

Dear Dad -

Wednesday night -

It was very good to hear from you again after such a long time. I've thought over the many things you spoke about; however, I still disagree with many which is natural since we are a generation apart and you should not be surprised.

Your suggestions are thoughtful and appreciated but I believe that I am unable to profit by your past lives and experiences. It is unfortunate, but none of us absorb all the lessons learned by those ahead of us. Perhaps it is because we are all unique personalities whose future life's objectives vary accordingly. What has seemed a successful life to you probably differs with mine and not entirely because I am young and inexperienced, for I need not remind you, how time changes one's society and culture. Of course, effort is and always will be a requisite of happiness. In that, we agree. But for my life ambitions, I've learned by now not to count on what one plans to a great extent.

First, I'm surprised at Uncle Leslie for believing that I could reach the so-called "top-flight".

I'm sure Leslie is content in being a well-loved small-town doctor. Perhaps at times he wishes he knew more, but I don't believe he would ever change places with any Harvard top-flighter. In short, Dad, I have no wish to go to Harvard, nor any burning desire to reach fame in medicine. To be a great man, psychology tells us that we must have unusual ability plus a drive. Dad, you weren't a Phi Bet and I won't be either. You had ambition as an engineer and went far in that line. I only think I have ambition to be a doctor, but that doesn't mean to me chemistry, physics, and college biology. Nor does being a doctor necessarily require it to. Then why do I want to be a doctor? Because I like people, not in the sense of a gang, but as people to help.

As for my plans, at this moment they are simply this: Next summer I shall study chemistry and psychology at Columbia. Next fall I would like to go to Dr Babbot's medical school in Brooklyn. Why there? Well, it's small, personal, not too difficult, and most of all, I like the place. And why next fall, well, Dad, Amhurst is lovely, a great opportunity

to study for certain people. But, I don't care
for knowledge, but mostly for action and this
way I'll get it. But this is not my life in the
future. It will be a large part of it, and that I
want it to be, but happiness for me lies in a
future with you. Please don't misunderstand me
as a sentimental youth, I don't mean to be. You
know, Dad, it is only our society which places an
economic pursuit so high up among the activities
of life. A happy home still holds for me a childish
ambition. You are in a position to tell me how
much a vacation adds to that success.

And now you know, and my one hope
is that you and Mother are not disappointed.
I'm not shooting for a star and I know it,
but that is the way I see things.

Well, much love and happiness to
you both. I'm really serious about this one
medical school. It's good and has all the
stuff that is needed. It will be up to me there.

Sincerely,
Tom.

November 4, 1940.

Dear Tom:

Your last letter was the best one I have had from you and I have enjoyed it very much. It shows that you have been thinking about your future and gives me a much better insight into your thoughts, future plans and ambitions which I wish to fully respect and, if possible, assist you in attaining them. I surely do not wish to interfere with any of your well thought out plans or decisions but I do wish to be sure that your plans are well thought out and your conclusions based on a firm foundation, both logic and fact. We should guard against any snap judgment in a situation of this kind.

Lots of young folks have come to the same conclusion as you that they cannot count on what one plans to a great extent. I wonder if they really have planned or have just been doing some wishful thinking. Possibly they have reached that conclusion on one failure or, in other words, on too narrow a time basis. It is not easy to lay out successful plans; this is one lesson you learn in engineering. Plans often start as wishful thinking but an engineer is required to crystallize his thoughts enough to put them down on paper where details of design, strength, cost, part lists made, an estimate of the time required for construction and when these carefully thought out plans are put into operation they generally succeed. But a plan which never gets beyond the imagination, which is not much more than a wish with no firm foundation to place it on, is doomed to failure from the start. I am as much convinced as ever that if a fellow plans for a certain objective - within practical limits - and works intelligently toward that objective, he will have a very good chance of reaching it, but most young folks are very impatient and do not like to take into consideration this time element.

I agree with the statement in your psychology that to succeed one must have ability plus a drive. I know that you have ability but it needs stimulation. I feel something has happened to undermine your confidence. When at Pingry you would absorb information very readily and studying was easy; that took concentration and the ability to read thoughts in the words rather than the words themselves - the quicker you regain this faculty the easier will be your progress.

It is hard to see at this time how mathematics, chemistry, physics and other general knowledge fit into the final picture; you probably do not require them for ordinary practice but in the past you have talked about helping humanity by doing research work and thus advancing the frontiers of medicine, then they would be equipment and tools you would need. There is so much to be known about medicine; in the past few years they have made more positive advance than had been made in the century previous and much more is to come. Did you ever stop to think why we have so many so-called "incurable diseases"? When the medical profession does not know much about a disease, why they call it "incurable". The disease is probably not incurable as a great many such have been taken off the list - it is called "incurable" because they do not know enough about it.

Alpha Delta Phi House,
Amherst, Mass.

P.S. As we are apt to have a sudden cold during a week's cogitation that you put some alcohol in the car.

The easiest way to acquire knowledge is to get curious about some of these things; then your attitude changes. I note that you have no ambitions toward Phi Beta Kappa and I must say that I did not either. However, when I once began to ask myself questions as to what made things go and found out how little I knew, that was when I went back to Michigan. I never thought of grades but was thinking about the opportunity the school presented of finding out a lot of information. The grades took care of themselves and the honors as well for it came to me as a complete surprise when I was advised that I had been elected to Phi Lambda Upsilon, the honorary chemical engineering fraternity, and Sigma Psi, the honorary scientific fraternity whose rating is really higher than Phi Beta Kappa in the literary field. Well thought out and your conclusions based on a firm foundation, both logic and fact. We should guard against any snap

Judgments. You wish to serve humanity which is a very fine objective but to serve them most effectively should you not have the best possible training not from the standpoint of economic return, but from that of being able to do the most good and avoid serious errors? How in medicine are you going to have safe action without knowledge? If you or one of your loved ones had something seriously the matter, would you wish to place yourself or them in the hands of a doctor that you did not feel had the latest and best knowledge on the subject? engineering.

Plans often start as wishful thinking but an engineer is required to crystallize his. I judge from your letter that Dr. Babbot must be an extremely fine man for he has apparently completely sold himself to you. I am sorry that I have never had an opportunity to meet him but his high personal qualities may not make his medical school the best one for you to attend. I hope you will hold off your decision on this a little longer. It may be a very fine school - I don't know - but I would like to have more information about it. Since you are interested in it, possibly you can tell me these things:

1. How long has the school been established?
2. How large is the teaching staff?
3. How many students?
4. What are their facilities in the way of buildings and equipment?
5. Are their teachers outstanding men in their line and recognized in certain lines of research?

It in certain lines of research? mathematics, chemistry, physics and other general knowledge fit into the final picture; you probably do not require them for. Mother finds that Scof and Mary Dee are planning to come over next weekend so, our visit to Amherst is again postponed. Mother is writing you more fully. If we do not get up to Amherst we will be looking forward to a good visit from you at Thanksgiving time. I was not sure from your letter the date you will be home; it looked like the 20th but as you probably are adhering to the old Thanksgiving date, I presume it will be the 27th. profession does not know much about a disease, say they call it "incurable". The disease is probably not incurable as a great many such have been. Affectionately yours, is called "incurable" because they do not know enough about it.

Mr. Thomas C. Wickenden,
Alpha Delta Phi House,
Amherst, Mass.

P.S. As we are apt to have a sudden cold snap I would suggest that you put some alcohol in the car.
(Over)