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James M. Sweet Correspondence

James Marvin Sweet 1871-

Maine State Library

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October 8, 1975

Mr. James Sweet
21 Middle Street
Bucksport, Maine 04416

Dear Mr. Sweet:

In the State Library, we have a Maine Room in which our growing Maine Author Collection is on permanent display in glass front bookcases. We wish to have all works of Maine authors represented in this collection.

This collection is a permanent exhibit of books by Maine people or books with a Maine flavor. Most of the volumes are inscribed presentation copies which gives an added interest to this valuable collection. We also gather biographical and critical material aiming to have at the State Library as complete a file as available of books by and information about Maine authors.

We would like to have you inscribe a copy of A STREETCAR NAMED IMMORTALITY for inclusion in this collection. It would give us pleasure to place your book on the Maine shelves. We hope that you will also continue to send us your future publications.

We would greatly appreciate your sending us biographical writings so that we may have as complete a file as possible on Maine authors.

We have already purchased copies of your book for our circulating library.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Shirley Thayer, Librarian
Maine Author Collection
MAINE STATE LIBRARY

ST:dlg

21 Middle Street
Bucksport, Maine
October 10th, 1975

Shirley Thayer, Librarian
Maine Author Collection
Maine State Library
Cultural Building
Augusta,
Maine
04330

Dear Ms. Thayer:

I was most honored and surprised to receive your communication concerning A STREETCAR NAMED IMMORTALITY.

It is a privilege to cooperate with the Maine State Library.

My unbounded thanks for purchasing copies of my book for your circulating library.

I shall be happy to mail you any future publications.

By biographical writings, I trust you mean information about the author's life, his motivations, and correlated subjects. I herewith enclose a brief profile of myself and the impetus behind the creation of A STREETCAR NAMED IMMORTALITY. Should you desire fuller information for your files, feel free to request such.

Later, I may do an analysis of my work. If I do such, I will forward you a copy for your files.

I trust that the enclosed is truly representative of myself and my work and is a suitable addition to the Maine State Library.

Sincerely yours,

James M. Sweet

*James
M.
Sweet*

Facts About Me

by James M. Sweet

Facts About Me

I was born in the house in which I now reside. I was born in the exact room adjacent to the livingroom where I wrote "A Streetcar Named Immortality". I am the youngest of four children; three living, one deceased. December 17th, 1937 I entered this world. I have a sister, Janice, thirteen years my senior, a brother, Dale, twelve years my senior, and a brother, now dead, for six years, who was seven years my senior. There is a considerable gap in our age differences.

My ancestors on both sides of the family were sailors. On the maternal side of my family were some distinguished people; among them, a bishop and an archeologist. The paternal side of my family possessed a great fondness for music. All of my mother's people were voracious readers, a trait which I happily inherited.

From the time of my being a young boy until I could do so for myself, both my mother and aunt read to me. One story that I'll never forget was read to me from Grimm's Fairy Tales. This was my mother's book when she was a young girl. There were no pictures in the book save drawings on the inside front and back covers. The covers were black with green lettering. The story that I'll never forget concerns a vain young lady who went to get some bread for her mother. Rather than soil her shoes, the young lady places the loaves of bread in a marsh, so that she can walk on them to retain the shiny appearance of her shoes. This young lady sinks down to this underground kingdom where she is tortured by grotesque and oversize forms of insect life. This story has never and will never desert my mind.

We always had many books in our home, but from the time I was in the third grade, I had a special liking for "The Book of Knowledge". We could never afford it, but I was frequently sending for the free sample booklet, "New Worlds To Conquer". I never had it as a child, but I acquired a 1920 set when I was twenty-two years old. This cost but five dollars, all twenty volumes. I read the set through in its entirety commencing on Halloween, 1968 and finishing up in February of 1969. This set was given away to a friend's family.

The second set, I acquired through a short feature on me featured in the Portland Sunday Telegram's, "Clearing House". In early 1968 I wrote a poem which I had set to music, "Willy-Nilly Over Billy". I wrote into the column explaining that I'd written the words of a song and was looking for a second-hand set of "The Book of Knowledge" for inspiration and cultural growth. I received one reply from the library in Springvale stating that they had a discarded set of "The Book of Knowledge" which I could have for the postage; again, five dollars. This was the 1943 edition. Included were four annuals. This I perused from March through June. This set I sold to a long-time friend of mine.

Shortly after I'd seen "Midnight Cowboy" in 1969, I saw a classified ad in the Bangor Daily News offering a brand new set of "The New Book of Knowledge" for sale, \$55. I telephoned the listed number. A young couple were going overseas and had no room for the excellent encyclopedia. I told them that I would like to have the set, but had no way of getting to Bangor to pick it up. They said that for five extra dollars, they would bring the set to me. This I perused from mid-October of 1969 until February of 1970. This set I sold to my next door neighbor for the exact price which I paid. This set I deem the best of all bargains for each year my neighbor, Gloria Parkhurst kindly lends me "The New Book of Knowledge Annual".

The next set I bought in a second-hand store at the end of the Bangor-Brewer bridge. This set was the 1957 edition. Two volumes were contained in one. There were ten individual volumes. I purchased the set in early May of 1971 and completed its perusal in mid-October. The cost was fourteen dollars. This set has been donated to the library of the Bucksport Christian School.

At the time of autobiographical writing, I've almost completed the perusal

of a fifth set. I'm about an eighth through the eighteenth volume of the 1928 edition which I purchased from the same second-hand store Christmas of 1974. This was \$25. This is one of the best editions of "The Book of Knowledge" ever printed. This set, God-willing, stays with me forever and ever. The original owners were very good to the volumes. There are only three or four pencil marks and tears in the entire set.

I have read one volume each of the Encyclopedia Brittanica and Americana, the fifteen volume "Book of Popular Science", four volumes of "Appleton's Cyclopedia of American Biography", the seven volume, "Lands and Peoples", a Bible dictionary, the eight volume, "Great Men and Famous Women", "Outline of Science" (seven volumes), "Outline of Literature and Art" (eight volumes), and the fifteen volume, "Childcraft" plus a number of one-volume encyclopedias such as "The Wonder Book of Knowledge" and Odham's Encyclopedia For Children.

I try to balance this reading with as much exercise as possible. I take Sunday walks and try to use the exercycle or stationary bicycle some every day. I enjoy working out and reading while music is playing. My favorite entertainers are Lena Horne and Pearl Bailey. My favorite actor is Jon Voight.

As a young boy, I was very obese. My sister encouraged me to diet when I was seventeen years of age. My diet adventures appeared twice in Ida Jean Kain's syndicated column. Now I never go near scales, but watch carefully what I eat. Strangely enough, I work as dishwasher and errand-runner in the kitchen of the Jed Prouty Hotel in Bucksport. I'm usually too busy to eat and wait until I get home where I can sit down and dine in leisure.

My first published work was a short story, "Once There Was" which appeared in Bucksport High School's, "Hillcrest". The next year, "Mist Lady", another short story appeared. These stories were pasted in a scrapbook which I long ago gave to an ex-girl-friend. Next, I appeared in the National Enquirer with a poem to this exotic blonde, Novella Paragini.

I went into the army in 1961, but was unsuited to the life. For punishment, one sergeant made me go to my tent and write. I'm thankful for him. I hadn't done anything particularly criminal. I just couldn't handle a rifle.

The next year, I commenced contributing a number of editorial letters to the Bangor Daily News. Many saw print and many didn't.

In 1967, I had the traumatic experience of being bullied by this sensual ruffian. It was more being teased than anything. This occurred at work. This teasing was of a subtle, sarcastic kind. I don't know why he continued to do that for I manifested no exterior reaction. It was then that I realized the shallowness of life on earth and the indescribable dimensions of the occult and unseen world. I occupied myself with preparation for that better world, hoping that God would take me to it. I read every book about the life beyond that I could find. I have my own book which I wrote to keep myself together at that time. This is called "Mortal and Immortal". In this work, the unknown soldier appears to me. We traverse eternity together. Oh, what a soothing consolation that book was to me at that time!

At the beginning of the persecution, I bought two books by Tennessee Williams; those being his short stories, "One Arm" and "Hard Candy". There is a vital, God-given magic in the creations of Tennessee Williams that makes all of life somehow worthwhile. I sent poems of my own to Viet-Nam soldiers, our own American boys, at that time to take my psyche off of my own troubles. Often, they would write in return. Those were difficult, yet transcendent days.

Origins of "A Streetcar Named Immortality"

I remember the demise of Vivien Leigh in July of 1967. I recall a merciless, yet excellent Harry Stradling close-up of her in the final scene of the motion picture, "A Streetcar Named Desire". As Blanche (Vivien) will not go willingly with the matron from the institution, Blanche has to be subdued by being pinned to the floor of the Kowalski home. This scene was photographed through diaphanous draperies, curtains which Blanche had torn out of place in her blind realization that someone, who she knew not had come for her. This scene is shown to the viewer as if he or she were looking down on it from above.

In the final private encounter between Stanley and Blanche, two directors had Stanley tear off the tiara crown that Blanche had donned after she understood that her dreams of happiness were shattered. Elia Kazan had Blanche's crown snatched in the movie version. James Bost, of the University of Maine at Orono had Hilary Billings do likewise to Judith Curran.

I wrote this up distributing it to various individuals listed in the Bangor Daily News's 'On the Maine Street'.

In 1972, I sent this essay to a prisoner in Atlanta. He wrote saying "how the gods must smile" when they read the noble thoughts expressed.

For sometime, I'd had two copies of "One Arm". I offered to give one away in The Bangor Daily News's 'On the Maine Street'. After I'd given the book to a local lady, I received an epistle from a lady in Brewer saying that she'd been to Hartford, Connecticut to visit her son. She had seen the degree of Doctor of Literature conferred on Tennessee Williams on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Broadway production of "A Streetcar Named Desire". She would go with her family to view "Streetcar" in Hartford on December 23rd. Though I'd given the book away, I sent her a money order for the price of a new one. She would not accept it, but returned it inside of the Hartford Stage Company's program for "A Streetcar Named Desire". This program is beautiful beyond words as it contains many reviews of the first and subsequent productions of "Streetcar". Mrs. Dorothy Chaisson also enclosed clippings from a Hartford newspaper concerning that particular production of "Streetcar". I became so inspired at the time that I finally did write an official Gospel tract with Biblical references and had it printed.

In a discarded physician's classified, a year previous to this, I saw the address of a doctor requesting "National Geographics" before 1920. I did have two which were a gift from my late paternal uncle. For some reason, I'd retained these many years. I sent them to him. He sent me two dollars with the query that if there were anything else that I wanted to let him know. Two months before this happened, I found a cast-aside physician's magazine, "MD" which concerns itself more with the arts than with medical practice. I asked if he had any copies of "MD". He sent me a number of them. He's been sending them for four years now. I was rather frustrated for he would take no money for the magazine and won't do so even now. I wrote a song about the symbolism in "Streetcar". The doctor is listed as "A Strange Man". In my song, I placed my friend's name as the doctor. On the opposite side, I had the impressionistic poem, "The Streetcar Cowboy". This was the first recording that I'd made that ever sold any copies, 90, to be exact. When I received my first royalty check six months later, I couldn't sleep that night.

The first year that I wrote a diary for Jon Voight, my nephew, Tom saw it. I write this diary every year. It contains descriptions of everyday events as well as original poetry. My nephew suggested that I write a book for public presentation. I could never do that. My writing was just for pleasure, not for profit and who had ever heard of me?

In the month of June, 1974, I sat myself down before a typewriter and disciplined myself to just write one hour nightly. I wrote for several hours on the Sabbath.

The result was "A Streetcar Named Immortality". Now I say this to the glory of God and not for my own credit. Every copy of the book that has sold in Bucksport has brought me money and fame. All of that money has been distributed to one charity or another and shall continue to be done. "Charity" is the pivot of the work. If I can reach just one person for Christ somewhere, if I can lighten a heavy heart somewhere, if I can only give a soul a reason for just living as Tennessee Williams, and, indeed, all good writers, have given me, then I will have received a royalty that acquires interest and multiplication in eternity.

Some of the money has been given to Jon Voight. The thoughts of him helped me through the second difficult time when I was being teased.

As eternity comes near (I'm a comparatively young man-37), I want more and more to give happiness to my fellow-man, bestowing, as I ascend the staircase of eternity, flowers of literature, garnered, it is hoped, from the Elysian gardens.

Blanche's final speech in "A Streetcar Named Desire" is the classic sentence, "Whoever you are, I have always depended on the kindness of strangers".

I want to be kind to every stranger, whoever and whatever he or she is.

My second work is completed, but is as yet unpublished. This is "The Midnight Streetcar". This is different from "Immortality" inasmuch as the prose and poetry are freely interwoven as an uninhibited spider's web rather than portiered in separate sections as is the literary form in "A Streetcar Named Immortality".

I write because I wish to inspire, educate, soothe, console, and show the great family of Man the awesomeness of God and the powers of endurance that tower in the souls and bodies or the possibility thereof, of everyone of us!

I am a bachelor.

My address is:

James M. Sweet
Box 206
21 Middle Street
Bucksport,
Maine
04416

*James
M.
Sweet*