

Love to Lucintak
from
Papa

to the most
beautiful girl
in the world

TODAY, THE FRESNO COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY is pleased to announce that it has made a major addition to its William Saroyan Collection: an assortment of signed and inscribed first editions, pamphlets, and manuscripts, but—most important—the archive of Saroyan’s daughter, Lucy (1946-2003). It contains the letters, postcards and notes written to her during a span of almost twenty years, from 1953 to 1972, and is rich in detail on family matters, business issues and current events. (The cover title uses the Armenian diminutive form of Lucy, “Lucintak,” by which Saroyan often addressed his daughter, and is taken from an undated note which prefaces the entire archive.)

THE FIRST ITEM IN THE ARCHIVE is a set of postcards celebrating Lucy’s seventh birthday, and the last is a poignant note regarding the demise of Saroyan’s cousin, Ross Bagdasarian—collaborator with Saroyan on the song “Come On-A My House,” and perhaps best known as the creator of “Alvin and the Chipmunks.” In the letter, Saroyan writes: “Actually, I am shocked and annoyed—at him—for as you know I have this theory that anybody who dies betrays the members of his family and his friends. (It’s not really sensible but that makes no difference.)” In those lines, we see the faintest anticipation of Saroyan’s later, famous deathbed statement: “Everybody has got to die, but I always believed an exception would be made in my case. Now what?”

LITERARY RICHES SIMILAR TO THESE ABOUND in Lucy Saroyan’s archive, and in reviewing the correspondence, it becomes exceedingly difficult to select a favorite note or letter. As representative of the whole, we have selected a lengthy letter from August 28, 1968, previously unpublished (along with the rest of the archive). In this letter, Saroyan poses questions to Lucy as part of an interview-by-mail, done at the request of a German youths’ magazine. Of course, Saroyan—being the inquisitive, opinionated, and boisterous individual he was—could not let the questions stand by themselves; at every turn, he felt obligated to inject his own prompts and comments. In the process, as a reading of the letter demonstrates, he managed to construct a comprehensive monologue/meditation on Life Itself. Therefore, this missive—even without Lucy’s answers—stands as a fascinating private testament, and as a useful introduction to Saroyan as the writer and all-purpose philosopher that he was.

WE AT THE LIBRARY count ourselves as fortunate to have secured this document, along with its many companion pieces, and we are pleased to now be able to share it with a wider public.

William B. Secrest, Jr., Librarian
California History and Genealogy Room
July 1, 2004

2729 West Griffith Way Fresno California 93705 Wednesday August 28 1968

Miss Lucy Saroyan 111 East 73rd Street New York City

Dear Lucy: This morning a letter arrived from Ingeborg Haase of Axel Springer & Sohn, publishers I take it of TWEN, in which he says he has some beautiful photographs of Lucy Saroyan by Mr. Berendsen: would I therefore interview my daughter, so that the photographs can be used in connection with your answers to my questions. Also will I write two pages along the lines of, If I Were a Young German. For which he regretfully can offer only \$1,500. I was thinking about all this when Special Delivery brought a package from you, which was open before I had a chance to read Don't Open Before August 31st---the fact is I really wasn't thinking that my birthday was coming up, I believed the package probably had some connection between the letter from TWEN, but I was happy to have the surprise of finding your lovely letter, and the old-fashioned card saying Happy May Thy Birthday Be, and finally the Daring Young Man Gift, which I shall in fact set up on Saturday, my birthday. ---I thank you with all my heart and I rejoice in you, but at the same time I must let you know that I am deeply troubled about Aram, because day before yesterday I got the third meticulously handwritten letter from him in reply to the liveliest and most cheerful letters I could possibly manage, and each of his letters has found fault with me in a nagging, stupid, meaningless, ridiculous, ill-mannered way, and this time I could take it no more and sent him an angry reply---which I know he needs, but only if he is a competent person, but as all evidence seems to suggest that he simply isn't, the letter I sent cannot be helpful, and so I have been feeling guilty about sending it---but I really don't know what to do about him. The unfortunately thing is that he seems to be stupid in a way that is final, that nothing can stir him out of his stupidity. Can you help me? Can you help him?

Now, I believe I must take up Mr. Haase, and so I shall now see about asking you a number of questions, which you can answer at your leisure, and return to me, so I can send the finished interview, along with My 2-pages on being a young German, to Mr. Haase: but don't let any of this trouble you, or be something to worry about.

1. Lucy, I have been invited by the popular German magazine for young people, TWEN, to ask you some general questions, and as I am in California and you are in New York I propose to do this interview in writing and by mail. First, how do you like your name? I mean, I know everybody in the world, but especially all young people, find fault with the name the gradually discovered signified themselves. And we know from the testimony of experts that a new persons name can have a profound effect on the character he chooses for himself out of the large potential that is in every person in the world before the age of twenty-one. So how do you like your name?

2. Now, how do you like yourself? What I mean is, all of the experts seem to agree that anybody who goes through life not loving the human race, and in fact hating everybody, does so because he feels that when they handed out identities and personalities he was given a raw deal, he was short-changed, and he doesn't like himself. I don't mean he pretends that he doesn't like himself, I mean for some reason he just can't like himself, and he can't believe in anything he thinks or dreams or plans or believes or does. Tell us, tell the young readers of TWEN something about this business of cherishing one's luck, whatever it may be, and about the business of many people in trying to face up to what appears to be poor luck, and thereby to improve it.

3. We all know the world that you were born into on January 17 1946 in San Francisco was a world that was in more trouble than it had ever before been in, and everything seemed to be getting at least ~~XX~~ a little more complicated than ever, if not really measurably worse than ever. Well, what about the world? First, do you feel it is really any of your business what the world is like for the majority of the people who are trying to live in it? Second, ~~apart from~~ apart from the achievements of the human race, both good and bad in all dimensions, what do you like best and most about the world---that is, the realm of man, rather than the realm of nature. I mean, cities, towns, villages, places, streets, traffic, noises, or something perhaps I can't even guess about. For instance, I like the smell of cities, and almost everybody believes cities stink. They don't, it's actually the smell of the millions of people in them---the smell of their dreams, as a matter of fact. But you tell me. And thensecond, A lot of very thoughtful people believe the human race is on its last legs staggering towards total self-destruction. And of course we know that the means for such self-destruction have been abundantly available for almost a quarter of a century. Well, the people I've just referred to are old people, but that doesn't mean their thinking is inaccurate or mistaken. All the same, young people are more nearly the living human race, so what do you think is going to happen along the lines of murder and/or suicide of the whole race itself. For instance, do you think it's really possible, and if so, what can you do to perhaps help prevent it. If you think it's not possible, tell us why.

4. I have always felt that much of the appeal of the human race has been its innocence, or one might even say its terrible ignorance, or even stupidity. Of course over a brief period of something like five hundred million years (which is gone in an electric flash if you are one of the lucky ones who happen to inhabit the earth at the present moment, and happen to be somebody actually breathing somewhere and on your feet), the human race has in fact improved quite a bit---even total strangers upon meeting have been known to smile or nod or murmur goodmorning, for instance. All the same, in all of this time, no member of the human race, no combination of hundreds of members, no philosophy, no religion, no culture, no science, has been able to prevent the most preposterous and disgraceful behavior of great numbers of human beings in the spending of great amounts of physical force upon one another, in wars. What causes this kind of behavior long after everybody has agreed that such behavior is wrong and must be avoided at any cost? A number of scientists believe that if a small nerve and blood vessel in the head is cut in every human being in the world, such behavior will become impossible, both physically and intellectual. If that is true (and I doubt it), would you approve of such a piece of surgery upon the human race?

5. Who do you hate? I mean, poor people are supposed to hate rich people. Protestants hate Catholics. Simple people hate complex people. Beautiful people hate plain people, or should I say other beautiful people, or more beautiful people? I think you have always known that I have always tried not to hate anybody, but of course without total success. And I know you have felt a sudden flareup of hatred in me for you, yourself, my own daughter, because you in turn have retaliated with instant and swift hatred for me---or rather each of us has so deeply regretted an aspect of the other, that we have been blinded by the unfortunate aspect to the dozens of more appealing aspects. Well, we know hate and love are sides of a larger thing which

doesn't even have a name, so that in a sense nobody can hate who doesn't love. All the same we also know prolonged hate is very destructive, and there are scientists who believe it causes cancer, for instance. All right, who do you hate? Why? What do you hate? Why? Or is hate obsolete, as so many of our cultural habits are. Even if it is obsolete, do you see the human race finding out how not to hate and still to remain vitally involved in the human experience. In short, I'm saying the balance of our traditional opposites is so subtle, the emotional and intellectual ecology of man is so central to his truth, that any notion of large improvement is unsound and essentially fantastic---and yet the world is full of religious people of all kinds, or philosophical people of all kinds, who believe man can become something like an angel. Or would you say he is already an angel, but at the same time some kind of a monkey, too?

6. How do you want to put yourself to work during your allotted portion of time? How do you want to participate in the human experience? Do you want to act on the stage or in films? Do you want your character and beauty and intelligence and (yes) your failings, your flaws, your limitations to be known to great numbers of people? If so, why? Or do you want your life to be almost entirely private, a matter of love and sufficiency among those you love who love you. If so, why? Or do you want to live every which way, insofar as that is possible. Publicly and privately simultaneously, or at the very least by turns.

7. And finally, if you had the power to do with absolute success one thing on behalf of the whole human race, what would it be? I remember arguing fifty years ago with some neighborhood boys in Fresno about that matter, because one of the boys said, "I would make death impossible." And I couldn't make him see the futility of that wish. But there are surely other things, short of that, which many young people in the world wish might happen to the human race to make the world and life a little more attractive and sensible for everybody rather than for just a lucky few---such as myself, for instance, and yourself. I mean, if you sometimes forget that there are now about three thousand million people in the world, and that the majority of them never so much as ~~xxxx~~ get enough food to really satisfy their hunger, try to remind yourself of that fact every day, so that you will more deeply understand your own good luck, not so much in having an adequate supply of hamburgers and Cokes, so much as in knowing that you can never really fully achieve your own most profound truth and meaning until the hungry begin to get food, and the homeless find shelter, and the ill are healed, and the mad are comforted into peace and ~~serenity~~ serenity. What would you do for that enormous human race that you don't know and ~~probably~~ in the nature of things can never really know?

I'm afraid I have been a little unfair in the manner in which I have put these few questions to you, but please help me over this failure, as you have over so many others, and let me know you do in fact understand my questions---and I am sure I will understand your replies. With love:

Pope

Dear Zumbweed, I haven't checked this, so make allowances for typing or other mistakes. I love you, thanks again for the both birthday presents. Papa

***T**he Fresno County Public Library acknowledges, with thanks, the private donors who helped make the purchase of Lucy Saroyan's archive and its allied components possible.*

***W**e also wish to thank the William Saroyan Society for its help with this acquisition, and many others; and the kind permission of the Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University, who own the copyright to the facsimiles reproduced in this keepsake, and allowed them to be reproduced on this occasion.*

100 copies

of “Love to Lucintak”

have been printed

to commemorate

the official announcement

of the Fresno County

Public Library’s

acquisition of

Lucy Saroyan’s

archive

William Saroyan
Malibu California



Lucy Saroyan
53 East 93rd Street
New York City N. Y.



VIA AIR MAIL