





# SELECTED LETTERS

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here was only one Woody Deem.

*Everyone I know thought of him as what the Japanese call "a national treasure." He had a sometimes gruff exterior, but it was all a pose. I remember one orientation when the faculty sat in the front row, and each stood in turn to be introduced to the new students. Woody stood, turned to face the audience, scowled, and sat down.*

● *The law school has had a few characters. Monroe McKay was known to lie on the floor during faculty meetings and declare his opinions with a voice from over there behind the chairs. He appeared in class on one of those first Halloweens as The Great Pumpkin, his round orange outfit stuffed with paper. This is the man who became a federal Court of Appeals judge? There is Jim Gordon, who does stand-up comedy and a Masked Marvel shtick at school and publishes articles and books people read mostly for the footnotes and the aside*

And then there was Woody Deem, who rarely told a joke but was everybody's straight man. His boots, diet, and mock-serious manner were grist for teasing. ● My team-teaching Criminal Trial Practice with him 20 times was a highlight of my 41-year academic career. Woody was knowledgeable, experienced, enthusiastic—and he definitely had a flair. We played Mutt and Jeff; he was the overbearing prosecutor and I the advocate for the defense. Whatever the students may have got out of the dialogue, we had fun. ● Woody came to school one day well along in fall semester 1984 and announced that his doctor had said, "You've taught your last class." I taught his remaining Criminal Law classes and finished Criminal Trial Practice alone, but it was certainly not the same without Woody. ● Woody and Norrie moved to St. George for his last several years as he declined. New generations of students have come and gone, vaguely if at all aware of what they had missed. By now half of our graduates have spent their years here cheated of a chance to know one of the great souls. ● Perhaps you think I am waxing sentimental, and I don't dispute it. But I have missed Woody this past decade and wish students had all had a chance to know him. A few years ago the Law School published "Criminals Are Stupid" as a tribute to Woody. It included many of the sort of stories Woody delighted to tell his classes about the impressive stupidity of some criminals. ● Woody was born in 1913 in Salt Lake City and grew up in North Ogden. From childhood he hoped to be a lawyer. After he finished two years at Weber College, his family moved to California, where he graduated from Occidental College at the top of his class in 1936. ● Recently Lorene Barker gave me a trove of letters that Woody had written to her in his young-adult years—a dozen substantial letters and several shorter notes that show his fluency, intelligence, and wit. ● The letters, written to a friend in Ogden, begin when Woody was just 21 and a student at Occidental. He wrote about his college experience—friends, academic success, a rich friend who took him to fancy parties "where I'm distinctly out of place," joining a fraternity, travel with the debate team, banter with faculty and fellow students, dating, and church activity. ● The letters, 1934 through 1939, reflect The Great Depression, but demonstrate that, whatever was happening in the economy, Woody refused to be depressed. The job market was dismal even for Phi Beta Kappas. At graduation Woody wrote: "As for the next year, nothing of any promise has presented itself. When I asked the Dean of Men for his advice, he told me to find a rich widow and get married. Thus far, even that course has brought no success. I may yet join the navy." ● In fact he joined the Civilian Conservation Corps, a government work program organized along military lines to give young men employment improving national forest lands. —EDWARD L. KIMBALL

CO. 902 CCC.  
Tuna Canyon Camp  
Tujunga, Calif.  
February 16, 1937

Dear Lorene,

Now we shall launch out into the Sea of CCC, or further adventures of a Phi Beta Kappa as a California Chicken Chaser.

When I finished at Occidental last spring I found myself hopelessly in debt. The final exams and comprehensive had me very apprehensive, so I did practically no outside work during the last month of school. On top of that I fell prey to the temptations of all the social whirl incident to graduation. I even marched three quarters of a mile in the solemn procession to receive a blank diploma (which I promptly framed). It

was an occasion given to philosophizing upon my part. You may rest assured that I preserved a record of this embarrassing circumstance in my diary. It is now much too cold to recall.

At about this time, I was given an extension of NYA work to the first of July. I had about four months work to make up, so I managed to keep fairly busy. Nothing of consequence happened except that I spent a week at Catalina Island, or did I tell you of that when I last wrote?

Then came the first of July. I was absolutely broke and had nothing at all in sight for the first time in my life. In almost any modern periodical, you can read the story of my next two weeks, wandering about the city applying for every conceivable position and some that aren't. I reached a dramatic climax when I failed to qualify as a dishwasher at a hotel. I climbed the city hall tower and spent a couple hours with myself. (Incidentally, it was almost the poorest company I have ever had). Now that I can look back upon it, I'm sure there is

nothing quite so pathetic as a dreaming young man who managed somehow to get clear through college with all of his ideals intact, only to have them tumble about his head when he tries to sally forth in the manner in which he has been directed by the august persons who address the graduates.

The same afternoon, I signed up for the CCC. For the first week, I'm quite sure that I endured more hardship, more insult, and more defeat than I have ever faced before in my life. We met at the P.E. station in the early morning fog to go in a body to Van Nuys, some forty miles distant, where we were to formally enroll. As I sat in the dismal station (why are railroad stations always dismal?) I looked the gang over searching for one in all the assembled crowd with whom I might have something in common. . . . There was a commotion in the far end. It turned out to be a drunk as filthy and unsightly as some of the underworld characters in French novels. When the sound of his voice rose above his reeking clothes, he made the announcement that he was going along as a cook. Have you ever found a fly in your soup and lost your appetite? What would be the sensation if you had found a snake? Yes, that's just how I felt!

After we had enrolled, we were poured into trucks going to the various camps in the district in much the same manner that grain is poured from the elevators into box cars headed for several destinations. But I learned very quickly. The temperature stood at somewhere around 120 degrees. In our truck load were [men who] at freezing temperature would make an apt subject for a Life Buoy ad. . . .

Upon our arrival at camp, someone bawled out that we should grab our luggage and make for the nearest barracks. The first there would get the first bunks. Already I was a CCC boy. I'm sure I was no more than third in the race for the nearest barracks. In half a minute I had distributed enough of my luggage over several bunks in several barracks to assure me of an almost satisfactory place anyway.

When supper was called, the rush to the mess hall defied description. You would have sworn none of them had eaten anything in a week. When I made my gentlemanly way in, I had to battle with the K.P.'s to make my way to a table. I seated myself very quietly and did my best not to act too much like a Phi Beta Kappa fresh from college who felt that he was in decidedly inferior company. A large burly chap sitting next to me, sniffed the air like a troubled bull and then turning, gave me a shower of potatoes and gravy as he slobbered, "You smell like a damned warehouse, why don't you set somewhere else?" I spent more time looking than eating.

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After the meal, I got out my sheet of instructions and did my best to dress up like a model CCC boy. On the whole I think I succeeded rather well. More was in store, however. I had no sooner started across campus than a rather over important chap grabbed me by the shoulder and shouted, "You're on the K.P., the kitchen's over there." Everybody laughed, just as

they do in the war movies at the K.P. During the course of the evening I managed to assist in the dropping of a dozen large plates; most of them broke, and the mess sergeant threatened to break the rest of them over our heads. It was long after dark when I finished my appointed task. Imagine my feelings when I discovered that the barracks where I had planned to sleep was locked.

While I was sitting on the front steps trying to figure out the next move, the night watchman came along and informed me that the captain had ordered that barracks closed because it was infested with bed-bugs to the extent that one arose very ill after having slept there a single night. He told me of a shack at the other end of camp where I might find a discarded mattress. In the dark, I couldn't see that it was rather filthy, so I was grateful. I made my way to another barracks and discovered an empty bunk purely by the sense of touch. It was an upper bunk at the far end. The fellow across the aisle inquired into the affair and loaned me a blanket.

I used my clothes for a pillow and was optimist enough to think I would sleep. I had almost succeeded in courting the muse when from somewhere below a pair of trousers sprang across my face. A shirt followed. I had seen the size of CCC boots, so I leaned over and uttered a feeble, "Hey!" a voice in the dark, exclaimed, "What the hell are you doing up there?" I couldn't think of anything clever, so I told him that I was sleeping. That, in short, was my first day in the CCC; I shall never forget it!

The next day we were kept in camp for orientation. As soon as I heard the word, I became suspicious. Big words, like big weapons, portend grave danger when manipulated by those who don't know how to use them. I was right. For my "orientation" I was given a bucket, a brush, and a can of lye and ushered into the large lavatory (which had no plumbing.) "Clean it!" were my instructions. My guide added that it usually took all day, so there was no need to hurry. For this task, I was garbed in large yellow shoes, denim trousers that were too small, a jumper that was more of a tent and a hat that was a combination of an empress Eugenie and a beach umbrella. The occasion was propitious for self-pity, but the lye was so strong that I had to keep my

mind on my work. When the day's work was done, not a spot of paint remained in the joint and my bright yellow shoes had turned almost black. By this time, I was fairly well convinced that I couldn't take it. I had already learned that the most convenient way out of the CCC was to pack up at dusk and disappear just as the lights went out. The process is called "Going over the hill."

But the tide turned. The mess sergeant had apparently forgiven me for the broken dishes, because he had asked the captain to put me on as a regular K.P. That was the beginning of the two most delightful weeks of my life, I am quite sure. I was given the highly colorful title of dining room orderly. I was dressed in pure white with large pearl buttons. My sole task was to set the tables, sweep the dining room floor, and wait on the officers' table at meal time. Work began at five thirty a.m. That shift kept me busy until 8:30 a.m., at which time I was free until eleven thirty. I worked then until two, was off until four thirty and then worked until six thirty. In a nearby canyon, I found a secluded little spot entirely shielded by thick brush and towering trees. In fact, one had to know the one way to get

tion of supply sergeant which he had held until the CCC started. He then joined the CCC and took the same position under an old army commander he had known. He was rather likable, very neat, rather an upright sort. But how different his life had been from mine. For him there was no struggle through college, no uncertainty, no driving ambition. Before my week was up, I almost envied him.

Back at camp I fought my first real battle. I learned the whole truth of my advancement. The erstwhile supply sergeant had fallen into disfavor with the captain, but managed to maintain extreme popularity with the fellows. After I took one look at his records and the list of property that he was short, I immediately agreed with the captain, and I wasn't very particular who knew it. A chorus of fellows gathered in front of the recreation hall and held a booing ceremony for the new supply sergeant. The fact that I had been to college made very good ammunition. I heaped coals upon the fire by pressing charges against every enrollee who was short any property for which the captain was pecuniarily responsible. The mob antipathy was short lived, as is any mob action. I contrived to make possible a weekly change of

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in, or the brush proved impenetrable. I spend a great share of my spare time there, taking sunbaths, reading, writing, or just lying on a mat of oak leaves watching the clouds. The glorious part of it was that after working three days, I had three days off. At the close of my first shift, the captain came to me and complimented me upon the way I did my work. Without thinking, I felt a thrill of pride. Afterward, I laughed heartily. I had been deeply complimented because I made a good K.P. in a CCC camp. But I really like it. The seclusion here was so complete, the work so simple, and the surrounding wooded hills so much to my liking.

But clouds appeared on the horizon. One morning as I stood at the captain's elbow, he informed me that I was to pack my clothing immediately and meet him out front, that I was to be promoted, and in preparation was to go to headquarters for a week's study under the supply sergeant there. I couldn't imagine why in the world that should mean so much rush or be done under such dire secrecy, but I didn't want to appear dumb, so I packed. On the way over he told me that I would receive a raise in pay and hold the title of assistant leader (which I learned later means nothing at all in this particular camp). At headquarters I learned first of all the rather minor matter of keeping the books for the supply department of the CCC and the issuing of clothing and supplies, and the much more important matter of chiseling to the extent that there would be no shortages when it came to the matter of property accounting—and shortages are the inevitable lot of the CCC personnel. The man I worked under was to me a very special study in psychology. He had joined the army when he got out of school, rose to the posi-

sheets rather than a haphazard bi-weekly change that had been current. Next I learned to swear, an invaluable aid! Nine times out of ten when you tell a man to go to hell in a loud tone of voice, he won't call your bluff, he'll generally go—away, at least. Then I began making friends and very shortly all objection to me or my office was underground.

While I held this position, one occurrence imprinted itself upon my memory. Once each week, I took a trip to headquarters for supplies, where I mingled with the stooges and gold bricks who lived the urban life of luxury of the headquarters detachment. To observe them, you wouldn't think that they are ordinary enrollees just like the rest of us. I insisted upon wearing my gaudy hat, before mentioned, and a pair of leather heels that made me sound like a whole army. I soon acquired the reputation of being awfully smart for being so dumb. (If you can figure that out.) One day, the warehouse clerk who looked and acted as important as a bloated toad happened to hint that he had been to college. That was an opportunity. Having heard how effectively a college man can be razzed by CCC boys, I decided to try it. When I finished my little speech, he was decidedly uncomfortable. Then I asked him what he took in college. His eyes gleamed, here was his chance, drawing himself up, he declared decorously, "I majored in merchandizing. Having completed but two years of my course, I took such subjects as Advanced Economic Theory, International Trade—but you wouldn't know anything about that, would you? I suppose college is just as far away from your type as is Kamchatka!" "No", I replied, being as mean and small as ever I could, "I wouldn't happen to know the law of diminishing returns; would you quote it?" He couldn't.

Next was "What my, dear fellow, is a protocol?" He had ribbed me mercilessly for being a hude, so I spared him not a bit. After several more unimportant technical questions, I concluded my little show with the suave statement, "And so my dear fellow, I would know nothing at all about college, and especially about a merchandising major!" I pushed my goon hat back onto my neck and sauntered away to the tune of applause and guffaws from similarly persecuted hudes.

After that the game of getting goats became an interesting pastime. Very often it was my goat that suffered, but often enough it was someone else's. On one occasion, a first lieutenant of the Marine Corps refused to honor my requisition on a minor point because I had tricked him into accepting two hundred pairs of old shoes that should have been repaired and greased before they were turned in. I marched into the quartermaster's office and presented my case of injustice. It got results. The quartermaster called up the first lieutenant and informed him that he was to honor my requisition. I pressed the point too far, I fear, because the Lieutenant declared war on me. I was quite relieved when my change of occupation took me out of his sphere of influence.

That was at Christmastime, when I rose to my present position of doubtful honor. I am now assistant company clerk, assistant canteen steward, assistant first aid man, and unofficial assistant to the supply steward (my brother, Aaron), assistant dispatcher, and clerk for the mess steward. You've guessed it, it's merely a matter of titles. I manage to keep very busy, but there is little immediate danger of a nervous breakdown.

... I think you know me well enough to understand just how disappointed I was at not being able to get into school this year. The outlook is now very bright. I will go to school next year. That is very certain. As to just where I will go, there is still some question. An influential friend, Leo J. Muir, has promised to get me in touch with Senator MacAdoo, who some time ago promised to help me find part time work in Washington while I attend school there. I have corresponded with Michigan University and learned that one can go to law school there very cheaply—and Michigan ranks very high as a law school. I'm quite sure it will be one or the other. I have been hoarding my wages like a miser. That, incidentally is a bright spot in this novel experience of mine. My income at present is just a bit vague, but on the average it is something over fifty dollars a month with board, room and clothes besides. It goes without saying that every bit of the cash goes into the bank against next year's education. There is a genuine thrill in looking forward. There is the doubt that I might not be able to do as well as I did at Occidental[, but t]he hope that I might do even better. — The dreams that one inevitably builds for the future.

You were right Lorene, the CCC is no place for anyone who claims to be respectable. Some of these fellows could walk under a snake's chassis without stooping over, morally speaking. At least once a month we have to discharge a man because he has contracted venereal disease. Some of them don't even seem to care! One is constantly confronted with all imaginable forms of vulgarity. However, I can't complain. I

share a very comfortable room in the camp hospital with the first aid man, who is as noble a chap as I shall ever hope to meet anywhere. I could not have found a finer friend in the best college. We have absolute privacy. Only the officers can enter our quarters without our permission. We have access to the hospital washroom. The office force has a private table in the dining hall. I do not attend any formations, I am exempt from all extra duty, and have private transportation to the city whenever I go on leave. Those things don't necessarily go with my position, but I have managed to win the goodwill of the officers, who deny me nothing within reason.

I have tentatively decided to write a book on CCC life. To that end, I have kept a daily diary that boasts eight hundred pages for last year and a good start for this. There are difficulties, however. In the first place, I see the camp life as one totally detached, since I am immune from practically all of its discomforts. Then, too, if I am to write a worthwhile book, I must master the art of being brutal without being bitter, of being serious without being tragic, and of being humorous without being absurd.

I am somewhat hesitant about mailing this letter. I fear I have overemphasized for the most part the unpleasant aspects of this little colony of ours. Frankly, on the whole, I like it here. I think the CCC should be made a permanent organization, and I have high hopes that it will someday take its place in the country as a highly respectable institution.

Sincerely,  
Woodruff

June 30, 1937

Dear Lorene,

The long and the short of it is that I have been offered a job in Washington, D.C., which I considered so worthwhile that I am giving up the scholarship at Duke University. I will have to work days and go to school nights for the first year, but after that I will have night shift and be able to go to school in the daytime.

Since last I wrote you, I have advanced to the much esteemed title of top sergeant at the same time keeping all my other duties and the net result is that I've had my nose to the grindstone continuously. . . .

I'm rather glad things turned out as they did because another two months of CCC life would have proved quite unbearable. All of my friends have left and the only officer for whom I had a wholesome respect is leaving today. It's strange how one comes to see that the changes in his life couldn't have occurred any other way under the circumstances.

Sincerely,  
Woodruff

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Part two, "Washington, D.C.," will appear in the next issue of *Clark Memorandum*.