the unique group of men with which he found himself then, and whom I managed to locate again 50 years later. My father came to hate the Navy, but I love it, because of the rich detail available to me as I reconstruct this period of his life half a century later, through hundreds of his letters home, and aided by a group of men who at one time shared with him a barracks, an office, a radio studio, a dinner table, a softball team, scores of ridiculous memoranda, thousands of beers, a love of newspapers and a finely-tuned distaste for the Navy, most often expressed with an exasperated sense of humor.

Of all the people I interviewed for this book, “the Navy guys” are the ones who seemed the most moved, both by my father himself and by my quest to learn more about him. And they affected me. They are among the most sensitive, articulate and funny people I have ever encountered, and I understand why my dad kept in touch with most of them after his military days were over. They all conveyed to me that those years in Pearl Harbor were very special times, evidenced by the fact that some of them still get together every couple of years – often in Hawaii – to laugh and enjoy each other, and rehash those wonderful years they spent together at that most vital time of lives.

I was fortunate to find my father’s navy letters in a few different places in the attic. My mother kept the letters sent to her between December 1951 and her arrival in Hawaii in June 1952. He wrote to her virtually every day. And my mom must also have retrieved the letters he had written home to his parents, among other family items, when my dad’s mother died in 1971, four years after his disappearance. These were all jumbled in a separate box, mixed together with all his yellowed newspaper clippings, written years later. And my maternal grandmother, who lived with my mother for a decade prior to her death, saved every letter ever written to her, including those from my father. She was a pack rat extraordinaire – an organized one, though, in contrast to her daughter – who saved and labeled everything. Everything. In one of her sewing boxes was a tin labeled: “Bits of yarn too small to use.”

After collating and filing all the letters chronologically, I had five loose-leaf binders full of John Lake’s letters from the Navy. Of all the sources of information I have about my dad, none are more revealing, because these are in his voice, written not for publication but from the heart, to those closest to him.

Following my father’s telegram marriage proposal, and my mother’s subsequent acceptance – also sent by telegram but mistakenly delivered to a John M. Lake, from Texas, resulting in several day’s delay and my father’s quiet panic – he wrote to her every night. He begs her to hurry up and get to Oahu, so they can get married and start their life together. He describes his daily, “incomplete” life without his future wife, proclaiming their ultimate joining as inevitable, though delayed by circumstance: “If it weren’t for a lot of foolish characters and a 38th parallel, we’d be a couple of old married people by now.” He apologizes for his “horrible goddam mistakes.” The early letters focused on the future with an eye to the past, exploring and explaining what went wrong and reveling in all that had been set right:

U.S. SUBMARINE BASE
Pearl Harbor, T.H.

Sunday afternoon

Dear Alice,

Today is one of those great days...There's a future in life again - Doggonit, woman, we've just gotta get you here as soon as possible - Spending all my waking moments thinking how great it'll be...Seems like a perpetual springtime here, anyway.

Yesterday was payday (ahhh!) so I bought myself some greatly satisfying civvies - few of us spent most of the weekend in town feeling ultra human and unmilitary.

If only I could communicate my enthusiasm to you, there wouldn't be many more days of apart-ness...Couple of factors contributing to a joyful "existence" which I neglected to mention - privilege of shopping in the Navy Commissary store...much easier living than on the cold cold outside...Milk \$.18 a quart, etc...And no worrying about doctor bills (or did I throw that in before?)

If only I'd known what a great deal I'd find here, all the agony could have been spared and we could have gotten hitched back East...But I fouled up...Anyway, it's still the greatest prospect in life.

Believe me, sweetheart, I get carried away thinking about the rosy future...When I realized that we could make our long-awaited start here, every minor worry dropped away like magic - Major problem of reviving your shattered confidence remained as the only dark cloud on J. Lake's personal horizon...Got confidence in both of us to whip that one in a hurry, though.

Maybe Pa Conlon would help you finance the trip here - After all, he's escaping all the Spencer Tracysms involved in "Father of the Bride"...If not, we'll stay home nights for an extra month or two.

I'm getting a reckoning on my savings - might as well hit the old man for size-able loan to make up whatever we'll need to get started - If he hasn't got it, I'll dig ditches at night - Anything...I've gotten to the point where I can't envision any kind of life at all without you to share it, when it looks as good to me as life does now, it just doesn't make sense for us to wait a day longer than we have to...

And as I said (an old story) I can't write it the way I'd tell it...

Maybe it's a good thing your telegram was befogged up...even though it cost us an apt...Made me so damn impatient to get going on Operation Future that I was ready to chew nails...Always knew how empty was life without you, but this takes the cake. Needing you when times were tough was nothing compared to the reaching-outness of a great happiness wanting to be shared. And it's still good for a warm glow to rehash memories of summer weekends, tempests in a religious teapot (don't give a damn any more), affixing a frat pin, waiting for the coffee to blug, Acacia formals, long walks home from the plant, trying to concentrate on books and having to give it up with you across the table in Conlon's breakfast nook, the unrealized glories of Delmar, walks on a Holy Thursday, the unequalled joy of just being together, the overworked teleps of across-the-city and across-the-state dimensions...I don't catch'em out here, but my mind is receptive...Each in itself worth more than 1000 illusory joys of the past year. And there the list only begins - I would have come crawling

back for good way back in January '51' but for something I'm gonna mention again now and then dismiss - friend Shogan - Just couldn't take that. I know (you told me a few times) that the female mind of A.Conlon couldn't see how that rankled...But it made me stay away until I couldn't stay away any longer. OK. So much for that - Some things are of far more importance...

Hurry up and be Mrs. Lake, will ya pleez? It's been in the cards for years...and the best thing about it is that we both knew it right from the start.

All my love,

Johnny

A few weeks later, after more correspondence filled with his flailing angst to arrange for my mother's arrival, John finally begins to describe his surroundings in detail, expressing impatience about the delay in his career and confessing to fears of not making hay when his opportunity to write professionally finally comes...

NAVY NEWS RELEASE
HEADQUARTERS, COMMANDER IN CHIEF, U.S. PACIFIC FLEET
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE

Sunday, January 6 - 8 p.m.
Happy Holiday,

Today's my unbirthday...for a change, I've got great letter-writing atmosphere...empty office (except for a few stray characters running around out in the radio section), quiet, and the whole evening to do nothing except write you a letter; a letter that may put quite a burden on the 6-cent stamp which is all I intend to use.

Just saw "Brave Bulls" down at the Sub Base, grabbed the shuttle bus to come up here and make sure of my trusty typewriter, which has a carriage two feet long and two signs reading "Non Illegitimi Carborundum" and "J.E. Lake, 9th Vice President in Charge of Log Yeomanning." The signs haven't the history the machine has, but both are old news around here by now and so am I...a good feeling...in a groove that's not ruttish as yet, familiar faces and expressions, in fact even this office has character at night when the lousiness is home for the weekend.

Looks just like any other business office right now, desks and typewriters, sheaves of paper, telephones, newspapers, dispatches...all in an un-Navylike state of repose. Only giveaway visible is "R.J. Meyer, Lt., USN" and maybe the big map of Korea on yon soundproof wall (television studio behind it).

All sounds like great communications media and stuff that Wes Clark would go bats over, huh? Nah...leave it to this outfit to commandeer men and material, then let both lie around and atrophy. Very little gets accomplished. Good will, yes...Got an Oxnamish Ensign who takes people on boat trips; I resent him because he's an " but he's still on the ball...Can't see that we get a hell of a lot more than done. But believe me, this provides insight.

Wally Lauria was remarking this a.m. on a story Joe Brown's trying to sell to *Our Navy* mag., on liberty ports in the West Coast and Pacific area...Brown isn't writing very much, he sez...He excuses Gelfand, who wants to be a CPA and a tax lawyer, becuz the Navy made a journalist out of him for spite or something...He excuses himself, because he's an ex-restauranteur (hash-slinger, maybe more to the point)...And Lake, he sez. He wants to go into the business and you haven't written anything at all, have you Lake?

I look up from *Look* and snarl "Nah, I'm waiting for inspiration."

...Doubts, anyone? The Navy would be great if there weren't any long future ahead. Security, food and a bed, comfortable uniforms, but wuzn't I made for something better? And just how good am I? Can I write? And if so, have I got a forceful enough personality to take advantage of my ability if there is any?

Doubts like these I don't get very often and don't bother me too often. You'd reassure me, if you were here, and I'd forget it...wouldn't mean much because you're prejudiced and can't see into the future, anyway...but I look at a guy like LCDR Quillman, the boss who praised me highly yesterday...tells me how he's reached the point of no return (was a city editor in Baton Rouge, not a good enough newspaper man, he confides, and has gone so far in the USNR now he's gotta keep going)...Nobody could be enjoying what he's doing...and he's stuck with it...This could be you, John, in 15-20 years.

The men who worked in the Navy's Public Information Office (PIO) at Pearl Harbor had no inkling that John Lake might be having moments of self-doubt. It wasn't because he behaved boastfully or was conceited; he didn't and he wasn't. In fact, John kept to himself more often than not, especially in the first few months on the base. It's just that he carried himself in a self-possessed manner. When he spoke, he did so with an educated, quiet assurance, with enough of a New York accent to place his genealogy, but not enough to mock. Officers who knew him dealt with him as an equal, despite his lower rank. He rarely spoke about himself unless asked directly, and never referred to his talents or his accomplishments, which made him a source of curious admiration to his mates as aspects of John's personality emerged over time.

Darryl Maddox wrote to me about their first meeting: "My first impression of John Lake was those heavy eyebrows under a black crewcut over a handsome face, gilded permanently with five o'clock shadow. The face was frowning, bent almost irretrievably over a book. I stole a glance at the title, a classic; I can't remember what. "This guy's gonna be worth knowing," I thought. I introduced myself, a newcomer to the islands. He regarded me appraisingly, smiled and said, "Welcome to Hell. I'm John Lake." We exchanged abbreviated biographies – he from Syracuse, me from Ohio Wesleyan – our mutual love of sports and utter contempt for the navy that had intruded into our adventures in newspapering. We shared a common interest in questioning authority and trying to get out of this mess as easily and quickly as possible – partners caught in the military fishnet."

Though few of them would admit it at the time, the young college graduates with journalism degrees that were assembling at the navy's Pearl Harbor headquarters in '51 and '52 were actually embarking upon the best military duty they could ever have hoped for. The 20 or so "anoiteds" – a term coined by their regular-navy chief, who resented their educations and cynical attitudes – were to join a public relations campaign for Admiral Arthur Radford, commander-in-chief of the Pacific Fleet (CINCPAC), who aspired to chair the Joint Chiefs of Staff (which he accomplished in 1953). CINCPACFLT had indeed cast a service-wide net: for enlisted men with backgrounds in journalism and broadcasting. The goal? To spread the news that the Navy now stood firmly at the cut-

ting edge, the key component of the military of the future, which staunchly the threat of communism and demonstrated U.S. power and supremacy to the rest of the world via aircraft carriers, not Army or Air Force bases.

The other fellows that shared the Navy's new journalist rating were, like my father, all a bit miscast in the military. Unlike many of the other enlisted men on the base, the journalists that had been beckoned to CINCPAC were almost all college graduates. Also in contrast to the other enlisted men, none of the PIO guys aspired to be officers, although the topic was often debated, because the prospect of Officer Candidate School (OCS) was often dangled in front of the intelligent group by the brass. An officer's income appealed to them, but the longer military commitment it required did not, nor did the perception that they might be concerned with status in any way. After all, the "white hats" at the PIO saw rank as meaningless (except for the increases in their paychecks), they enjoyed poking fun at the military whenever possible and would not want to be seen as selling out their ideals, or, even more important, their post-military career aspirations.

The Navy, on the other hand, would probably have preferred that these college grads not serve in the enlisted ranks, because of the opportunity they had to act as a potent nucleus of anti-war or anti-military discord among the lower classes. The "anoiteds" mostly kept to themselves, however, and were far more interested in fomenting a party than a mutiny. The highest-ranking enlisted man in the unit was a Chief Petty Officer named Bob Hampton ("Hamp" to the men under him), a career Navy man who recognized this dynamic among his bright, disgruntled and somewhat superior charges, called them "the goddam tea-drinking reserves," so disgusted was he at their lack of military ambition.

The plum job at the PIO was to work in the radio section, dubbed "the inner sanctum" for its physical as well as social insulation from the rest of the office. The radio section produced thousands of shipboard interviews called "hometowners" because they were recorded on phonograph discs and distributed to sailors' hometown radio stations for public-service airing. The only negative was that every now and then, one might actually have to set foot on a ship.

"We'd have to go to sea every now and then, one at a time, lugging two huge reel-to-reel magnetic tape recorders, our sea bags and enough seasick pills to choke a giraffe," Maddox wrote.

The crown production of the PIO was "Across the Blue Pacific," a weekly radio show that was broadcast on Armed Services Radio networks across much of the nation. On the program, past naval events were dramatized and sandwiched between island music by a vocal group called The Royal Hawaiian Serenaders. Ironically, the malcontented journalists were the ones that wrote the patriotic scripts designed to maintain morale among both the troops and the folks at home.

Celebrities often performed on the program because the Navy cooperated with movie-making in the islands, which were also a stopover for those heading to Japan or Korea to entertain the troops. Among them was Henry Fonda, while making "Mr. Roberts," Humphrey Bogart and Fred MacMurray doing "Caine Mutiny," and John Wayne, on a break from "Big Jim McClain." (The Duke invited the radio crew for poolside drinks at his hotel, prompting a flurry of bragging letters home afterward).

"The best were actors who got their start doing radio drama: Vincent Price, Anne Blythe, Raymond Burr," remembered Maddox. "Burr was among the most requested performers by troops on the line. He was great. He genuinely took an interest in our scripts, came back over the weekend to beef up three or four of them, and then returned that Monday to perform. He really liked our work."

"Of all our writers," he added, "I think your dad and Phil Haff stood head and shoulders above. We sorta rode their shirttails."

Phil Haff was the only one of the group I had met before. When I was a kid, Haff lived in Brooklyn Heights and worked for AT&T in public relations. My mother kept in touch with him after my dad disappeared, and we visited him a few times in the city. He used to walk across the Brooklyn Bridge every day to go to work, which I always thought was pretty cool. He was soft-spoken and patient, as I remember him today, and he was a constant source of little-known, urban factoids that appealed to me as an 11-year-old, interesting tidbits about New York City's East River or the Empire State Building that I used to proudly recite to my friends. Phil is now retired and living in Honolulu, back in his favorite place in the world.

Haff was known as a comedian back then, a talented guy and a quipster, and he and my dad got along great. They cracked each other up with a biting humor and a game of one-upmanship: who hated the Navy more, and who hated it more creatively. He was a "day-counter" like my dad; each knew exactly how much time remained of their military commitment. My sense is that although Haff may have looked up to my father, he also recognized a fundamental difference between the two of them. He, like the rest of the guys, gradually recognized that there was a line there somewhere, a boundary of discontent that he did not cross, either unable or unwilling to feel as acutely bothered to same degree that my father did.

"Your father was always the smartest of the crew," Haff analyzed. "He was too smart, in fact. He saw injustice everywhere, in the newspapers, in the military – he thought it unfair that we had to buy our own uniforms, for instance, since we made so little money. So he didn't. He wouldn't – he wore the most tattered whites you've ever seen. But they were always clean."

Spurred on by my father and Haff and a particularly annoying brush with military nonsense no longer remembered, some of the guys penned a document entitled, "Necessary Ideals of the Military Which Conflict with the American Tradition," because they were determined not to think back on their Navy days years later and get nostalgic; they wanted a device to remind them how pissed off they were at the time.

The ambitious manifesto didn't work, though. These days they're all dripping with nostalgia when they talk and write to me about those days in that strange radio studio, even Haff, who remarked, "Living a war through sound effects and martial background music has made it difficult for me to take anything seriously since."

Haff described how they sometimes got celebrities to help out with "Across the Blue Pacific:" "We'd see in the paper that so-and-so was coming to town, so we'd call them at their hotel and say, 'The admiral would be pleased to have you visit our base, or the site of the USS Arizona, or something.' Then we'd say, 'And while you're here, would you mind reading a few lines into the microphone?' We got Gabby Hayes that way, who worked with his teeth in for the first time in 30 years."

The radio section worked in an air-conditioned, carpeted office that overlooked the site of the USS Arizona, which still was not much more than a floating wooden dock at the time, ten years after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The inner sanctum looked like any other office except that it also had a glassed-in control booth at one end where the recording equipment was kept, and a small, soundproofed studio where the radio dramas were performed. The group took turns reading the daily newscasts called, "Your Pacific Fleet Today," which were recorded and then delivered to the Honolulu radio stations.

Everyone worked on "Across the Blue Pacific," too, researching, writing and acting in the dramatized five-minute stories gleaned from Naval history. Pat McLatchy did most of the technical work.

"I wasn't much of a writer, so Chief Hampton finally assigned me to be the main guy responsible for recording

it, directing some productions, creating and recording the sound effects, and editing it all into the final production,” McLatchy explained. “None of us were trained or educated to do any of this kind of work. We all learned as we went, laughing at our amateurish ways and having real fun doing it.”

Pat sent me a tape of three productions of *Across the Blue Pacific*, which gave me an opportunity to hear my father’s voice. It wasn’t as deep as I expected, but it had a distinctive, smooth timbre and a subtle, New York lilt.

It was a relaxed atmosphere. There were no officers to deal with and Chief Hampton, recognizing that his group wouldn’t know a davit from a fo’c’sle unless there was a promotion test upcoming, left them alone most of the time as long as the work got done. At the end of the day, there was no rush to escape. The men often hung around, talking, writing letters home, fiddling with the recording equipment or playing practical jokes. They enjoyed each other’s company.

My dad’s desk was just inside the door, to the right. All the guys share pretty much the same image when they recall John Lake: behind his desk, either leaning against the wall, reading, or hunched over his typewriter, which bore the sign “NON ILLEGITIMI CARBORUNDUM” (don’t let the bastards get you down), an important slogan for the group.

“John stayed close to his chair and typewriter,” said McLatchy. “He brown-bagged his lunches and usually ate right there. He had a real habit of brushing his teeth after lunch. But the principal image I have of John was his insatiable reading habit. He carried a paperback book with him constantly. As soon as his brown bag was empty, the book would come out until work started again. I read a little in those days, but his reading was steady and constant... John was a pretty good jock, but not like any jock I knew. From him, I learned you could be a jock and still read books.”

At first, most of the guys lived in a barracks at the submarine base. They slept in a long, rectangular building without windows, only screens with roll-down canvasses to cover them in bad weather. The canvasses were seldom used. The walls were lined with bunk beds and lockers. Down the center of the room were six wooden tables, used for shooting the bull or letter writing. Lights-out was at ten o’clock, which is why many of my dad’s early letters to my mom were hand-written in the shower room, after getting back late from basketball practice for one of the teams on the base.

Over the barracks reigned a boorish boatswain’s mate, a career guy that took special pleasure in tormenting the short-timers. He was an obnoxious bully that got under everyone’s skin, particularly my dad’s.

“Every workday morning we were jolted awake by his bullhorn: ‘Drop your cocks and grab your socks, you swabby scum.’ This opening salvo added a touch of class to our day in the typewriter trenches,” remembered Maddox. “John took special offense and engaged the bos’n in a verbal confrontation so artful the brute didn’t even get it. All of us admired his bravado and, even more, the skill to outwit stupid authority.

“Another time at the sub base barracks, the bos’n secured a hatch (locked down a door) with a sign that read ‘S-E-C-R-U-E-D.’ From then on John’s mantra when encountering any blockade: ‘Don’t go there; it’s SECROOD.’”

My dad loved the language and playing with words, and he was delighted to find a receptive audience at CINC-PAC, even among some of the officers. Bored with the routine communications filled with maddening military gibberish of tortured syntax and logic that constantly circulated throughout headquarters, my father took to constructing all his inter-office memoranda exclusively with poetry, endearing him to the guys for his quirky cleverness. The officers tolerated the practice and a few got a kick out of them.

Impatient with CINCPAC's tendency to classify the most mundane communications as "top secret," he coined ominous, nonsensical instructions for handling such messages, such as "Destroy Before Reading," or "Forget Before Hearing." He created words, like *over-loafing* (officers goofing off while supervising others), and *Shoganism* (the preference to have one's girlfriend cheat with someone handsome rather than troll-like). When describing something he did not care for, he'd say, "This I love not well." He played with words and usage the way a dog amuses itself with a ball, to no particular end other than to see how it rolls and what it tastes like.

"We would actually read the dictionary, and yell words at each other from across the room," laughed John Romero. "We'd test each other for fun, to see if the other guy knew what it meant. He got me on 'coruscating,' (showing flashes of brilliance); I got him on 'stercoraceous,' (living in dung). John usually knew, though. Or sometimes we'd just loudly announce a word because we liked the way it sounded."

Their mystified co-workers either learned to ignore the curious badinage or stopped to listen with furrowed brows, anxious to keep up or, even better, bark out a definition themselves. But it was really the two Johns' game.

"Profligate," one would offer.

"Pro-FLI-gate," the other countered.

"No, PRO-fli-gate," the first corrected.

"Oh. You're right... Umbelliferous?"

"Carrots... Sextodecimo!"

"Um, the lesser known Marx Brother?"

Appreciative laughter.

Meanwhile, the letters to the fiancé continued to cover familiar ground, but also conveyed a growing comfort with his surroundings and fellow inner-sanctum dwellers, whom he fondly described with a loose and humorous repartee:

Friday... January 32nd

Hullo:

We'll try to get back on a steady letter-a-day basis. Only time I have a legitimate excuse is when there's no typewriter available, because I've given up handwriting for the rest of the century...can't stand to look at my own.

Quite a party last night. Lake wasn't drinking, and wound up with only a semi-gay after-effect...People force them on you, and it's sad, after they've had a few themselves. Good old Joe had a great time - higher'n a kite - and the crew left feeling well pleased. Few aspirin tablets being passed around this morning. This is "the escape mechanism of modern life." Phooey.

Almost all the fun of getting drunk is talking about it later - I don't think it's "escape" or "Escape."

Tonight - reception. Hah! Shlurrrppp. (That sounds like one of your words...looks like it, anyway)

A Hurst fellow from Milwaukee...fine lad, Marquette and Mil. Journal...related last night his great delight with the English language. Also gets kicks out of staring at words, realizing how weird they look...He was convulsed on a bus one day looking at a poster with "ENOUGH" in big letters, he sez. It is one of the four-star weird-ones, all right.

Love these unorthodox senses of humor. Glad to hear some other being besides you'n me appreciates that particular twist.

Much better you're a University Bookstore thing. The sophomore women just irk you because you're envious - your own lost days of carefree whatsy. That'll be 25 bucks, please.

Now that it's February, you can start saving and we'll think in terms of progress progress...I've accumulated a big 66 dollars since the thing started - for me and a Navy salary that's pretty good. And let me know as soon as you can on a tentative... I'll visit the Catholic Chaplain and get things started in a minor way.

Deliveries here are responsible for letterless days, quite often. Any bad weather between here and NY (Jesus, Tokyo's closer than you are, did you know that?) means delay.

Stay-at-homishness may be agreeable there. Not here. It'll be tolerable plus with a couple of Lakes trying to live within their dammit budget.

Couldn't resist the temptation yesterday to flip a satisfactory Navy grease pencil into the envelope when I finished addressing it...now I'm wondering what'll happen - will you have to pay excess freight charges? Will I get the letter back? Will they open it and court martial me for wrongful appropriation of government property? I guess if that root beer drop made it to Syracuse, this stand a fair chance.

US Mail's a wondrous thing, isn't it?

Ottawa you should appreciate. Got close to it but never quite...Most of my Northern NY frens rave over the place.

Travel is something I hope we can do a lot of together - one of these days after one o these lovebirds gets a license, I'll steal a car and we'll go wild.

...You'll be a fine woman of mystery hiding from Art, all right, and you'll have a wee mite of the Lake "nervous itch of October" in treating a problem by running away from it - because you supposedly don't even have to do any thinking. Maybe it's the best way. But you'll make him feel like a more important something-or-other because you take the trouble to hide out from him for a few days.

Not that it's much of my business...It's my fault he's still knocking at the door (thank you loyal citizens) and I've got no right to tell you how to handle your problems...If I were Anne (but you understand her as only a woman can) I'd also object to having a well-thought-of male companion directed my way because my pal Alice took it on the lam.

Do I know what I'm talking about? Hell, no.

People in Iceland are probably all noble poor things, anyway. It's probably the motto of the Reykjavik Daily Iceberg - "Ecce nes, thingi nobili poori." Something about the atmosphere, you know.

Tell me, you will come home at night and swipe my what books? Books foocy.

What is it with me? Inherited my father's forthright honesty and what am I doing with it? Wally needs a high-chair top so I helped him swipe one when he was crocked and I was gay last night...But the wages of sin is the thing doesn't fit.

Tired to hail a cab from Waikiki last night - about 4 of us - by mistake we got the cops. Irritation, anyone? They thought we were in trouble and they didn't realize how right they were.

Today is wedding day. Joe appeared a while ago looking pale and wan, shaking like a leaf...

Our office procedure undergoeth one of its regular transitions...From chaos to order, they're all that. But they all result in more chaos.

Groucho Marx wrote the Communist Manifesto. And I look like Groucho Marx. Anything else you wanta know?

All right, so we won't argue about religion. Who's trying to start an argument? I'm just telling you how I feel, that's all. And I'm the kind of guy who keeps track of how many times who gives in just to make sure he isn't getting pushed around...this in relations with everybody...not just future wives...see? See?

Oh boy, am I gonna be impossible to live with. Oh boy.

This guy you were looking for, was his name Confucious? But more to the point, if you found it you never told me and that was at a point in our relations when we were ostensibly being love-each-others (finally fixed the ribbon) - and weren't you telling me at about that time that you see me dot have fund some element of companionate disbelief with me? That was when I was mistakenly (I guess) idealistic and holding out for my original statement of aims - to go 2 people Catholic or 2 Protestant or not at all...I made it not at all; and you assured me that it was wrong, that you saw things in a way similar to little me, and we could go on being idealistically futurish. So we did.

This is new to me. Now can I bewail "Why didn't you tell me?" Of course it doesn't change anything now. But you cheated - and I thought all the time I was the one who failed...once you did...hmmm...You're not marrying perfection if this is true, John.

"Do not expect to find perfection in anyone." Marriage books, basic tenet 1489-b...OK...

I love you like nobody's business anyway, and let's be honest with each other no matter what happens from now on, please?

It's so easy to give in - me to you on religion now, you to me on religion on some church steps at Salina and Colvin - but it's such a bad thing to give in to yourself. That's what makes life bad. When you're honest with yourself, not even fooling you for a minute although you may overlook some minor matters from time to time, that's when you're doing the right thing.

Please don't ever give in if you feel inside that you're doing the wrong thing...tell me about the conflict. I've got no right to preach on this subject, but that's the procedure I'll have to follow and I'm making it sauce for goose...And I think you know I wasn't serious on keeping a box-score in matters debatable...that's poison.

So help me I vow, every time I read a letter from you, to write in plain English, but the sentences never have time to get organized. I wonder what'll happen if I try. Currently we await Admiral with peg-leg...Hoskins...this is why I'm on a different typewriter - gotta move outta da way when he comes thru and I ain't takin' no

chances. He just comed in.
I will stop. Stop.

Love and all that stuff...

J. ANDROCLES LIONBITINGTON

Interestingly, the aforementioned “Art” is none other than Art Arnold, later to make another appearance, 15 years later, playing the co-adulterer. It bugs me. I want to yell, “Watch out! Keep your eyes open!” Not because I blame my mother for the ultimate downfall of the marriage, but because my father seems so over-the-top dependent on her for his emotional well-being. When things went wrong, when people disappointed him, he took it much harder than most. When he fell, he fell hard. But at the time, he was so completely in love. They were in love. And he saw no peril; quite the contrary: he felt that his future was rosy with Alice and that she was necessary to his survival. It was the only future he could imagine:

DARLING ALICE...WHAT CAN A LOVESICK GUY SAY THAT HASN'T BEEN SAID? I CAN REVEL IN BEAUTIFUL MEMORIES OR BEAUTIFUL FUTURE GLANCES. I CAN GLORY IN ALL THAT WE ARE AND ALL THAT WE HAVE TO OFFER EACH OTHER, AND THANK GOD THAT OUR PROMISE WILL BE FULFILLED. I CAN MISS YOU WITH MIND AND BODY, WITH THAT TRITE OLD HEART AND SOUL THAT PEOPLE, DOGGONE'EM ARE ALWAYS YAPPING ABOUT WHEN THEY DON'T KNOW, WHEN THEY COULDN'T KNOW HOW MUCH TWO PEOPLE IN LOVE REALLY NEED EACH OTHER WHEN THOSE PEOPLE ARE YOU AND I.

ALL THIS I CAN DO AND IT WON'T COMMUNICATE TO YOU IN A LETTER. I CAN ONLY REMEMBER THAT EVERYTHING WE FEEL IS SO MUCH ALIKE, SO “SUPERNATURALLY” SIMILAR THAT NOTHING ONE OF US THOUGHT OR FELT WAS EVER STRANGE TO THE OTHER; THAT SUCH COMMUNION OF SPIRIT AS OURS OFFERS HOPE FOR A MORE WONDERFUL LIFE THAN FEW EVEN DREAM EXISTS...WHETHER IT BE LIVED IN A HILLTOP HONOLULU (IT COULD COME TO THIS??)

YOU SEE WHAT I MEAN.

CAN I JUST SAY – ALICE MY DARLING, I LOVE YOU – AND HOPE TO TELL YOU ALL THAT'S IN MY HEART? POSSIBLY NOT. BUT ALICE MY DARLING, I DO LOVE YOU. I LOVE YOU, I LOVE YOU, I LOVE YOU.

HOW MUCH, IS OPERATION FUTURE. BIG OLD BOUNDLESS LIMITLESS FUTURE...WITH SILVER-LINING, YET.

It's clear that my father's profound love for my mother affected his sense of self; he lays himself open to her completely. He is romantically vulnerable, which I'm sure she appreciated. What I love about my dad's letters, however, is how he moves effortlessly from analysis of issues, both personal and global; to proclamations of love; right in to silly asides, for instance, later in the same letter:

HAVING STIRRED A CUP OF GI COFFEE WITH A PENCIL, AND TASTED SAME, I AM CURRENTLY WISHING FOR 2 THINGS. YOU AND A SPOON.

My reaction to my father's letters, written at age 21, is admiration. Naturally, I look to myself at the same age for context: I was not reading the classics when I became legal to drink, but I was emotionally jangly. I was not Phi Beta Kappa, but I was editor of my school paper. I did not have his discipline or drive, though, and certainly not his honesty, and I wonder if I would have had more of these attributes if I had to bring my report cards home to him. Or discuss my career plans. Or even the pennant race. His high expectations of people, perhaps one of his biggest downfalls, happen to be what I admire the most. He expected excellence, was delighted when he saw it, and devastated when the opportunity for it was missed. It is a tough way to live. His highs were high and his lows dreadfully low, and we share this trait.

I'm also proud of him. His pride was hurt when my mother kissed another, so he stayed away. I would have, too. But I would not have had the strength to forgive, not at age 21. He is well read, articulate and passionate. He's silly. He's proud. He's vulnerable. He is unable to let blatant injustice or stupidity go unchallenged. On a daily basis he exhibits much that I aspire to be today, 20 years older.

What I find most gratifying is the impact he had on his buddies in the PIO. This crew, from Montana and Nebraska, California and New Hampshire, Nevada and New York, absolutely loved him. They praised his curiosity, admired his chutzpah, were astonished by his fierce intelligence and adored his idiosyncrasies. They were young, bound by common experience, their familiar predicament and provenance as men, and their memories of that time together are strong.

"'Socks up, Flange Head.' That's what he'd say when I pitched myself into predicaments," recalled Maddox, describing their softball adventures. "His timing was always just right. I'd usually survive the inning. What he meant transcended cheerleading: Nobody but you are going to solve your problem, buddy, so suck up your inner resources and just do it.

"John loved nicknames. He called me Flange Head because I looked like a pole with a flange on top, my naval white hat pulled wide at the sides like wings. He also dubbed me 'the limp-limbed wonder of PIO' because I pitched with a loose, flailing motion akin to Ray Bolger's scarecrow in Oz."

My dad played a skillful first base, I'm told, giving the PIO guys their first glimpse of his athleticism, as the radio section team played other squads of enlisted men that didn't particularly care for the college boys. The pencil pushers did pretty well, though, regardless of the enmity emanating from across the diamond.

The basketball league, made up of teams from various military bases in the area, featured many skilled players, including some former college athletes, from around the country. The games were covered in the Honolulu papers – "Lake plays a sparkling floor game" – but not many of the PIO guys had a chance to see my father in action, because he quit after a few months, determined to find a part-time job at night to save money for his upcoming marriage. They heard the stories, though, and saw flashes of his grace playing softball and touch football on the beach. The fact that my dad didn't talk about his athletic performances, past or present, made him all the more admirable, to both them and me.

Nonetheless, everyone at CINCPAC had a full view of John's sports mania, if not his talents as a participant. He created an underground sports newsletter, *The Goalpost*, that was popular at CINCPACFLT until it was discovered he was using the Admiral's mimeograph machine for its production. The publication folded and its editor was scolded. He ran to the AP wire machine in the outer office every time its bell rang in the afternoon; he wanted baseball scores from the East Coast. He solicited and offered opinions and predictions on every sport, and shared his three-week old *Sporting News* issues (they took that long to get to Hawaii) only after he had combed through every page, statistic and box score.

John Lake was not the only sports nut at the PIO, however, nor was he the only one with an irreverent sense of humor. John Romero and Ross Tucker, also much practiced in the arts of sports writing and absurd incongruities, took both well-honed skills with them after their discharge from the Navy in 1953, when they went to work on the sports section of the Las Vegas Review-Journal.

On Saturdays, the two worked together assembling the Sunday morning edition, the largest of the week. The phone calls for college football scores would start in the late afternoon, and they were unrelenting. With no internet or 24-hour sports channels back then, rabid sports fans who couldn't bear to wait for the Sunday paper to learn the fate of their favorite teams had only one reliable source for the information they craved: The sports department of their local paper, recipients of the AP and UPI stories that came across the wire all day long.

"We'd get guys calling for scores all the time for schools you never heard of; you know, 'Can I get a score for Southeastern Mid-Valley Tech?' or some school equally obscure," Romero explained, "and we just got sick of it after a while."

One slow Saturday night, the annoying calls inspired them. To amuse themselves, Tucker and Romero fabricated a small southern college they named Julius Schneider, and included the team's fictitious results among the pages of game summaries of the prior day's college football contests from across the nation. The Julius Schneider team was lead by a heroic halfback named Beppo Max.

"I think Ross came up with the name of the school and I came up with Beppo Max," Romero laughed. "In every Sunday edition you'd find one paragraph about Julius Schneider crushing another hapless opponent."

Beppo Max, the Little All-America running back, usually ran for five or six touchdowns. One particularly ridiculous evening, he got eight. The scores – 66-0, 49-2 – were also outrageous. Julius Schneider played most of their games at home, in Bayou City, Louisiana. One memorable opponent from the J.S. schedule was called Trumlyn Mines.

"Julius Schneider also had a linebacker named Jack Check," Romero continued. "A bad game for Check was running back one interception for a TD. Usually he did it two or three times. Once five."

Romero and Tucker told my dad, who was still back in Hawaii, the tale about the Julius Schneider zelig, and all the guys had a long laugh about it. The sports staff at the Las Vegas Review-Journal had a throng of loyal admirers back at CINCPAC.

"We assumed nobody but us paid much attention to Julius Schneider. But one night we got a call from a guy who asked us for the Julius Schneider score," chuckled Romero. "Man, you should have heard us whooping and hollering after that call."

There were other running jokes to sustain him, sports contests and trips to the beach to placate him and the consistent good will of his friends to comfort him, but it was the arrival of his fiancé four days before they were to be married that truly bolstered my father. Although he had settled into a pleasant routine and growing sense of comfort with his surroundings – "a groove not yet ruttish," – it was my mother's arrival in Hawaii that allowed him to shed much of his built-up anxiety and uncertainty, at least where their relationship was concerned.

John and Alice Lake were married in Makalapa Chapel on June 2, 1952. My mother was escorted to Honolulu by her Aunt Margaret. Margaret performed all her family obligations with good cheer and then took off on a

month-long tour of the Hawaiian Islands. Mom was “given away” in the wedding ceremony by Commander William J. Lederer – soon-to-be author of the bestselling *The Ugly American* – who had come to be a sort of mentor to my father.

The newlyweds settled into an apartment near Waikiki Beach. Alice got a job at the Honolulu Advertiser, working on the Women’s section. John passed another rating test and was promoted to third-class petty officer. His letters to Alice stopped, obviously, and the quicker, clearer notes to his parents and sister began.

In them, my father is characteristically humble, mentioning his work only in passing, such as his speechwriting for Admiral Radford in the months leading to his appointment to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and his participation in a Christmas armed-service radio special that was filmed being made by CBS-TV. He devotes most of his energy to analyzing the presidential race (he wants Adlai Stevenson; Alice wants Dwight Eisenhower), the pennant race and, for that matter, the human race. He is still impatient to get his life started and, although happy to be married, growing more frustrated with the Navy.

...I suppose I shall sit back and reflect on the first completely wasted year of my young life. I needless to say do not include marriage and the jobs thereof – but consider same the inevitable sooner or later that would have been sooner had it not been for Stalin et al...As for the rest, it sours my stomach to look back upon it as a time of needless squandering of time and energy upon small and stupid tasks devised by small and stupid people whose entire existence is predicated upon the inevitability of war. A pox on’t.

But as for the marriage, we’re incredibly happy...could not be more so in spite of the Navy and the countless hordes of Communism (the present name for it) who peril our futures and those of our goers-after...can’t fight the next war until it occurs, by gum, and it doesn’t occur around here on odd or even-numbered years.

Several of us have been playing in a Y basketball league. The effect on me is not to reduce the waistline but rather to keep it at its present state of semi-paunchiness...takes an awful lot of work to get back in that sore of trim I can only faintly remember...147 pounds. Skin’n bones and running the mile for BCATS.

Right now it’s 180 pounds, fat and flab, and running the gauntlet for the old Navy.

Remark – we hear there’s a new Pogo book and haven’t seen it yet on the newsstands. If you see it, we’d live to glim the thing.

Statement – It’s truly fabulous in the daily strip now. Best comic strip in the history of the world.

Complaint – wahhhh...I wanta work on a newspaper.

Been looking over musical instruments and have found several likely spots for cheap guitars, banjos, mandolins, etc...will probably make some newsworthy efforts along that line sometime this spring.

Guess Pop has lost track of Snuffy Smith in toto, but lately it’s really popping – Riddles has another baby boy and now there are three grinning, toothy faces (similar but not congruent, as it were) with the identical R. Barlow countenance.

Navy dentists are still saving my teeth but there are a couple that probably won’t survive this enlistment. Also due to die soon are my basketball shoes and Alice’s eyes, which will probably need reading specs before long...the shoes don’t need glasses, really, only new soles (so many of us do) and I’ll attend to that shortly.

All other matters attended to, I’ll sign off until the next opportunity presents. Be

sure to attend the performance of the trans-ocean phone call and lemme know how it all sounds. Our love to youse and yiz...John

Back at the inner sanctum, the guys were amused to listen to John extol the virtues of being the beneficiary of Alice, the ideal female companion. Most of them had also moved out of the barracks and off the sub base and six of them lived together in a rented house on Manoa Boulevard they called Taj Manoa. They enjoyed hearing blissful testimony of Alice's intellect, and the appealing aspects of domestic normalcy, especially coming from my father, the independent one.

Together, my parents made a home together, first in an apartment and later in a hillside cottage that overlooked Diamond Head. They were wonderfully happy together. Both dwellings were cozy, comfortable and welcoming, and visited often by the crowd of hungry young bachelors eager for a home-cooked meal and good conversation.

"We all wanted to be included in the Lake galaxy," said Maddox. "Alice cooked well and their place always offered good food and wine and genuine hospitality. My fondest memories of the Lakes are evenings around their kitchen table or, occasionally, at our Taj Manoa house."

The group was young enough that they needed little encouragement to party, and they did so often, but they also spent many nights reading plays aloud, each one assigned a speaking part, followed by the inevitable discussion and analysis endemic to my family.

"On serious nights we'd read something from Odets or Tennessee Williams or even the Bard," Maddox proudly recalled. "That would launch the discussion that would evolve into every corner of the human comedy. John was a relentless debater, competitive to the core, with a strong world-view that stimulated others to stretch their minds. In fact, both John and Alice had strong opinions. Neither would tolerate trivial or lame logic. Both bore genial eastern good manners, yet a certain aloof quality."

It is a recurring theme with these two: Snobbishness may be a bit too strong a description, but only just a bit. "Aloof" is probably a tad on the kind side, although certainly a fair description of their outward behavior. Privately, my mother and father referred to the unfortunate, unenlightened masses as "people," a pejorative term they used to describe any individual or group that had a negative impact on their lives. (The usage of the larger "people" infers sheep-like qualities and expressed their disdain for unalterable followers, poor saps incapable of original thought). Both of them, however, also displayed an appreciation for salt-of-the-earth types, regardless of one's educational background. What they really disliked, I think, was mindlessness and phoniness, as well as getting dragged into situations where "people" dwelt; the military was full of "people." (Unfortunately for both of them, any large group is, by definition, full of people.)

Conversely, to be included socially among the group of persons favored by my parents was validation of one's intellect, humor and uniqueness. To the young men who worked alongside my father, my parents were worldly, New York sophisticates, but they were also pleasantly unpretentious and, therefore, compelling dinner company indeed, however unsustainable their personal code may have been.

"I once tried to persuade the Lakes to invite a young newcomer to a night of reading plays," Maddox told me. "The kid was like Dickens' Uriah Heep, a nerdy sorta nothing eager to join anybody who'd have him. Nope. There's too little time to invest in the pitiful."

“At the time, I thought, ‘How cruel.’ As I grow older, I see the disciplined thinking that involved. That stern discipline and focused dedication to verities may have been the stuff that propelled John professionally and, in a cruel backhand, may have been the stuff that plummeted him into depths few can tolerate.”

There is a remarkable consistency among the memories of the Navy guys. They were all struck by the same incidents and retain many of the same images in their minds of that time of their lives. Queries about dinners with the Lakes, for example, evoke recollections of passionate discussions, lots of wine and cats.

On wine: My parents were apparently incensed that California wines should receive more publicity than New York wines, and even more so that there were “rules” regarding what type of wine one should imbibe, based on the season or dish being served or what-have-you. This is noteworthy only because of the unanimous acceptance by the men of the only Lake mandate on wine, one that is practiced by all of them 50 years later: Rules, shmules – go by your personal taste.

On cats: My father at first tolerated, and then ultimately shared, my mother’s fondness for felines. She took them in and he acquiesced. But he came to admire their independent streaks and he laughed at their behavior, as well as my mother’s interpretations of their thoughts. The cats were their children, and Michael and Poody, among others, each rated several descriptive paragraphs in many of the letters home to their families.

My mother’s affection for her cats was so strong, in fact, that my dad complained to her one particular evening that the cats were better cared for than he, because they had dinner and he did not. He was irked and he made it clear. The following evening, he returned home to find that my mother had prepared a dinner of meat loaf for him, timed perfectly for his arrival home from the base. He gratefully devoured it and commented how good it tasted.

“Now you’re as well fed as the cats,” my mother laughed fiendishly, as her culinary retribution for his petulance the night before became clear to my father: She had mixed cat food into his meal.

Apparently, he took the joke well, because he told his friends about it, and they were an appreciative audience of any practical joke, especially one the group deemed just. John had been taken down a peg, he took it like a man and everyone loved the story.

John was proud of Alice, and all the guys saw why. She was bright, pretty and fun. She was not shy about her opinions, a trait that they all shared and admired. She mixed well with everyone and was held in high esteem by the group, particularly because she was already in the newspaper game. She had quickly ascended to a position of some authority at the Honolulu Advertiser – executive women’s editor – so my mother wrote to her cousin, Gracie, and told her she had a job in Honolulu as my mother’s assistant if she wanted it. She did. It was perfect timing for my dad, too, because he was about to return to the States for the first time in two years to attend Armed Forces Information School in New Rochelle, New York, and felt better about leaving his new wife in Hawaii if Gracie would be staying at the cottage with her.

After a peaceful first Christmas together as a married couple, John left for New York in February, 1953. The school’s five-week program at Fort Slocum ran through the beginning of April, after which my dad had 30 days leave to visit family, friends and relatives up and down the East Coast. He saw his family in Delmar and Alice’s in their new home in Milton, Massachusetts. He got together with college buddies. And always planning for the future, he talked with a few newspaper editors about jobs and discussed with friends the benefits of getting his masters degree first.

In many ways, though, the trip unsettled my father. Despite pleasant reunions with some, there were troubles, too. His mother was having a disturbing nervous episode. He got into a bar fight. He was restricted to the base for a while for failing an inspection and, apparently, mouthing off to an officer. Still deeply dependent on Alice, he missed her terribly and, ironically, longed to return to Hawaii.

Thursday night
Back at the old stand...

Haven't clicked out a letter to you on this typewriter since the summer of 1950.

Well, I failed to see Mel, Pete, Shogan and almost everybody else. I did talk to Kurt on the phone. He's going up to start at 62.50 per on the Rochester Democrat-Chronicle in May...really raves about the Columbia classes and placement - both 100% better than Syracuse, he says. Mrs. Kurt is assistant to some dress designer while they're in NY, will have to dig up something new when they get to Rochester but doesn't mind too much since her home is in Syracuse.

I'll talk to Kurt next week some time, possibly take in a ball game together when I get down to NYC for a day at the Polo Grounds. He's got me all enthused about Columbia and all despondent at the two years yet to go...everybody else has been asking me "You're out now, aren't you?"...The world isn't waiting for me to get out of the Navy - it's moving right along.

Tomorrow I'm moving out for Boston. Gets so I can't spend a night here without going stir-crazy...just like old days...

Out of 79 in, the PIO class at Slocum, I finished 6th. Considering my antics, it's astounding and gratifying. But if I hadn't been restricted the week of finals, I no doubt would have landed 66th. And 5 Army guys beat me - their success in the class determines their assignment. So leading Uncle Sam's boys in blue, I demonstrated once again that it takes no brains, no hard work - just luck and crossword puzzles - to be a success in one's schoolwork.

My orders came thru, calling for me to check in at Washington, D.C. Receiving Station at the completion of leave...wish it were tomorrow--I never missed you anything like this...so you can count on my having to hang around there for a few days, anyway.

That means I'll be back the first week in May - 5th, 6th, 7th, or so.

No letter to answer...and nowhere in the world makes me feel less

inspired than the dining room at 49 Roweland Avenue.

Got up at 4 p.m. today, tho. 14 hours of solid sleep. Now I'm completely caught up. So what? Reminds me - one of the low dives we frequented in Baltimore, some old bat came up to us and sez, "What's wrong with the Irish?" We hashed that over, some toothless grizzled chap romped over and she conducted introductions - "This is my husband, so what?"

Nice people. Salt of the earth.

Now listen to what else happened.

I went to the Knick-News. And the managing editor was a pretty fabulous fellow. Name of Salisbury. We talked for over an hour, and it was enjoyable as hell. No gimmick. But if we send him something worthwhile, he'll print it and pay us.

He told me to come and see him when I get out of the Navy. If I'm interested in a job, that is. Thank you kindly, I said. He told me about the good old days. He told me he's a graduate of the third grade. He told me in the good old days on the Syracuse Herald, he never knew if he'd have a staff after lunch. He told me every man on the paper was a drunkard. He told me one reporter picked off every coat from the rack, hocked them all, and got plastered with the money. He told me Acheson and Harriman are boobs and he told me Marshall is a convenient scapegoat. He told me every time he turns around somebody is suing his newspaper. And he loves the god-dam racket. Now how do you like that?

Got 2 days good beard now and more than anything else, I'd like to keep it for your mother's benefit when she gets her first look at me...but that would present too many obstacles to effective hitchhiking...and when I travel, I only travel that way. Who's got money?

This house is full of weeping women right now. The doctor told mother all sorts of meaningless things, naturally (the old man sent for him-she didn't) and then ma told Kitty a bunch of some meaningful things such as she has nothing left to live for, she has not one iota of self-confidence...

Eric J. and J. Eric, unfortunately, are too god-damned matter of fact about the whole business. Nobody has said so, but it's obvious to one and all. I'm privately wracking my brain for a solution to the thing, but so far it's pretty much a blank. Now I can take her to a show every night for 3 weeks, but what good will that do next fall when Kitty, too, is gone? Obviously needs to. Both are in bad

health. Who should win? Don't ask me. It's a toughie, no question about that.

...things are tough all over.

Also in a completely detached way...if anything happens to you, I'll walk calmly out and do a schottische in front of first passing car. My theme song -Anchor's away.

When I see you, it still won't be soon enough. Write, if you please, and be careful. G'night, Mrs. Everything...

Jawn

There are recurring themes of dissatisfaction in his letters. Maybe it's the situation he finds himself in at the impatient age of 23. Perhaps it is something more, a revealing flaw. Although the continual expressions of disappointment are noteworthy, my instinct is to discount it as a trend because he is writing to the people with whom he feels most free to express himself: his wife, sister and parents. I haven't met anyone who thought he was a chronic complainer.

Still, I keep looking for clues, character defects or the seeds of dissent that drove my parents apart and my father away – were they planted in Hawaii? Or did it all come later?

Saturday...

Alpha wahine...

Just finished reading an article about Hay-waw in one of Gracie's gift Holidays. This you'll want to read. Michener wrote it, was disenchanted with the hula, muumuus, and a couple other aspects of island living, but in general pleased with the place and he did a good enough job to compound my "homesickness" for the place. Terrific photography, too.

Rainy weather yesterday didn't hurt the travel...got here before supper yesterday. Joe Senior arrived from Montreal this morning, bringing the sunshine, and today was a fine spring day. So far I'm having a great time and most unhappy that I can't comply with Mom Conlon's invitation to stay after Monday...things at home and all that kind of rot. Last place in the world I want to be, right now, but something tells me I'd better be there.

It's great. Both parents telling us how they'll never live another year out. I'll discuss it with them on any terms they wish - Dad is most matter-of-fact about it. But the sister hasn't arrived yet at the point where she'd care to hash it over that way. She's almost as excited as mother.

Anyway, your parents both look good. Joe Senior is tired, but that's natural enough after an all-night train ride, anyway. Your

mother looks wonderful. Joe Jr. looks down on me now from a 1-inch vantage point...and if you're interested, his basketball has picked up a lot in 2 years.

We played for a few hours at Cunningham Park today.

What else? They're feeding me in fine style. A drink before dinner is still the only way to live. And amidst all the splendor, there's only on thing I want to do that's flap-flap back over Dimun Head.

Last night I was a son-in-law and looked at thousand of family photos...didn't mind it a bit. Still think you've changed a lot more than your brother since frowny childhood faces, but your mother doesn't.

I added to my collection of Alice pictures, too.

Martin Road is a lot like Parkside Ave, yea? A little nicer...

I got ready to hop off the bus and clued the driver as to my intentions. "Martin Road? Never heard of it."

Some divining intellect nearby said, "He means Mahtin Road."

Daylight.

"Oh, Mahtin Road...Two more stops."

What a place. And has your brother ever sopped up the accent. He sounds like your friend Mrs. Crabfish or whatever her name was - the gal at Lederer's party who writes murder mysteries.

All in all, this whole East Coast business is pretty bad without you. In the long run your comment to Ma Conlon is quite true - home-sick isn't a place.

Mrs. Conlon also adds - you haven't been sending her a tear sheet every week...in fact not one for almost a month now...and naturally she also added you don't write enough.

Without a letter for almost a week now myself, I feel almost the same.

Diamond Head will look good to the New York snob...mighty good. I wish the USN would keep me in Hawaii for those 816 days, and that's more proof than was needed that people are never satisfied...and if the grass isn't greener, the volcanoes are firier...

Some day, Mrs. McHugling, we'll get together in a few of these places and start loquacious rhapsodizing about Beautiful Hawaii...and it's happening to me already...every time I pick up a magazine with a travel ad, either a UAL plane over Diamond Head or that familiar spot on Waikiki Beach, near the Halekulani...it gets me. Wait'll you see what a jolt that'll give us in 5 years. The people can all go to hell, they can't spoil the place...

Kitty thinks the thing bothering her mother more than anything is a flopperoo that occurred on some League of Gal Voters project. Her help all quit, left her with a monumental task that no one person could do, and naturally it kerplunked. Kitty opines this shot her confidence all to hell, and since the bustling-about projects are her

life's blood now, that's why nothing left.

Tell me what I do about this, for krissake.

Love and affection is fine. But there won't be anybody in that house next year but Mr. and Mrs. (I hope) and then what...So I'm chicken...it's still a disease and maybe the best place for me in a few thousand miles away.

Finally read "Catcher in the Rye" a few nights ago. Much good. Right now I'm working over the Digest version of "Giant" in one of your family's RD collections...don't like it very much thru chapter three.

Every day I'm more convinced. We're extremely fortunate. And what if we hadn't met...you certainly make me happy.

You read a book and you like it. So what? You're richer in knowledge, you've been amused, you store part of it away in the volutions and then what? Then you sit back and think that you have an Alice and it's Something. If you had to sit back and there wasn't any Alice, it would most emphatically be Nothing. On wheels.

Can I take all this for granted? People must think so. Pete Gelfand telling me "She's the greatest, John...She's one in a million. She's great, John."

"I know, Pete."

He wants me to jump for joy. Goddammitall, jump for joy people should see the Chesire cat inside me. Then they'd shut up a while themselves. I told your mother about the Pete Gelfand episode. She's afraid I don't know it, too, something tells me.

What the hell...who should know if my wife is the greatest in the world? I'm bad enough...it's been "Alice says..." To everybody for 7 weeks now...I should worship my wife in public? Go to hell, go to hell, people.

I've only met a few humans in my whole life who weren't people or buds...thank God my wife is one of them...and thank God I've got enough sense to know it without instructions from the floor. Didn't I pick her out? Leave me alone, ya bastids.

(But it's nice to hear, huh?)

That Michener story is in the latest Holiday. Don't miss it. By the time you're reading the next one, I'll be there to distract you - thanks again, Lawd.

Your ever-lovin'
Shoo Fly Poi

After visiting his in-laws at their new home in Milton, he hitch-hiked back to his parents' house and wrote Alice again:

Monday night - 13th

And now I'm in Delmar...

Only reason I came home was to pick up the mail awaiting me. But there wasn't any. What is it with you? Over a week now...Even your old husband never got that lazy.

Pretty mild weather today - it only snowed for about 4 hours...it's still on the ground. Took me from 9:30am to 6pm to make the long haul from Boston via thumb. Cold.

Your parents are really great! I hated to leave - your mother even gave me an "Easter present" - sexy Irish linen handkerchiefs. It's a reaffirmation of faith and a vindication of the special people theory. There are only a few but they are so damn fine it makes up for everything.

You wanna hear some more about our psychiatric ward here? Further research indicated the whole problem centers on the old man - been rather characteristically inconsiderate - a pent-up type thing...Anyway the talk now revolves about hospitals. Nice?

(Kitty sends love - Mother sends too)

Main thing I'm getting out of all this is not to wait until I'm 52 to get married...and you shouldn't wait until 36...OK?

After reading some of the short stories in the Hemingway collection at Milton, I've decided he has written some pretty good stuff...Boston radio stations don't carry "Hawaii Calls"...

Got a picture of you on the little table in the living room here - you look like home. I miss you more tonight than ever before, I think. Because you're my joy in living, because I want you to share the "Steel Guitar Rag," Jolson album, "Showboat" records, because I want to hold your hand again to prove you're real, and because I'm not sure I'm handling the family problems correctly. This is a time for firmness and I'm being firm - if I calculate wrong and overplay my hand, it's section 8 for all of us.

Must be I'm betting old...some of the stupid radio commercials this morning really made me sore. Your mother left Joe Senior at the office (he went to NY later in the day for McCoy Retirement Banquet) and took me out as far as Wellesley...It was only a slight drizzle in Boston but by the time I got past Springfield it was blinding snow.

Got reading prospects for your husband. But I feel like I did while waiting for you to come to Hawaii...can't sit down and thoroughly enjoy anything, not even the latest Newsweek or some recommended avant-garde stuff entitled "New Voices."

Good God but I'm desperate for your comforting presence! Alice, my darling, have I ever cautioned you about crossing streets? Well look both ways, will you please?

Your mother tells me she likes banjo music.

We spent the drive back from the Toll House yesterday talking about your fanny. Did your "ears" burn?

Now you can amuse yourself thinking about the twists the conversation took.

What the hell, how much can a guy keep writing when he's got nothing to answer?

Your good and Faithful slob,

Jawn

Shortly before flying back to Honolulu, my dad finally did get a letter from my mother, indicating, among other things, that he would be hearing rumors of her infidelity upon his return. (She'd been spending a great deal of time with a mutual friend of theirs, an officer named Bob Pence, and apparently some people started talking about it). My father dismissed the rumors instantly, and assured my mom that he was not worried about the machinations of "low minds:"

Awright, last letter...

Wish I were following as closely on the heels of the envelope as it sounds...

...Now that you figure you've matured "considerably" since 1950, I'm itching to read something I effused thru the mails in those days, just to see if I can recognize any difference. I didn't think there was that much difference in yours, to be honest. No matter how disgusted you get with people and things, you still sound refreshingly stardusty most of the time. But to get bitchy on a minute point, viz. "If you're disillusioned it proves you still expect something better," I say no no no, if you're disillusioned, it proves you did expect something better but you don't any more. And neither you nor I expect the "better" from anyone. We're just pleasantly surprised when we find it. Right? Therefore I'd say we have been literally disillusioned, and we do take it for granted.

It makes little difference in the long run. We'll find the "element" somewhere. And the picture you paint, with a forsythia backdrop, finds me astounded at myself and delighted at the prospect. Domestic as hell. I'll probably turn out to be a fat, jolly old man - 100% different from the elder statesmanly me I used to picture. While if you also do a turnabout on my earlier biddy who raises havoc at the village tavern dragging me home each Saturday night.

Truth is stranger...At the moment I can't conceive anything more ridiculous than having to be dragged home any night, but that's because I'm young whip-snap who can't get over the idea of loving his wife and liking her at the same time...

...How can a guy get excited over Lance Cook's mouthings when he's 5000 miles away and enjoying the blue sky, warm breeze, rustling leaves and wet, spring smells?

If there's a bit of talk, as it were, my reaction is Lance McBoyle is probably doing 50% of it. Right or wrong, I've got more confidence in you and myself than to get even slightly alarmed over this outcry.

Thanks, tho, for giving me the whole scoop. We've got an awful lot to be thankful for.....nd to fight for...so I imagine the baddies will be doing their best, as long as we're alive, to tear it down some way. Best we always anticipate the situations and keep each other informed.

(And then someday if the gossip-spreading starts while I'm around, I can play athletic games just for kicks and try to reason after-

ward).

Only thing that makes me feel sore about the whole damn thing is your "having trouble knowing quite what to say." Somehow it disturbs me when the cause and effect starts somewhere outside our marriage. And when people can't keep their beaked noses in their own business.

To be above reproach is laudable, but in a lifetime, people just won't let you be... If you bolted the front door and didn't go out for 2 months, somebody with a low mind or an evil intent would whisper that THERE'S TALK about what's happening behind those closed doors.

And if there IS any, consider the source...and I'm sorry I can't be there to face it with you.

If I must be cuckolded, be subtle about it.

And until I get back, please remember to get enough sleep at night, eat your meals, brush your teeth and don't walk in the puddles...Then maybe, just maybe, we'll really bolt the front door and see what transpires.

I love you, my darling, more than ever before.

Lake, Apr. '48
Lake, Apr. '50
Lake, Apr. '52
Lake, Apr. '53
Etc etc etc etc

Johnny

It's good to know that while he was bitching about everything, he was highly conscious of it, and they actively discussed the issue of his discontent. Hers, too. And I think part of their conversational connection was, "and here's another thing that pisses me off..." It was a contextual way of saying I love you, because you're not like all the other baddies out there in the dreaded crowds of "people." He loved her and had more faith in her than he did in himself, which is quite remarkable, indeed.

Correspondence from both of them in the summer of 1953 indicates that, despite annoyances on the job, they made the most of their time together. When my dad returned from the East Coast in May, it was another blissful reunion for the couple. Work was work, but at leisure they happily fed their literary appetites. Almost every letter home mentions what magazines and novels are being read, whether or not they are recommended, and why. They enrolled in a play writing class at the university. They took great delight in the slow accumulation of shelves, end tables and desks, furnishing their hillside cottage to support their bookish lifestyle. They did a fair amount of sightseeing, too, which my dad documented on slides with his camera. (There are dozens of pictures of my wind-blown mother and her cousin Gracie at various points of interest, like Diamond Head and "the Punch Bowl;" hardly any of my father).

In late October, it was John Lake's turn to go to sea on behalf of the CINCPAC radio section to gather hometowners and other press release fodder from the Pacific Fleet and bases in Korea and Japan. It gave him a chance to inhale Far Eastern culture and exhale more disgust for the Navy and its wasteful ways. He wrote about it to his parents...

Wedn. Nov. 4 (Tuesday in NY)

Dear folks,

This southwest corner of Japan has been foggy but not rainy for the past three days. There's plenty of work on this jaunt - we're trying to do hometown newspaper stories on every man in the Pacific Fleet Mine Force - but we're getting a little time to see Sasebo, anyway. Highly-Americanized. I wanta get away from the city and use my camera a bit.

It took us 17 days to get here on a minesweeper...we stopped only to fuel at Midway. Weather was pretty good all the way.

We'll be here about a week, then move up to the east coast of Korea (and get an income-tax exemption for the month) over to the west coast, then back. We process all our films, then move up to Yokosuka (about 20 miles from Tokyo) for a couple of weeks and then head back to Hawaii in early December.

Like I said all last April to you people "I miss my little wife." But with 13 ships to cover (two others are covering 8 more ships) I won't have too much time to be gloomy over it.

I haven't seen enough of Japan to give you my erudite opinions...but I can't help thinking about this place 10 years ago or so...and how things change in a short time.

We're getting plenty of shipboard duty (bad, bad) anyway - and I'm wondering what I would have done if I had been to get that kind of treatment for four solid years.

Haven't kept up very well on stateside news - but I did hear a news broadcast tonight that cheered me, to the effect that the Democrats are on the comeback trail according to election day evidence. Wagner in NY, a Democrat in NJ...many unexpected gains, they say...

World travel is all well and good, but my mind is usually flitting around my little grass shack in Hawaii. I'll come out of the Navy (I sometimes wonder - 20 months to go) and go into life-long hibernation with Mrs. John E. How I love that gal! Life has its blessings, even when one's a sailor.

I can't give you a permanent address here, so this sketchy correspondence will continue to be one-way until I get back home and stay put for a while. When you write to Kitty (well, she'll be home for Thanksgiving, just tell her "Hello, Kitty-san")...Love to both Mom and Pop. Take care of yourselves...

John

And to his sister at Cornell a week and a half later, he wrote a letter revealing a new tone in their sibling relationship, sharing adult humor and conveying a peer's respect rather than playing the solely role of the big brother advisor. His bittersweet take on one's irretrievable college days reflects his situation, and perhaps, a realization that life's future pleasures, once located, will always be different than they were in more carefree times.

Friday the 13th - Nov.

Dear Katinka...

You know how it is with Navy offices and stationery. You be broad-minded for a Cornell coed.

I'm in the photo lab, Navy Fleet Activities, Sasebo, Japan. Here's where we work (now), while we live out in the harbor on the LST-799, headquarters for Commander Mine Squadron Three. We got back yesterday from a two-day trip to Korea (Koje-do).

The purpose of this trip - do hometown news stories on the U.S. Pacific Fleet mine forces. So far we've covered seven ships, and have about as many more to do. We came over here from Hawaii on a 220-foot minesweeper (17 days en route) and I'm here to tell you the Navy is even more for the birds than I suspected earlier.

A week or so from now we go to Yokosuka (15 miles from Tokyo) and do much the same type stuff, then head back for Pearl Harbor (it says here) around December 2nd. We left Oct. 17th.

So...aside from continual bitching about my state in life, I've seen a small corner of the Japanese island of Kyushu. What's it like? Dusty, mountainous, getting chilly (a little warmer than NYS in November), Americanized, Navy-ized and commercialized.

It's a city of many smells. Fish, dirt, fecal matter, Japanese beer, fecal matter, dirt, and fecal matter.

A city of a million bars, a thousand whorehouses, a hundred Navy ships of all kinds at all times. A city of women in skirts and sweaters (the young ones) and women in kimonos and shawls (the old ones), of rickshaws with pedals and motors, of sailors with money, thirst, sexual appetites and eventually, gonorrhoea, a city of little children with outstretched hands, bars filled with the continual din of hillbilly music and Navy cussing.

Not a pretty picture, this Japan "a sovereign nation."

But then, the Americans don't go everywhere. A corner of Honolulu that caters to overnight Navy trade is much the same - it's just a pity that we have to spawn our vices on the Japanese. I suppose if they had won the war, it would be the same in our country - to say the least.

As always, I'm impatient to get back to Hawaii and hoping now to make it in three weeks or so. But I did get a chance to do a lot of shopping here and some sightseeing up and above the thieves' alleys

downtown.

I've lost track of everything stateside - football, politics, and even the date of Thanksgiving - but I supposed you'll be on your way back to Delmar for a well-earned rest just a few days after you get this.

There's not a thing I can tell you about college any more - so it's about time you started telling me, about Cornell. Write me at the Pearl Harbor or Honolulu address, maybe between reunions at home and I hope to eyeball it before Xmas.

You, me and the rest of us pitiful slobs are destined to go thru life remembering college as the greatest of the great. You've probably already discovered that - but if not, you will have by the time spring bursts upon Ithaca. College is really the greatest.

I'd laud it less, perhaps, in a different set of circumstances of my own, but laud it I would, regardless.

College is the places, the buildings, the snow and the leaves, the sweaters and the overcoats, the books - but mostly it's the people. It takes a while to find the people you'll remember, and you find them in a lot of peculiar ways. But when you think back upon the places (Schoellkopf, Willard Straight, etc etc) they're associated with people - always. And you'll go back to the places only to find them somehow different, because the people aren't there to go with them. That's when you become simpering slum, ailing out to the kids in beanies and slickers and slacks that it's not the same anymore, not like the good old days when you were in school - and the kids nod, snicker behind their backs and go off, hand-in-hand, to their next party, or their next class, or to TGIF.

Thomas Wolfe expressed very well that "you can't go home again." You can't. Anywhere. It always changes - at 49 Rowland, 102 Walnut Place, Clara Dickson Hall, Felta Nu Thi, etc...

Alice and I are prepared (it's good for morale to think ahead) for a big Colgate weekend in 1955, when we'll get together with all sorts of people we haven't seen for 4 or 5 years and bemoan the loss of the old gang, then get together with ourselves at night (like everyone else), shake our head and mutter "I wonder whatever happened to old Sploogle, he used to be a ball of fire"...

Ah, so goes it with the senile.

Maybe when that grand and glorious junior year rolls around for Kitty Lake, we can get together and have a collegiate weekend someplace...Cornell, Columbia (if I get there), or Syracuse.

I'm practically out of the Navy now, you know...only 600 days to go...or about 20 months.

Say your prayers for the prevention of war, will you please?

Right now I'm sweating out a transfer from Pearl Harbor...Cdr Lederer promises to let J. Lake stick around for another year - if that happens, I've got it made - if not, maybe I'll go over the hill and out into the Everglades to hide. My brief acquaintance with sea

duty out here has not pleased me.

Next time, Air Force. (God forbid)

Well, don't forget to write. Keep 'em guessing (all but the profs)
and don't flunk out until I get back.

Lots of love,
Big Brudda

To his mother...

Sunday, Dec. 6

Dear Mom,

Your boy is now in Yokosuka, once again patiently playing the Navy game of "wait and see." Everybody wants to be home for Christmas and I'm no exception - but from the look of things, a lot of us will not make it. Over 1300 transients are living in a floating cow barn that counts - takes the Receiving ship here...checking daily flight drafts and standing striped watches.

Kelley and I have been here for three days now - an optimist would guess at our departure as next weekend sometime. I'll continue to play Cassandra, as I'm sure Pop wants me to stay in character and guess at any time after that. If they ship us out within 3 weeks, good enough - I'll even stop complaining for a while.

I'm disgusted! We took a lot of pictures down in Sasebo and lost 'em all...up here we catch the duty every other day so I've foresworn all liberty until I hit Hawaii again. In fact, I'm not even eager to get to Tokyo. I've seen enough of Japan the Navy's way. Too much conscious effort of the will is required to rise above my environment.

At any rate, I've discovered a niche in the usually-open base library and will try to stay hidden until the big boys decide I can go home. No work (I'm very grateful and none the least ashamed), amazingly good food, an unbelievably cold and dirty "home," and a few bookshelves will be my life until that time.

I suppose I ought to relate my experiences in detail, a la Bob Gardner. But a Navy guy sees too few people and too few places to observe with much objectivity...and I'm sure the same is true of many gov't officials in town, although most of the people and places they see are entirely different.

No matter what anyone says, my attitude is perfectly healthy it's just that counting the minutes until July 4, 1955, takes up so much of my time. But there are only 828,000 minutes left - practically nothing.

You'll hear from the Asiatic wing of the family again before long - give my love to Dad and Kitty (she'll be there again soon) -

Affectionately,
John

And to Alice...

Sunday afternoon

The burden of time -

--and yet it's better than manual labor. Doing nothing, I mean. My aversion to work is the only feeling approaching in intensity my desire to get the hell out of here.

The library wasn't open this morning, so the time was spent reading such items as *Movieland*, *Women In Prison* and the daily copy of *Stars and Stripes* in the coffee hall (always jammed...when you get a seat you keep it for hours) - it becomes the beer hall after working hours and after the nightly movie, we roll the burden of time over there. Last night's offering of Martin & Lewis in "The Caddy" was even worse than the one you slept thru.

Except for New Year's Day bowl games, football season is over - this has been a very bad 7 weeks.

Are you acquainted with a female named Mary who dresses hair in the E.A. shoppe at the Royal? Kelley squires her about - also one of her customers, a middle-aged thing named Leona.

We're both looking forward to rehashing this trip over a steak and subsequent bottles of wine at the Lakes'.

Woes - we lost all our photos. One pack of hometowners and a huge pile of cumshaw was thrown out by the photo lab crew in Sasebo. Evidently my only mementoes of the voyage will be my sunken cheeks and protruding (or would you have it protruding?) ribs.

One of us is making out, anyway - but it doesn't prove you're the world's best wife just because you're on a better-a-day schedule from now on. I'd write if I were married to L. Borgia...in fact I'll enough have (jesus-look what I did w/o a typewriter) i.e., I'll have enough time to write.

A little while ago I read the back copies of *Newsweek* that I missed while on the high sea. Nov. 2 had a story on college students that seemed to me quite unrepresentative. Acceptance of McCarthyism, for instance. I hope some of its conclusions were falsely drawn, at any rate.

Three letters in seven weeks - no wonder this has been a miserable trip.

Living out of the sea bag is great, too. Why, we even had lockers in the mine force! Two worthwhile things I did on this trip were 1) keep a copy of the orders in my wallet - an lvey suggestion that proved erudite; 2) lug a laundry bag along...I put about 15 lbs of dirty clothes across the counter of the Sano-something establishment today.

A third, it occurs, was returning to 1849 Kaisoo St. on the morning of Oct. 17th because (a) without the pea coat I'd be dead now and (b) getting a chance to kiss you goodbye again was like cheating fate - the memory has been rattling around in my head for almost two months. You're good!

I must admit 1 good thing about transient status here - the food is pretty fine. Like other shore establishments in Japan, it employs civilian Japanese mess boys - and in this one they even wait on tables. The chow's good and there's enough of it - couldn't say either one about most of these ships.

Shore duty is bad - sea duty is worse - and I have 578 days to go.

If I remember rightly, among those leaving Hawaii today are Dick Raymond, Lance Cook, and Don Ross...in 5 months - Sid Rheuban. Time continues to plod and maybe some day we'll really get out.

Really feels like winter. Cold, rough wind coming in off the Tokyo Bay - whipping up the water and people's collars. It gets dark by 4:30 and the sunlight is that peculiar brand which you haven't seen since 1952 - looking like it's been filtered thru gauze.

Always there are intermediate steps. The boys on the APL, once they're transferred to flight status, feel like freed slaves. So then they're restricted to the ship until departure and it seems that period is often longer than the earlier one. Quite an experience. I honestly wish I could come up with some concrete suggestion for improving the mill - I could gripe with a clear conscience, anyway. Evidently it's just bad business trying to go to the U.S. around Christmas-time. Thank God I don't have to make it all the way to the U.S. proper - a guy who left Sasebo with us is heading for Illinois on emergency leave and hasn't even gotten on a stateside flight draft yet - his whole family has had time to die by now. Hope they really weren't in need of him.

Old Yokosuka, she is really a big base - almost as large as Pearl Harbor. But in the light of experience, not nearly so peachy.

Yep, every day goes slowly, but every day counts on four years. As of January, we can say "Next year we get out." - or - "Our enlistment is 62 % fini." - or - "A year and a half left."

No matter how I try, that keeps coming out like "Just six more centuries" -

Please replace this with page 4, which you will find enclosed (and secured).

More people I talk to, the more I realize how ridiculous this trip was! Any one of 3 other commands could have done the job more easily, simply, quickly, efficiently, cheaply - etc. etc. etc.

This sounds like the real me - every letter - but it's better than a breezy, newsy opener like, say

Dear Alice,

Well guess what? Last night all my hair fell out!

- or -

Honeykins,

I don't know how to tell you this, but they say I have syphilis.

- or -

Wifey dear,

Last night I killed a man.

*

If you get one of those, then and only then are you to stop loving old Janw. In the meantime, warm over a big we-love-each-other-because-we're-us embrace and when I do get back we'll fry eggs on it.

You're good!

-rmmmfff-

Johnny

Despite his fears, my dad managed to get back to Honolulu in time for Christmas, temporarily sparing all his acquaintances another diatribe on military inefficiency. It was another wonderful holiday. John and Alice were settled comfortably in their house, made into a snug little home through the presence of house plants, my father's music, my mother's good-smelling meals, piles of books and magazines and the cats that patrolled among them when not sleeping under the Christmas tree.

The PIO gang had a Christmas party at the Taj Manoa, and everyone brought an ornament for the tree. Cousin Gracie, who was pretty, sweet and innocent, endeared herself forever to the fun-loving group with her contribution, a lovely velvet fish, deep red in color, on the back of which was written, "Fuck you." Everyone was shocked and delighted.

John welcomed 1954 – "now I can say 'next year I get out of the Navy'" – and time marched on, too slowly to suit him. Admiral Felix Stump replaced Radford as Commander in Chief, which brought some unwelcome changes to the informal work atmosphere at the office, now surrounded by a chain link fence and traversed more frequently by unfamiliar officers, who took offense at fringed, threadbare uniforms.

Despite his percolating ill will toward the military, or perhaps motivated by it, my dad prepared for his final rating test, which, if passed, would yield a promotion to first-class petty officer.

...Gotta haul out the boob-books and start studying several weeks from now for the first class test, some six weeks off. First class petty officers in the Navy do nothing, by tradition. Especially on ship. But they also are usually career men. I shall baffle the experts, first, by making the rank during my first enlistment and second, by then chucking the whole business and getting the hell out.

He passed the test, of course. And as he marveled at how time had passed, he also realized how close he'd become with his friends in the radio section, describing them briefly for his father:

The radio section at CINCPAC is the last stronghold for the old-timers...I've been with PIO longer than anyone else except Commander Lederer, out of a total crew of more than 40. Radio has a really great collection...

Pat McLatchy, grad, U of Montana – knows things about wildcats, national parks, the guitar, etc.

Darrell Maddox, grad, U of Ohio Wesleyan – fine taste in literature, movies, pitches a swift softball, good singer...

Phil Haff, student, Antioch College – my kind of character, cynical, irreligious, Democrat, anti-McCarthy, pro-New York Giant, pro-skin diving, natural comedian and has a terrific mind.

J.Lake, boy swabbie.

Darrell Vincent, grad, U of Wisconsin – agreeable guy, which is all I know about him...he's been here almost two years but is a new recruit in radio.

Chief petty officer Bob Hampton, ex-boiler tender, resentful of our educational advantages but otherwise fairly broadminded and able to be borne for 465 more days.

Hampton and my father had managed to get along for most of his time at the PIO. Although “Hamp” took his share of behind-the-back jibes from the radio crew (he was the boss and a career-man, after all), they respected him.

Pat McLatchy was especially fond of Chief Hampton because the chief found other work for Pat when it became clear that McLatchy wasn't a natural script writer. Hampton understood McLatchy, a “country boy from Montana” and an anomaly among the anointed because of his rural background, and he quietly mentored him.

“He was one of the most important men in my life,” McLatchy told me, revealing something he would never have admitted to the other guys at the time. “He was the quintessential Navy regular, except he was very, very intelligent. Not intellectual, though. He didn't connect with the real intellectual types, because they were cynics.”

Hampton was a master of “cumshaw,” the art of circumventing military bureaucracy and quickly procuring whatever was needed. Defined as a word of Chinese origin meaning present or gratuity, cumshaw as slang came to mean ill-gotten booty or material acquired through shrewdness, behind the scenes. It was used as both noun and verb. Cumshaw was as much a part of Naval tradition as reveille and dress-blues, and successful purveyors of cumshaw were greatly admired for their wily schemes. Chief Hampton, who'd spent 20 years as an engineer on a destroyer, was among the best at it.

“He set up the radio studio by stealing equipment from an armed forces station that had closed down,” McLatchy explained. “He got a truck with no requisition and just took the stuff. Whenever we needed technical equipment, no matter how rare it was – A left-handed gadget? No problem – he'd get it somehow.”

Hampton needed the anointed to run his radio station, just like he needed an occasional left-handed gadget, but his disdain for the men he regarded as draft-dodgers was clear. Still, he generally gave them room and they learned to work around him. But as my father's time in the Navy grew short and his insubordinate gestures became more overt – he had begun showering and shaving at night, when he got home, rather than before work, and he still refused to pay for new uniforms – Hampton's patience began to wear.

Buck has returned to the States from Europe – enjoyed himself a lot over there and since his sub is due for a year long overhaul in Philadelphia, his sailing days are probably over. I'm not so sure about my own, since the constant clash of wills between the chief and myself is availing me nothing except the maintenance of my integrity...a poor price to pay for a Far Easter cruise, I suppose, and the same may still be in my future. I give thanks, however, that one more will probably be my limit and that nothing they can do now will be too bad, really, as long as I get out of this mess by next summer.

254 days.

My dad was given sea-duty orders to go to Indochina, but these were rescinded at the last minute because of a change in the political situation in Viet Nam. Phil Haff recalled that my father was punished a couple of times for his rebelliousness, and may have been given sea duty as a result, although I can't confirm it from my dad's letters.

It becomes clear that when he was accepted to return to Syracuse for a masters program, though, his frustration simply fell away. Six months before his discharge date, he was offered a scholarship as well as an assistant teaching position with a stipend and, with his cloudy future suddenly brightened by firm plans, he suddenly became immune to military annoyances and the “tests” presented by Chief Hampton:

My hats are tattered, my uniforms threadbare, my shoes falling apart...but my heart is glad. Such a wondrous thing is this short-timer state of mind.

The future was at hand and the now placidly reflective John Lake made a point to do all his favorite Hawaii things – mostly snorkeling, sightseeing and taking in Hawaiian music – one more time.

John and Alice departed Honolulu in June 1955. The Navy shipped their furniture to Syracuse and their cats to Milton, Massachusetts, to be cared for by Alice’s parents. My father was granted his discharge in San Francisco in July. After a well-planned tour of the American West, they collected Michael and Poody and settled back in Syracuse to re-start their lives. They did not stay very long.

PINKERTON'S, INC.

CONFIDENTIAL

Locate - John Lake

Report of CGB

Date Monday, February 5, 1968

Mrs. John Lake
The Morning Call
Hackensack, N.J.

Stated that Mr. Lake had been under great pressure for about 2 years and had been receiving psychiatric care from Dr. Stanley Pogul of Teaneck, N.J. - 201-833-0027. The doctor is said to have advised Mrs. Lake that his condition was serious and it would be possible for subject to "slip into amnesia." It is Mrs. Lake's opinion that this is what happened to her husband. She stated that she has been in contact with all of his friends, her friends and their friends and none have seen subject since the date of his disappearance.

Mr. Lake has a special checking account at the Bankers Trust Co., Rockefeller Center Branch and as of about one week ago, no checks had been presented for payment. Mrs. Lake has also alerted the Diners Club, American Express and Air Travel Card and they have agreed to notify her if any purchases are made on these cards. Mr. Lake was said not to be a "joiner" and to the best of Mrs. Lake's knowledge, the only club he occasionally attended, was the Syracuse Alumni Club in New York City. He may have confided in some of the members, but Mrs. Lake has no knowledge of this. She stated that he is not only an excellent journalist, but he had done manual labor and is not afraid of hard work. It is possible that in his present state of mind, Mr. Lake may be employed as a laborer in or near New York City. He is normally clean shaven, but has been known to grow a short beard from time to time.

On the night of his disappearance Mr. Lake took Miss Sandy Robertson, a nurse residing in New York City to dinner at the La Popette on E. 58th St., N.Y.C. Miss Robertson told Mrs. Lake that he ordered dinner, but barely ate any of the food. Most of the evening was spent by subject talking about his children and wanting to see them. He is said to have told Miss Robertson that he thought he would just get on the subway and go to see them. Mrs. Lake will look for Miss Robertson's address or telephone number. She believes she has this information at home. She will also give me subject's social

security number.

According to Mrs. Lake, John had tickets for a play "Brigadoon" for the night of 12/24/67, but did not use them. He was also scheduled to cover a sports event in Miami, Florida in December and had made plans to visit his sister in North Miami Beach. She has not heard from him and he did not cover the sports event. Mr. Lake usually ate his meals at the Mansfield Lounge in the Hotel Mansfield on West 44th St., N.Y.C. and is known to the staff. Mrs. Lake stated subject's mother, who resides in Delmar, N.Y., has not been told of his disappearance. She stated that it was her wish that should our investigation be narrowed to the Delmar area, that our investigators do not question the mother.

Subject was described as being in good physical health. He has no surgical scars but does have a small chin scar as a result of an old basketball injury. When he grows a beard this scar is not visible.

According to Sandy Robertson, subject had only five one dollar bills and credit cards in his wallet when she was with him on Sunday, Dec. 10, 1967. Mrs. Lake stated she has his passport and other effects. According to Mrs. Lake, after checking subject's wardrobe, he was wearing a black cashmere overcoat, black cashmere blazer with sterling silver buttons, black jersey shirt, dark oxford grey flannel slacks and black leather loafers, no hat, scarf nor gloves, on the night of Dec. 10, 1967.

His birth date was given as 2/18/30.

Detective Merkle of the N.Y.C. Police Department, 6th Pct. has been assigned to this case. Mrs. Lake has been in contact with him but as of about one week ago, there were no developments. Mrs. Lake expressed a wish to fully cooperate with our investigation.