



Woody Deem, teacher extraordinaire. He came from a poor family, excelled in college, only to graduate (with a Phi Beta Kappa) key broke and with no job prospects. Failing to follow his dean's advice to marry a rich widow, he joined the CCC, matching wits with the system for a year. Education came in handy, as he found his niche as a clerk, putting him in possession of powers that made his life much easier (See "Woody Deem: Selected Letters, Part 1," Clark Memorandum, Fall 1995). But come summer he turned down a scholarship at Duke Law School to take on work in Washington as assistant to a senator and as Capitol guard. That work would pay his living expenses and allow him to attend law school at Georgetown University.

W o o d y D e e m

# Selected Letters

W a s h i n g t o n , D . C .

■ The keen mind, the playful wit, the commitment to hard work,

the generous spirit, and the broad knowledge that he brought to teaching at BYU were evident back in his law school days. Those qualities developed and were adapted to changing circumstances, but they were already discernible in letters to a friend while Woody worked his way through law school.

Illustration by Chris Gall

If you knew Woody, you'll never forget. If you did not, more's the pity. —Edward L. Kimball

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23 4th N.E. Apt. #2  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Lorene, December 19, 1937

...

Congress is fast becoming the butt of all jokes around here. All last week they held late sessions; one night they stayed until ten. More than half of the people who work in the capitol building have to stay each evening until Congress is out, without the opportunity of going out to supper. As a result, about seven thirty or eight o'clock, spirits begin to lag and invective against the legislature runs high. Last night on his way to the barber shop to get a hair cut while they were calling roll upstairs a congressman left word that I should give him a ring if they called for a vote on the floor before he got back. Whenever the session runs past seven the wives of congressmen all dolled up for the evening start stringing in to take their seats in the gallery to wait until the man of the house gets through to take them out. A beacon light burns in the dome when a night session occurs and that brings several hundred visitors up from the city with the result that we have a regular madhouse around here. Last night, an old chap who looked like a farmer came in with a fierce expression on his face declaring that he had come to shoot it out with Congressman Moore, who happens to have been dead for some six years. The old boy was convinced we were merely hiding him and raised quite a storm. Finally in desperation we called the station wagon and sent him away. The charge was drunkenness, but it must have worn off in a hurry, because they turned him loose and he came right back up. He didn't have a gun so it's still a mystery as to how he intended to shoot it out. When the Wage and Hours Bill was recommitted Friday evening, one white-haired congressman with a New England accent came down the hall snorting, "Humph! So the South still rules the House!" After he had gone, one filthy rebel turned to another and said, "That's one time those damned Yankees had to admit they were licked." This last was in fun, I think.

The foreign affairs committee is very seriously investigating the Sino-Japanese situation. One night one of the boys who works in the committee rooms smuggled out some snapshots that had just arrived

from the war zone. The horrors shown there make one's blood run cold. There was one picture of a street filled with the bodies of Chinese defenders. All the clothing that could be used had been stripped from their bodies, and in many places these nude mangled forms were piled three and four deep. The chap who brought them explained that they get several hundred such snapshots every time the mail from the China Clipper comes in. It is inconceivably that any civilized nation could do the things that Japan is doing without being utterly demoralized.

When the British ambassador came up to the capitol last week, several of the gang engaged his English chauffeur in a discussion of the general situation over there. The most surprising information he offered was that the British opinion, so far as he knows it, is distinctly against Edward the VIII. This fellow claims that he was once a guard at one of the royal residences where he had the opportunity of observing Edward, whom he called everything but a gentleman. It may be propaganda, but since then the opinion has been voiced by other Britishers.

...

The night before Thanksgiving, I attended a dance given by the legal fraternity that I have pledged. (I still don't remember the name of it, but it's good orthodox Greek.) It was very different from the parties we used to have out home. Everyone brought his liquor with him, and ordered more at the hotel, so that the tables were fairly littered with national brands and before the evening was over, some of the novel steps in the Big Apple were wholly unintentional. . . .

One night a woman stopped at my desk to wait for someone. When our conversation ran to the war in the Orient, she told me that her husband was in the World War. He claims that several generals ordered their men over the top after they knew that an armistice was about to be declared, and that they did this in the hope of gaining a few more feet of ground and thus gain promotion and decoration for themselves. She was very bitter, declaring that a son of hers would go to no war, save it were one to defend American homes from invasion.

Shortly after that, as I sat here studying, someone tapped me on the shoulder, and pointing to a young man across the hall, said, "See that boy? Handsome, ain't he? He's well built and healthy. He'll look even better in a uniform. I used to look like that before the war—and when war is done with him, he'll look like me—or worse?" When I turned to stare in amazement at the man who had addressed me, I found him to be a horrible cripple, one leg off at the knee, a hand off at the wrist, nose and one eye gone and a livid scar running the length of one cheek. He laughed at my discomfiture and shambled off.

Sincerely,  
Woodruff

Dear Lorene,

[January 1938]

...

You should be glad you aren't here in Washington to have your faith in democracy shaken. Some of the goings on in the Senate rival slapstick comedy. Then in the House they're discussing the appropriation bill which covers so many items that nobody knows anything about it. There aren't more than half a dozen congressman on the floor most of the time. They come in when there is a discussion of some department they are interested in and then leave until time for a vote. Things have just stopped happening. There is little hope of getting anything besides the appropriation bill passed before they adjourn early in the spring to go home for the campaign.

...

I made my first arrest yesterday. There is an ordinance in our police regulations that prohibits dogs and cats in the building. In walked a large gray tom cat, and in the interest of law and order there was nothing else to do but arrest him, which I promptly did. Then when I called the guard room for the squad car, I was told that it was out of gas. When I asked for suggestions, the sergeant told me to raffle the cat off to the highest bidder. Several congressmen stopped to pet him, and finally one of them offered to take him into the restaurant for a bit to eat and that's the last I saw of him.

But now, I must get back to lessons.  
Sincerely,  
Woodruff

Dear Lorene,

March 20, 1938

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And the people in the building are for the most part very interesting. There is one job here, a door job for one of the committees, that has been in one Negro family ever since before the Civil War, and, because of the meritorious service of the founder of the family, it probably will remain so for many generations yet to come. In the Senate post office, there is a very charming lady who captivates everyone. People go out of their way to buy stamps at that station. Her husband was Georgia congressman who died in office, penniless after a life of unselfish public service. This position is by way of tribute to his memory. One of the engineers got his job during Teddy Roosevelt's administration and has remembered all of the scandal of the interim. Every now and then he pauses and regales me for a couple of hours. One of the guides here, a rather old lady, lost a husband and two sons in the World War; as a result, war has become a hideous institution in her mind. There is a clerk on the House side, who has a mania for clothes and spends all his income on finery. He has a Texas summer outfit, broad hat, high heels, etc., then he has several outfits with swallow tail coats, collars that call for scarfs instead of mere ties. At the moment he's deeply bothered because the news boys refuse to deliver a paper to his office, claiming that they don't even do that for congressmen unless they get paid extra. The list could go on indefinitely.

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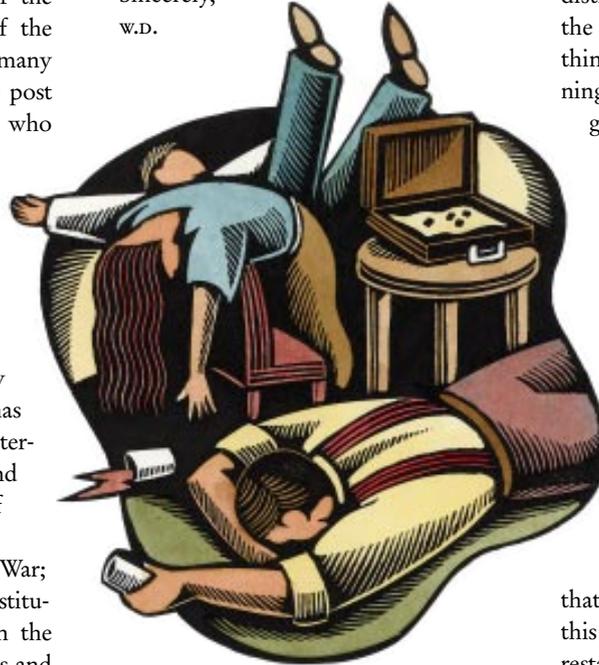
Last Sunday, I joined a law fraternity. The list of celebrated lawyers that are now fraternity brothers is quite breathtaking. Among them is the district attorney for the District of Columbia, who spoke at the banquet.

Lawyers, I fear, are a bit snobbish. They have their own jokes that aren't the least bit funny to one not steeped in the learning of the law. To them history is a series of great law cases, most of which they know by name and quote them quite frequently. It follows that the truly great men of the world have all been lawyers. We have their pictures framed and hung in the halls of the Law School. In front of my desk is a portrait of Lord Mansfield who is so much more important than Columbus that there is no comparison.

Lord Mansfield added an element to the law that no other man could possibly have added and maintained. There are dozens of them. To be quite frank, I hadn't heard of one of them before I started law school. ...

Sincerely,

w.D.



Dear Lorene,

July 2, 1938

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School, of course, finally came to an end—with a smash up, rather than a bang, to be quite truthful. The examinations that they handed out to us were more like thunderbolts. In each class we would read over the examination and then laugh heartily before settling down to the miserable business of discovering some word in the question that we could nail on to and write about. One of the profs boasted, that on the basis of the examination he gave, he could flunk the whole class with not the least difficulty. From personal experience, I can say that he was probably right. Marks will be out in about a month, but the apathy that has developed is surprising. I'm quite sure now that if I flunked in everything, it would call forth only a sigh!

Just at the commencement period, we had the annual law club banquet. There it was my rare honor to sit across the table from Justice Butler of the Supreme Court. His has been a very interesting and eventful life. For more than forty years he has

been the personal friend of the men who are counted as most important in the nation. His greatest sport is to tell story after story of the events of recent history, lending the touches that will probably never get into the history books. It was my distinct pleasure to be elected secretary of the law club for next year. Very interesting things are in store. We are tentatively planning to get up a tournament of intercollegiate debating with the other law colleges here in the District, and perhaps with some a little more distant.

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"Dead, by Gad, every one of them!" Then, did he call an ambulance or a doctor? No, he exclaimed, "I must get a picture of this!"  
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The adjournment of Congress was characteristically colorful, as all of them are. (This makes three for me.) But times are changing.

Heretofore, it has been the capitol police that really got things going in fine style. But this year, the captain issued orders to the restaurants in the capitol not to sell liquor of any description to the police until after midnight. Even the congressmen remarked upon how tame this celebration was compared with some others that we have had. Early in the afternoon, the congressmen started coming in prepared to sit to the bitter end. All of them practically made their train and plane reservations, and accordingly brought their luggage down with them and stacked it in the halls. The place closely resembled a baggage depot. Then, it came time for the discussion of an important bill in the House. Upon investigation, it was discovered that the bill had not yet returned from the printers, so a recess was called during which the gentlemen had liquid refreshments and talked baseball or cursed the printer. From my vantage point in the lower hall, I could get a bird's eye view of things as they came and went. One congressman sauntered in and over to the elevator. Another one asked him where he was going. He looked all around and then exclaimed in a stage whisper loud enough for everyone to hear, "I'm going up to the chamber to help steal some more of the people's money. Come on up, it's lots of fun!" Then someone in the Senate

pulled a filibuster that bade fair to last for a week! Things went wild in the House, and some of the things that were said about senators were most amazing, but things broke up in the Senate and they were all out around ten. . . .

In the senator's office, we continue to be one big delightful family. . . . Not long ago as I was laboring over the files, one of the girls flitted past and gave my suspenders a resounding flip. Without thinking, I rewarded her with a howl that rattled the windows. Out in the other room, interviewing the secretary, were some important people from New York. The secretary realized that she had either to explain or to set their minds at ease. The thought of explaining any of the antics of that crowd made her shudder, so she merely called, "Woody, take that dog out for some air!"

At another time, we were cleaning out the closet when we came upon an old brief case lying in a dark corner covered with inches of dust. Upon examination, it turned out to be the brief case that the senator took with him on his trip to the Philippines and the Orient some four years ago. We opened it and sorted the stuff, saving what should have been filed four years ago and discarding the rest. In the very bottom, we found a little package with strange Egyptian writing all over it. Then the secretary remembered that the senator had cautioned no one to touch the brief case, and this must be the reason. The gentlemen in the crowd insisted that it wouldn't be cricket to open the package, but the girls were fairly being eaten alive with curiosity. When he saw that he could do nothing to prevent them, the clerk curtly announced that he was going for lunch and that he hoped that, whatever it was in the package, it would kill them. The venture smacked of adventure, so I stayed. Upon opening the box, we first pulled out a long paper of instructions apparently, these also being written in Egyptian. Together we pored over them to make out a translation. The only Egyptian that any of us knew was what one ordinarily picks up on the streets of an American city, but by and by we concluded that water at last was called for. Then we opened the little packages wrapped in tinfoil to discover strange smelling black cubes! "Opium," someone exclaimed. We all dashed into the small lavatory opening off the office to see what would happen to the stuff when

one of the tablets was dissolved in a glass of water. The water immediately took on an amber color and began to give off a strange fragrance! Just then someone knocked on the door of the office, and one of the girls dashed out to answer it. It turned out to be a group of the personal friends of the senator here in Washington on a visit. He had told them to drop in at the office and meet the gang. They could hear us talking excitedly so it was of no use for the girl to say she was there alone. So she carefully opened the door and slid into the crowded lavatory to explain the predicament we were in. There was only one practical solution and that we did! Opening the door, very casually, we filed out one by one doing our best to put over the impression that it was nothing unusual for the entire office force to repair to the lavatory for a tête-à-tête! Then we confused the visitors with conversation and hoped they'd forget. Once they were gone, back we dashed to examine the experiment. The tablet had dissolved and the substance in the glass was now a murky black color with little beads of oil floating on the surface. The next test was to discover the reaction upon the human anatomy, so we drew straws to see who should taste it. The unfortunate young lady discovered that it was nothing more nor less than coffee, very stale coffee, and unsweetened. What a let down! But we could still give the clerk the scare of his life! Accordingly, we watched for him, and as soon as we spied him sauntering across the park, we took the ominous little box and dropped it near the door. Each one of us took one of the little black cubes and then draped ourselves over the furniture in attitudes that impressed us as being expressive of violent death. We even shuddered at the sight of each other. The clerk, taking his cues excellently, paused at the door, picked up the box, noting it was empty, smelled it and then surveyed the room again, exclaiming, "Dead, by Gad, every one of them!" Then, did he call an ambulance or a doctor? No, he exclaimed, "I must get a picture of this!" While he was in the next room preparing his camera, the young lady who had frozen herself in a death writhe across the desk concluded that her lovely figure would not be displayed to good advantage there and accordingly picked herself off the desk and draped gracefully over the dictio-

nary stand. Our little farce ended in a fiasco when the clerk and the stenog got into a heated argument about whether or not it was fair for a corpse to move! If the drama of life were not everywhere so absorbing as it is that office now and then, there would be no need for the writers of thrill stories!

. . .

Sincerely,  
Woodruff

Dear Lorene, September 13, 1938

. . .

My personal problem is one that I fear will never be completely solved. Four, no, five years ago when I first went down to Occidental, I met a charming young lady by the name of Floy. The first glance rather put me out to the count and I immediately made inquiries as to any attachments the girl might have. A friend offered the information that she was engaged to be married and happily so. As chance would have it we had four classes together, lived only two miles apart, entered the same activities at college, and spent much of our time together. However, it was merely a grand friendship—it could never be anything more because our worlds were so widely separated. Her romance went on the rocks in the course of a year and a half. This last summer, shortly after I arrived in California, she and I discovered that we were in love. Our greatest difference is religion. She doesn't belong to any church, but takes an active part in a seminar discussion group who have studied the scriptures intently and arrived at the novel conclusion that Christ was a mere man in every regard, that there was no pre-existence, and no life after death, that the apostles undoubtedly stole the body and concocted the story of the resurrection to comfort them in their disappointment. Mormonism means more to me than it ever has in the past. How we are ever going to reach a compromise is a deep dark mystery. . . .

An interesting experience was a dinner with Communists of the "There comes a revolution and the working man will eat cake" variety. The communists denounce the prejudice of the capitalists when in truth they are even more prejudiced. They swear by statistics without bothering to remember who compiled the statistics or

what was included or left out, and that reminds me of a quotation from Mark Twain to the effect that there are two kinds of lies—Damned lies, and statistics. My main criticism of the communists that I met is that they are too idealistic.

... A pal from law school just dropped in to impress upon me the injustice of it all. He's the happy go lucky sort without a care in the world. Because Criminal Law was taught exclusively on Saturday mornings, this chap managed to get in for the second hour half a dozen times or so during the year and came off with a grade of 88. Poor me, dumb bunny that I am, studied like a trouper, rose religiously every Saturday and managed to pull down an 89!

Regards to the family.  
Sincerely,  
Woodruff

2222 Eye St. N,W,  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mrs. Smith,                      December 3, 1939

Whew! How strange it seems! And I suppose the next question should be, "How is Mr. Smith?" ...

Things here have happened breathlessly since last I wrote to you, so breathlessly in fact, that whenever something was through happening, it took all my time resting up for something else. I've had three different jobs, one for a whisky firm. (I was not a taster.) Last summer, I assisted one of the profs at law school in the task of writing a case book on labor law. It was an Herculean task taking about sixteen hours per day of every day including Sundays and holidays. Consequently, I managed to get home about two nights per week just long enough to change clothes and then dash back out. That job lasted until school started. When the book was finished I rated a line in the preface that may come in handy when I start looking for a job next spring.

At the moment I'm working for the House Committee investigating the National Labor Relations Board. It is by far the most interesting work I have ever done, and there is no limit to its possibilities, except a time limit. Our investigation has to be completed by the first of February. And what

experience. One learns to smell out a clue from among a thousand sheets of paper. Last evening at the District Bar Association dinner, the assistant general counsel for the board had a table next to ours, which gave us a chance to get acquainted. He's a likeable chap but there were members of his staff who glowered at us occasionally. Already the newspaper columnists have torn into us. You might watch the papers there for editorials on the committee. I have to confess that I was the cause of one of the tirades. Some editor in Philadelphia came out with a lingo about the committee hiring a raft of Georgetown seniors to evaluate the work of one of the most capable of the government bureaus. It so happens that I am the only law student on the committee; the others are all attorneys, several of them are attorneys of some standing.

At law school, I was selected to be on the Law Journal staff. That is an experience in itself. It is difficult to imagine that one small law journal should present such a tremendous task. We have a staff meeting every week, at which someone loses his sense of humor and a miniature war gets started. At the moment a smart little fellow of pinkish outlook is goading me for what he considers my capitalistic tendencies. It does help one to keep awake for the tedious two-hour session, however. One of my articles has been printed thus far, and I have another to come out in the January issue, if and when I finally get it finished. I've been at the library all afternoon working on it. However, the more difficult task is getting other fellows to work on the journal.

...

Last spring, my political friends in the law fraternity started the machine going and presto, I was elected to the presidency. ...

It's an excellent gang of fellows, quite the best legal fraternity in the country and ours is the largest and most active chapter in the fraternity. There's only one difficulty. The fraternity over the years has acquired the reputation of being able to throw beer parties that have no equal. This year, I was on the phone here at the apartment making final arrangements for the first beer party of the season, when one of the roommates brought in a couple of missionaries on their way home from Europe. You can imagine his mortification! ...

And this reminds me that there has been a change of roommates since last I wrote to you. ... The one roommate who is not a Utahn is a little chap from Pennsylvania. He's most likeable, brilliant, energetic, athletic, and thinks very deeply. Since he and I are the only ones in the apartment who don't have girl friends, we've knocked around quite a bit together. The association has proved very invigorating for me. He has very little of a positive religion and is deeply skeptical of mine, which has added incentive to my resolution to live my religion in such a way that it will be convincing both to me and to my associates. ...

This has been very choppy and not very communicative, but even so there are fifty pages of equity to read ere sleep overtakes us.

Forgive this long delay, my regards to Mr. Smith and to the family,  
Sincerely,  
Woody

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In 1940 Woody graduated at the top of his class, worked briefly for the Reconstruction Finance Corporation and the National Association of Manufacturers, and then for Uncle Sam as a lawyer buck private. After a colorful military career (told inimitably in the biographical sketch appended to *Criminals Are Stupid: A Tribute to Woody Deem* [J Reuben Clark Law School, 1990]) Woody returned to Washington to work for Ernest Wilkinson's law firm.

At 33 he married Norrie Dolvin, a pretty red-haired Marine sergeant, and they moved to California, where he served as a prosecutor for 22 years. He and Norrie adopted eight children (the agency would not give them more); their swimming pool was open to the neighborhood. He served as bishop four years, Scoutmaster five, counselor in the stake presidency nine. And during a two-year break in his career as a prosecutor, he taught at the Church College of Hawaii—Chinese and drama!

In 1973, almost 60, he accepted the challenge to teach at the new BYU Law School. As one of the original faculty he helped give the school its character and contributed to its growing excellence. There was no one more devoted to the importance of practical training and no one more committed to help students individually.

The good humor, keenness, and optimism that show through in his letters of college days stayed with him to the end.