

August 8, 1955

Dear Grote:

It was good to get your recent letters, and to know that all goes well with you. You will be glad to know that your recorder cleared San Fran on the "Oronsay" on 8/5 and should be in your hands shortly. The enclosed correspondence is interesting and gives you the whole story. Please note that you will have to contact the proper people in Sydney for transshipment to Hobart because **Oriant** only goes that far. Charges to Sydney have been paid here.

All the above required fast footwork here, and of course knowing the ropes is half the battle. Fortunately, I had filled out export declarations for some of our Canadian shipments so I sat me down and filled them out in detail. These were sent Airmail to Union Steamship in San Fran ahead of the package, so they were looking for it----and I had it marked up for fair with all the dope all over it.

However, all the above on my part would have done no good except for the cooperation of Pilcher at Union Steamship who put the charges on the cuff to get the shipment cleared. This is probably quite a breach of policy, and so his check is going out by Air mail tonight so he can send you the necessary papers you will need to get the item transhipped at Sydney. Damn decent of him, in my opinion.

The express charges were 11.55 and I have the waybill which is no longer needed. I will deposit one of your Gary Wheaton Bankchecks to cover these expenses which I didn't do earlier since your advance covered earlier expenses. Also, I received another Gary Wheaton check for you a couple of days ago along with mine. There are one or two other checks here which I will deposit at the Harris if I get time, or keep them here for you.

It hardly seems possible that Todd will be going to school this fall, but into Kindergarten he goes, and it will be what he needs. Three down and one to go. Only three more weeks of vacation, and in case you don't know it outfitting and getting children ready for school is quite a chore and requires \$\$\$\$\$\$. Andy is in sixth grade and quite a charmer. Jeff is an avid baseball fan and is developing into a good athlete. As a result of Jeff's interest ^{Andy} is also a "red hot" "White Sox" fan and baseball is on the radio regularly. Larry is coming out of his shell in the last six months, and he and Todd keep everything stirred up most of the time. They are really four handsome and generally well behaved children. And if the two little ones do as well in school as Andy and Jeff, that will be a real treat. Only yesterday did we have any sickness, and today they all have the summer pip with a fever and upset stomach which they probably acquired at the swimming pool.

Our only two real problems at present are the fact that the house is getting too small, and that I'm not making enough money to provide an adequate living. Jean has been more than patient in realizing that it takes time to get a business started, but by now we should be getting some of the rewards for our efforts and economies. Such is not yet the case. For awhile I thought that it took time to put over a new product, and then I felt that next month would always be the beginning of the up trend. Next month never came. Today we have many competitors most of whom make a metal vertical blind. One is made by the big name in the drapery hardware industry (Kirsch) who have spent more money on national ads than we have invested in our entire operations. However, people aren't rushing out to buy their blind despite the promotion.

I have come to the conclusion that people in general do not like vertical blinds. One of the reasons is that they cost too much in relation to "what people think they ought to cost", and therefore people don't feel they are getting value for their money. Secondly, there is something wrong with the engineering of all of them including ours, and this has not helped the cause of vertical blinds in general.

In other words, if one of our competitors was selling his product like crazy, then we should find out what the matter is with ours, and change it. This is not happening. What to do??? Our observations are certainly interesting, and very close to the truth, and your alternatives make sense although working for a large organization may be quite a change after this---almost too much.

Also, Grote, nobody likes to be considered a failure, and in business there is no middle ground. You either put it across or you don't. However, I feel now that we have given this ~~the~~ a fair run, and if it is not going to pay off then the thing to do is to get out. Had ~~we~~ been forced to do that a few months after we started, I would have felt differently because we hadn't then had time to give the ~~the~~ product a fair run for its money.

At the present time, the only asset we have that is really worth anything is our experience/~~the~~ in what is wrong with our product. We have been working on improvements to overcome the known deficiencies of the product, and I am loathe to quit until we have made these changes and see if the product is more salable. I am straining to get two of these four major changes into production within sixty days. If I'm lucky I'll get the other two in ninety days. Then, if it doesn't sell, I can pack it in with a clear mind. Meanwhile, it is possible that the business won't support both of us (Mike and me) at its present level of operations, and if that is so, I'll get a job or Mike can until we can make these changes.

And it won't take long to find out because our loyal dealers will start doing a better job within a short time, and if they do, then the others can be easily persuaded. In other words, I'm not going to continue this the way it is, but I'm not getting out until we have a chance to profit from correcting our mistakes. What would really gravel me is to get out just prior to a big swing in public demand so that anybody in this business couldn't help but make money---after sweating it out all these years and losing a small fortune along the way. However, that is part of the gamble, and if our improved product doesn't sell, then I will feel confident that vertical blinds are not what the public wants.

All the above, is in addition to the day by day aggravations, and by now I am of the opinion that two out of three people are probably cheats, liars, bastards, or crooks. One out of three is for sure, and the second one is only waiting for his chance to pick up a buck, and if he stakes are high enough ethics are thrown out the window,

As far as the house is concerned we are still thinking of moving it because the land will bring as much ~~the~~ or more without the house as with it. If we are lucky we may get it moved this fall, and if not then next spring sure. Lots are hard to come by now in Wheaton, and particularly in a location where we can move this house. However, we're still working on it, and hope to be successful in finding a satisfactory lot for which we can get a moving permit. The last spot was a mess without sewer or water, and the cost of putting them in was prohibitive. However, somebody bought the lot for more than we would have paid, and still has to put in the sewer and water. Lots are getting scarce. You'd never recognize the town, and I'm not convinced that suburban Wheaton is giving full value for the tax dollar.

We are glad you will be with us for Christmas so keep us posted as to your plans. Fitting you in for the holidays will be no problem if you aren't too fussy---but for God's sake give Jean a little advance notice so we can shift things around. Let's hope your plans and my plans are pretty well defined by then, and that things will be somewhat easier for all of us.

