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Letter from Linda Grace Hoyer to John Updike, March 19, 1951

Linda Grace Hoyer

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March 19, 1951

Dear John:

Your father called the Greenwich Updikes last evening and learned at least two things of interest: a note, officially, inviting you to visit them at your earliest convenience is in the mails and, since Jean is very much interested in eligible young men, I'm sure Kit would be welcome to stop over there with you, if he leaves Harvard with you. Of course I did not share in the conversation but I got the impression that Mary is very anxious to see you under all circumstances and for any length of time. Don, however, is still lord of the manor and, in a manner of speaking, a little bored with his wife's side of the family. So, when you go there, treat him with all the deference he expects from all of us. No kidding!

The other thing we learned is: the blondes will be coming to Plowville in April when Jean has her spring vacation instead of now. So, stop and see them by all means.

Going back to my comment on the social science essay, here is a quote from Bertrand Russell's The Conquest of Happiness. It came to us by way of Mr. Hemmig but is nevertheless true, I think.

"Human beings differ profoundly in regard to the tendency to regard their lives as a whole. To some men it is natural to do so, and essential to happiness to be able to do so with some satisfaction. To others life is a series of detached incidents without directed movement and without unity. I think the former sort are more likely to achieve happiness than the latter, since they will gradually build up those circumstances from which they can derive contentment and self-respect, whereas the other will be blown about by the winds of circumstance, now this way, now that, without ever arriving at any haven. The habit of viewing life as a whole is an essential part both of wisdom and of true morality, and is one of the things which ought to be encouraged in education."

In fact, I think the long range view of things is the whole excuse for what we call "an education." The techniques for survival should not ever be confused with "education" but studied for the strictly material tools they are. So you went to Harvard which I believe is one of the few places in America where these two forms of the learning process are carefully labelled and separated. And the essay on the middle ages made me very happy because in it you show how clearly you see yourself in relation to the life you intend to live and in relation to the life that was lived by millions of people hundreds of years ago. It is a priceless thing to see, if you want to be happy.

Willis Everhart asked about you and send his best smile, having never seen him smile before I was surprised to see how good it is. The carnations in Willis's vases were lovely, too. *Walter*