

Sunday, Oct. 17, 1999
Belmont, MA.

Dear Margrit,

When I read through Joche's recent letter of advice about recommendations of temperature and humidity ranges which might be best for the house, I shuddered a little on your behalf. At 66° in the dining room on a very mild day, we have not turned the heat up at all, but have dressed warmly and let the sun warm the house. I know that you have not been used to dressing in layers and enjoy temperatures well above 70°. I am also concerned lest you dry yourself out with electric heaters. That would certainly be bad for the cough that I often hear during telephone conversations.

Joche does not need all the layers of clothing which I routinely put on. He has continued to work very hard, mostly by himself. He has completed installation of baseboard heating elements in the addition and insulation of the high vaulted ceiling in the third floor back room. Now he is starting on the front room from which one now has a striking view of a few vividly colored trees, notably the small locust planted in the green strip between sidewalk & street. We'd like to take a day or two off to see foliage a little further from home but I'm not happy at the prospect of riding any distance in a car.

When I thought about your return to Kennebec this week, I wanted to make one more attempt to get you to look for witch hazel. I suspect that I may already have made the name unwelcome to you. Last year you showed me a dry branch with opened seed pods - about as much like blooming witch hazel as a withered apple core resembles a glossy fragrant ripe apple.

Why do I bore you with annually renewed requests that you look for witch hazel in bloom? Am I like a cat that brings in its dead prey to the dismay of its owner? If you ever do get out in the woods at this time, perhaps you will understand. At one time I thought of typing onto the outside of the envelope: Look Inside For Limited Time Offer! And of course at my age, at your age, there really isn't that much time left. * See below

See p. 47 of Stupka's Wildflowers in Color and also p. 192 of Mrs William Starr Dana's How to Know the Wildflowers. You can ^{leave} pass this aside or you can drive down to the road that leads up to the ^{George} ~~Old~~ Feathercamp Tower, where we saw lovely little wild flowers two summers ago. The witch hazel was certainly down along the stream and often grows at the edges of woods in damp places.

Klemens has been away since Wednesday at a big conference of his Dialysis Company's personnel in St. Petersburg, FL. Perhaps they expected him to bring the whole family, as he did once when the meeting was at Hilton Head. Anyway he was given a large ocean-view suite with 4 King-size beds and 4 TVs! When he offered to give it up, the Secretary said that he should "enjoy it." He made at least one successful talk. He comes back this evening at 8³⁰ pm or later.

Laura just called. She will be out at book club meeting from 7 until 9 pm. If Rebekah managed most of the problems, and I helped her with spelling & stylistic corrections of an English assignment.]

* * More nature notes: I suppose that ~~another~~ other factors in my zeal to persuade you to look for witch hazel (to get the children here to stop their noise to listen to the moaning bird) are rooted.

10/17③

in childhood experiences. I remember as a child being deeply impressed by lines from "Georg" Elgy written in a ~~four~~ County Churchyard

"Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear;
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air."

Later, in ninth grade, I memorized much of the context of these lines as the class read aloud and chanted in unison most of the poem. Perhaps the method is not suited to contemporary schools, but it worked.

I was also much impressed by the way my mother leaned down to caress beautiful cushions of moss during our walks through the woods of the Pocono Mountains. Such a gesture reflected an intimacy with the world of nature.

I know one place where witch hazel grows in Belmont and will make it my business to take any of the children who will go with me late this month or in early November, when I think it is in bloom.

I had intended to congratulate you on your success with cosmos, planted against the porch foundation wall. It flowered and looked very beautiful despite my prediction that water-rooted plants generally fail. My own cosmos is just recently coming into bloom and has not yet been frost killed. When I learn of a predicted drop in temperature, I gather more leafy branches with buds & put them in a vase on kitchen windowsill and on the dining room table.

At 4:45 must go next door while Hanna takes IV. to trumpet lesson. Rebekah to Hebrew lessons as she says "I could take Ben's hand teach along." But I go! Love Margaret

Now that I have gotten the witch hazel bee out of my bonnet", I should tell you briefly of some sympathetic thoughts I have had recently about Mutti. As I hobble around my house and haul myself up stairs, I see Mutti moving from stove to sink to table in her rocking gait. I never heard her complain of pain though she must have had a good deal of discomfort. I meditate also on a couple of times when Mutti asked me to explain about the poetry that I was then teaching. Somehow it was not an exposition which I could get started. Nowadays with the interest that I have acquired in watching and studying the people I meet, mostly in Tophen's practice, we might have more to talk about. That's one of life's problems: by the time you grow up enough to talk to the person who challenges and disconcerts you, that threatening figure has gone.

Today we have had two intermissions of a kind from which I could make quite entertaining stories.

At 1:00 as I was putting on my new shoes to get ready for exercises, perhaps a walk, a patient appeared at the door. He is a gentle, foolish, mentally retarded man, to whom I had last week sent a letter intended to tell him that we had moved, that I would make a new appt. for him. He comes, he says, to be sure that we have his new telephone number. So Tophen examined his eyes, then drove him home. Then a lady called, who can't get used to her new glasses. Her son, who works at night, could bring her now. She is nice, anxious. So Tophen spends an hour on her while I visit with the son, who for 20 years has worked for the Bester Globe in "distribution". Every day he is up at 3:00 and on his way to work to make sure all the papers, including N.Y. Times, Wall St Journal etc get where they are going. On vacation he travels, trading his Dominican time. Share

You remember Mutti's delight in going to town. Largely I think because of the people she saw. A meal at the Piccadilly Restaurant - Russo restaurant for her.