

Learning to Live the Christian Life

John Gates Ramsay sent many letters to his daughter Patricia while she was in college at Ohio State University. They were unusual letters because the father treated his young daughter as his colleague in the effort to live a Christian life. Both had been influenced by Moral Re-Armament in seeking to change the world. They sought daily "guidance" during daily "quiet time" asking God to lead them.

Some background: In 1920 John was 17 and living in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania with his parents, one brother age 14, and seven sisters (sister Olive had already married and left the nest). John was working to help support the family and especially to send his sister Jessie to Moravian College. His father worked for Bethlehem Steel as a foreman.

1920 United States Federal Census - John Ramsey

State: Pennsylvania County: Lehigh Sheet: 22-B Family: 486 Line: 79 Image: 946

44 | Sheet 22-B | of 48

Ramsay, William	Head	R	11	W	48	M
Jessie	Wife		7	W	46	M
Arthur	Son		7	W	22	S
John	Son		11	W	17	S
Jessie	Daughter		7	W	16	S
Harry	Son		11	W	14	S
May	Daughter		7	W	12	S
Helen	Daughter		7	W	10	S
Loach	Daughter		7	W	8	S
Wilhelmina	Daughter		7	W	6	S
Louise	Daughter		7	W	4	S

By 1930, John (age 27) was married to Gertrude (age 25) and Patricia was age 2. John was by now an inspector for Bethlehem Steel.

The Golden Gate Bridge construction project was carried out by the McClintic-Marshall Construction Co., a subsidiary of [Bethlehem Steel Corporation](#) and John was required to inspect the steel being produced in Bethlehem. He rejected one shipment. His superior asked him to reconsider but John knew that it was not right to use flawed steel in such a project and refused. He was demoted and assigned to work in the open hearth furnace. The family lived in a small duplex with a commode, no bath.



During the Great Depression, John worked to organize a union so that workers had an opportunity to have some say in their working conditions through collective bargaining. By now he had four children of his own. He was elected President of the Bethlehem Steel Workers Organizing Committee.

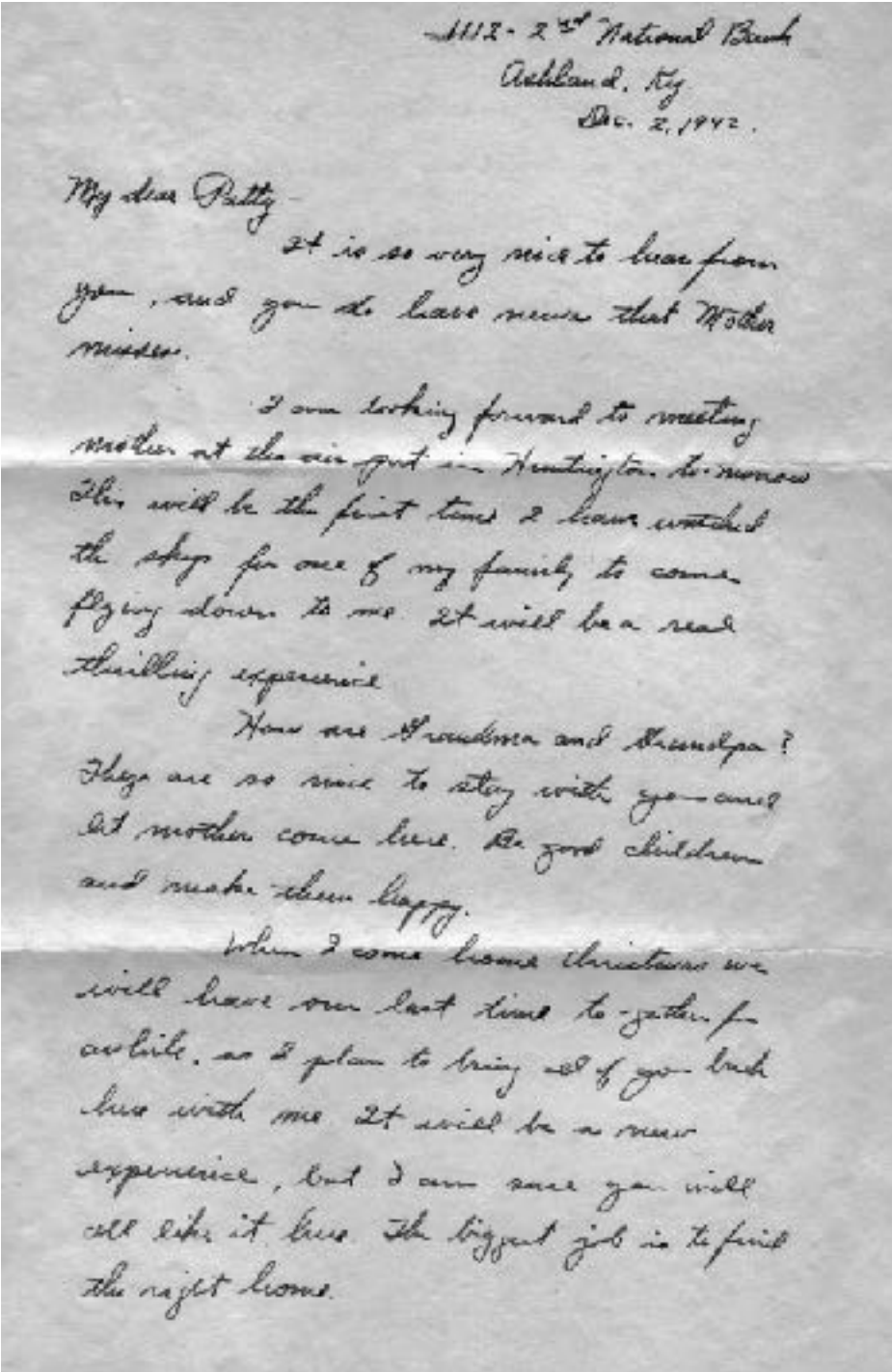


Bethlehem Steel fired John but the United Steelworkers of America hired him and supplied him with a paycheck for the rest of his life. He travelled to places where organizing was running into road blocks. John always sought ways to find the common ground of a Christian approach in those communities.

Here are excerpts from letters in John's handwriting. They are all from John to Patty because Patty saved his letters—her letters to him have not been uncovered. But, his letters give insights into the difficulties facing American workers as they tried to make their lives worthwhile. They demonstrate John's importance in giving a voice to industrial employees during this transition to the Industrial age. The letters also demonstrate how listening to God can (however one interprets God) lead to common ground for people in every situation.

Conditions in the Armco Plant in Ashland, Kentucky required John's touch. He made plans to move his family to Ashland for the duration. His own family was equal in importance to him as his work for union families. He did not want his work to separate him from his wife and children.

Wed. December 2, 1942; John age 40, Patty age 15:



1112- 2nd National Bank
Ashland, Ky.
Dec. 2, 1942.

My dear Patty -

It is so very nice to hear from you, and you do have news that Mother misses.

I am looking forward to meeting Mother at the airport in Huntington. Tomorrow this will be the first time I have watched the ship for one of my family to come flying down to me. It will be a real thrilling experience.

How are Grandma and Grandpa? They are so nice to stay with you - and let Mother come here. Be good children and make them happy.

When I come home Christmas we will have our last time to gather for awhile, as I plan to bring all of you back here with me. It will be a new experience, but I am sure you will all like it here. The biggest job is to find the right home.

Last night Anne, Betty and I worked overtime to get invitations out to the ministers to attend a meeting Thursday night. at 11 P.M. I took them to Anne's apartment and at their request stopped for a cup of coffee. It had been a dreary rainy day and I had a bit of a cold so I thought a warm cup of coffee would be right. Well, Anne made a steak dinner, with mushrooms, broccoli and cranberries. When I left after 12 and went home, it was just as though I had eaten a noon meal. I couldn't go to sleep so read about the ARNCO-CRP-treat until 5am when I went to sleep. The moral to this story - don't try to make night into day - go home to much sleep.

Betty - I am enclosing \$1.00 for you for your fine work in school. I always look for a piano when I go looking for a home.

Dad bless and watch over all of you.

Love

Daddy.

ARMCO Steel employed 4,000 workers in Ashland. John was sent to help unionize the plant. While there, the family attended the Presbyterian Church, but Gertrude was shunned at the Women's Club because of John's union activities—powerful forces were against the workers having collective bargaining rights. ARMCO was on trial in court for their resistance to a union.



Grandma Ramsay visits at Easter in Ashland, 1943:

l to r: Gertrude, John G, John M, Grandma Jessie, Richard M, Patricia G. William R. (age 11) likely took the photo.

The Constitution assures the right of citizens to peaceably assemble. The United Steelworkers of America won the election in Ashland and the Ramsay family moved to Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania where another ARMCO plant in Butler was being organized. WWII gave more attention to the value of industrial workers who produced the machinery of war.

Friday May 7, 1943, John age 40, Patty age 15:

United Steelworkers of America
110 EAST JEFFERSON STREET
Butler, Penn'a. PHONE 4-008

R. E. HALL
NIGHT SUPERVISOR
"ARMCO CARPENTER"

May 7, 1943

My dear Patty -

I have been thinking a lot about you and the boys and wondering how you are and what you are all doing. Our correspondence is getting to be less and less, so I am making a new start for I do receive your letters.

You will be interested in my experience recently in which I have learned a lot about the importance of blood plasma. It is an opportunity for the individual citizen to play an important part in modern warfare. "To give your blood so that others may live."

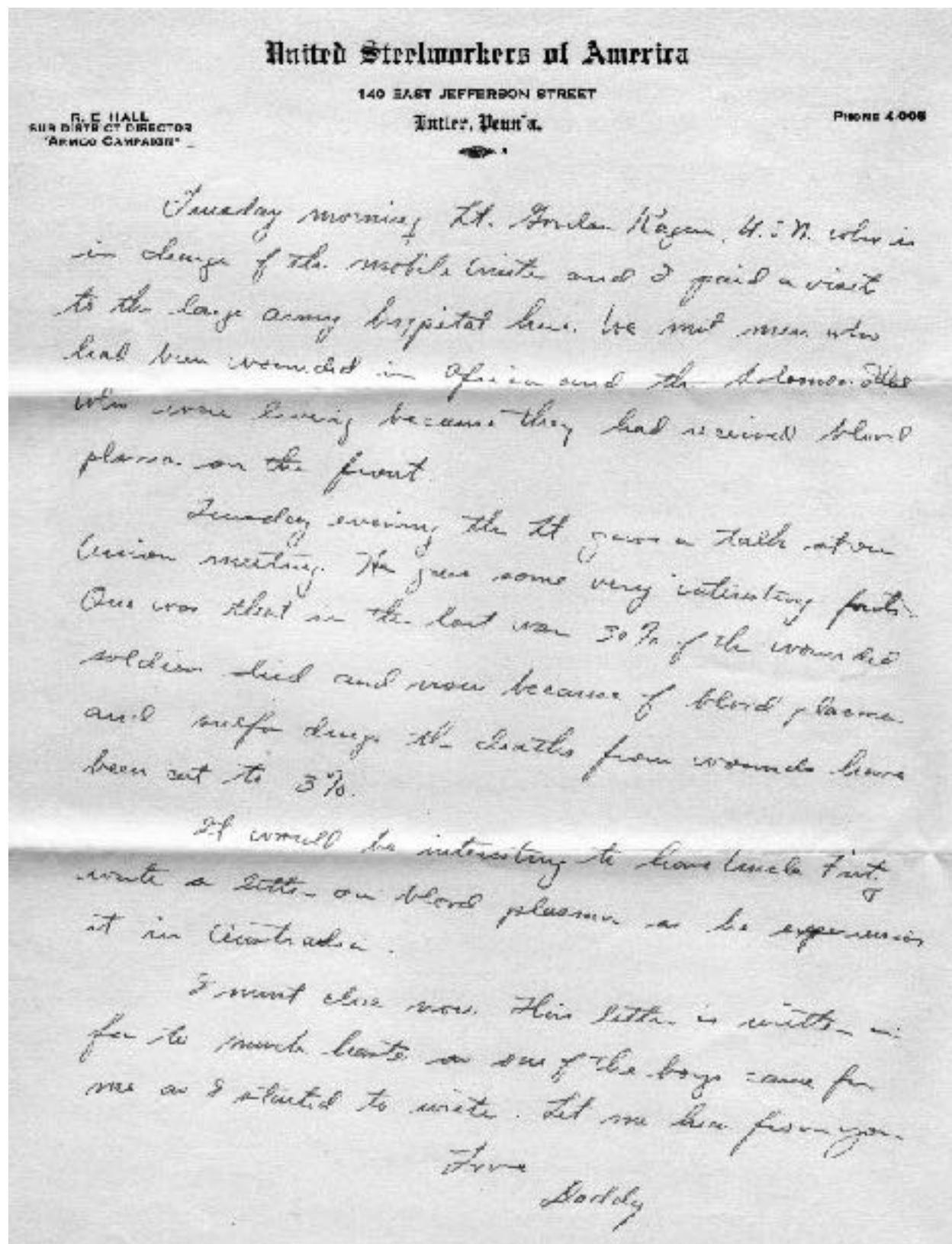
A few weeks ago I went to Pittsburgh and came able to make arrangements for a Mobile Unit of the Red Cross for Blood Plasma to come to Butler. They came on May 3rd and will probably be here for three weeks.

I gave my first pint of blood on Tuesday May 1st. The Red Cross Mobile Unit was set up in the Sunday School Auditorium of the Presbyterian Church. You came in and met a replacement who had you registered at a desk. Then you sat down and went for a call to another desk, where

your personal information was taken. Then you move to another room of chairs and wait your turn to have your blood pressure taken. While waiting a nurse comes and puts a sphygmometer in your mouth and takes your pulse. While taking your blood pressure a sample blot of blood is taken from your finger tip.

If you are OK you go behind a screened partition and find rows of beds with people laying down. Having their blood drained it was put on a bed and my arm cleaned & disinfected. Then an injection (similar to what a dentist does to clean your teeth) is given. Then the needle for draining blood is inserted and you open & close the palm of your hand pumping blood into a glass container. While doing this I was talking to an Italian lady who was in the bed beside me and kidding the young lady who was on the bed on the other side (she had a hard time pumping).

After a pint of blood is taken you rest for ten minutes and then get up and go to have some refreshments. I had tea & sandwiches and received a badge and had done my duty. When you give three transfusions you receive a silver badge.

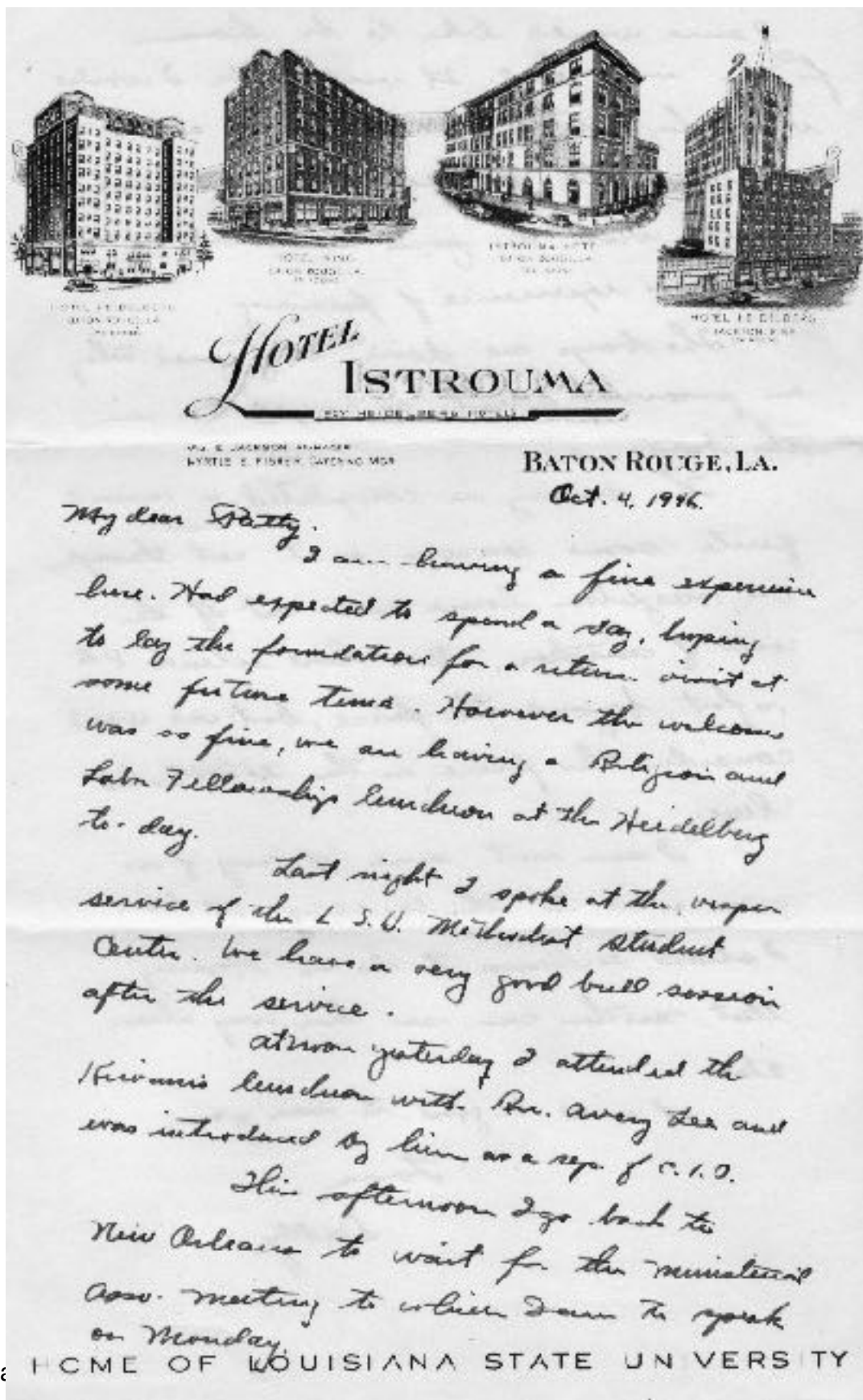


Following success in Butler, John and family relocated to Columbus Ohio, a more centralized location with an airport. John's expertise in working in public relations and with church leadership was made tangible as he set up religion and labor fellowship groups in many places. After a fire in their rented house in Columbus, the family spent part of the summer at a Moral Re-Armament retreat on Mackinac Island. Other labor leaders also became active in MRA.



Louie Capone, Warner Clark, John Riffe, Bob Hall, John G. Ramsay, and ?, Union men at MRA on Mackinac Island, 1944
This is not Louis Capone of Murder Inc. who died in Sing Sing before this photo was taken.

Friday Oct. 4, 1946, John age 44, Patty age 19:



I am would like to be home
for the week end. It used to be I would
wish for mother to join me and
share in the new experiences I have.
Now I wish to join her & share in
the new experience of farming.

The boys are doing very well. They
are proving adept as carpenters in
the barn.

The survey is completed & caused
quite some concern as it cut through
our neighbor's house and cut off the
well of another. Our line extends 8 to
10 feet beyond the fence, but we will
consider the fence as the established
line.

I am not sure if any of us
can come to the wedding. At least
I shall endeavor to do so. Hoping
that mother can see her way clear
also.

It will be good to see you.

Love

Daddy.

John had been assigned to the Southern Drive of the C.I.O. The Steelworkers still paid his salary but his work now included community relations for all of the C.I.O. industrial unions. The family had moved to a farm twenty miles west of Atlanta. The wedding refers to the marriage of Gertrude's brother Fritz to Esther Jean in Waynesville, Ohio.

Tues. Oct 29, 1946, John age 44, Patty age 19:

HOTEL GENERAL TYLER
WEST POINT, GEORGIA

Oct. 29, 1946

My dear Patty -

We missed hearing from you last week and I was happy to hear from mother that your letter came Monday morning.

I am spending most of this week here, where we are having an N.L.R.B. election in the Barnett Building and days start on Thursday.

The company here will fully fire our local leadership, kept us from securing a meeting place and had our local office taken from us. All organizing has been done by pushing doublets and proving out literature.

A citizens committee has been formed to fight our campaign. Sixty local merchants published a resolution against us. Word was passed around last week that the ministers were going to preach against us last Sunday and on here I am.

The ministers had to be contacted individually. Being into one Methodist Church I saw a September 2nd student and used it as my calling card. I found

HOTEL GENERAL TYLER

WEST POINT, GEORGIA

most of the clergy friendly and all of them taking a neutral stand. However the local newspaper in its editorial said the "Ministers and the Merchants are against C.I.O." and it has not been refuted by the ministers and as the lie holds in the thinking of some people.

Early Sunday morning bricks marked NO-C.I.O. - were thrown through the plate glass windows of two drug stores our organizers frequent. Now stickers Vote NO-C.I.O. appear on all plate glass store windows.

There is a Rev. Ramsey here who is openly for our union. I had a prayer meeting in his home last night. He is a negro and a great soul.

Before this trip I attended a meeting of the Industrial Division of the Federal Council in Philadelphia. It was good to get off the plane in Newark and find the Hobettles and

HOTEL GENERAL TYLER

WEST POINT, GEORGIA

sister Mary writing for me. I am enclosing a picture of Mary Lou and her little sister Lillian. Please send it back.

Sunday I went to Bethlehem and Easton. All are well & happy except Aunt Billie. She and Tom have made a mountain out of, I am sure, mole hills and a seeking a divorce. I have suggested they try separation first and invited Billie and the children to visit with us. It did not look to good. It may be guided for you to write them also. Thomas Richards, 27 W. 3rd St., Hazelton, Pa.

Spent three days in Atlanta, Ga. There was no real change there and the local workers were still afraid to expose themselves. I spent all my time talking to local workers who have joined the union. Miss Stubby tells me that 15 of them went to Roanoke to meet Mr. Pittman. I am grateful for that. Enclosed are pictures George Sandlen gave me for you. Her niece

was visiting him. you would like
here. she is a supervisor of the
Telephone Company in Memphis, Tenn.
Send these a card to the Commonwealth
Hotel.

At Gastonia we had a fine
luncheon with 20 minutes present.
They formed a fellowship group there.
Ruth Gettings is doing a fine job.

Mother and the boys probably
have kept you informed about Skyland
Farm. It is really beautiful there with
the leaves in glorious colors. The
garden sure is a success and the
regular garden is now cleared of weeds
and plowed. Strawberries are in
the picking.

May God richly bless you
and bring you safely home. Let
me know when.

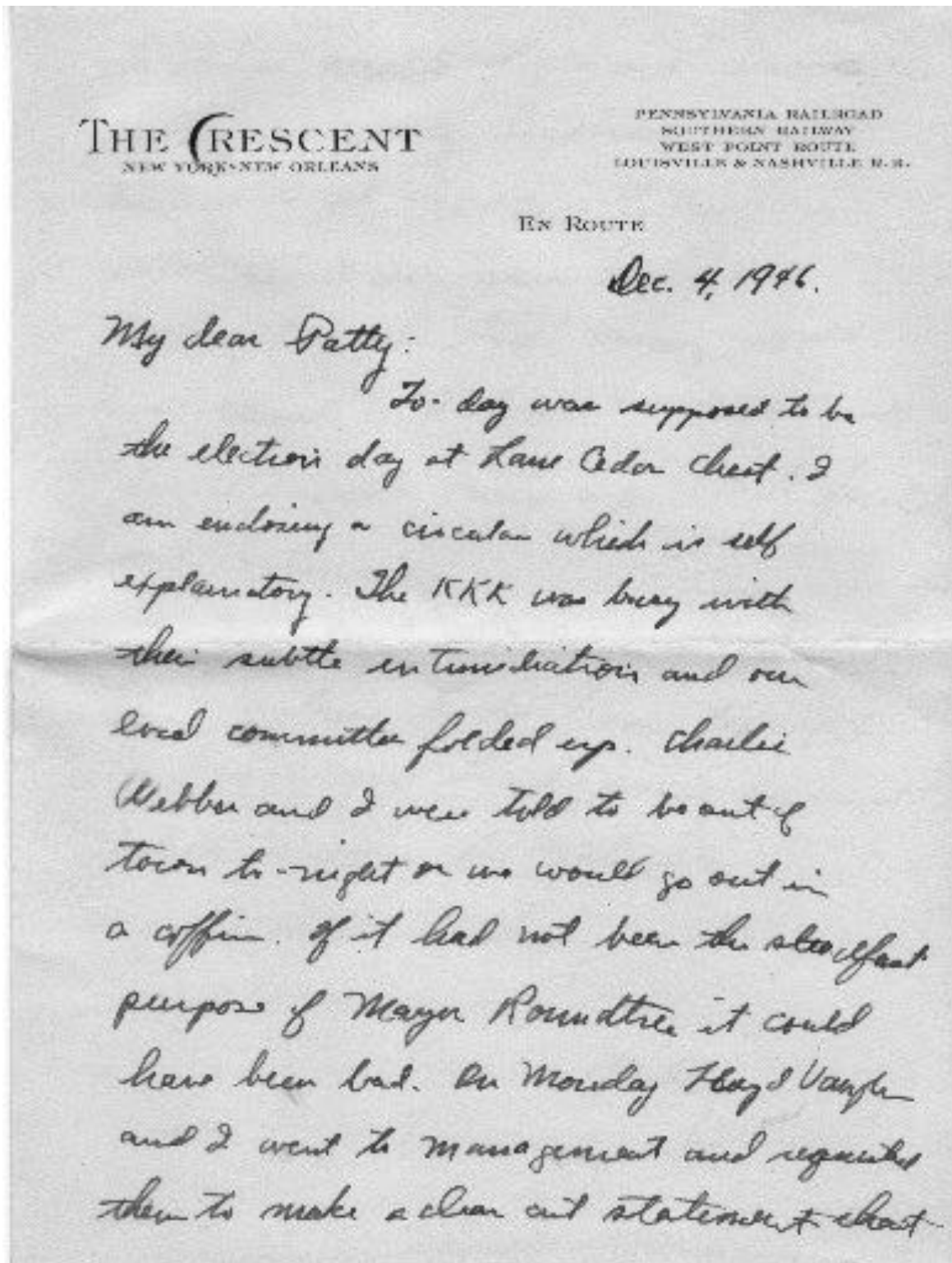
Best wishes to all our
Columbus friends.

Love
Daddy.

Wed. Nov. 27, 1946, John age 44, Patty age 19:

Tuesday the boys went to school^d
and mother and daddy went to Columbus,
Ga. Parson Jack, editor of the Trumpet
scolded the ministerial association
for permitting Dr. Ramsay ~~from~~ of C. I. O.
to propagandize them. I did not go
to see parson, but to know the
effect he has on the others. It was
good to have mother take a trip with
me.

Wed. Dec. 4, 1946, John age 44, Patty age 19:



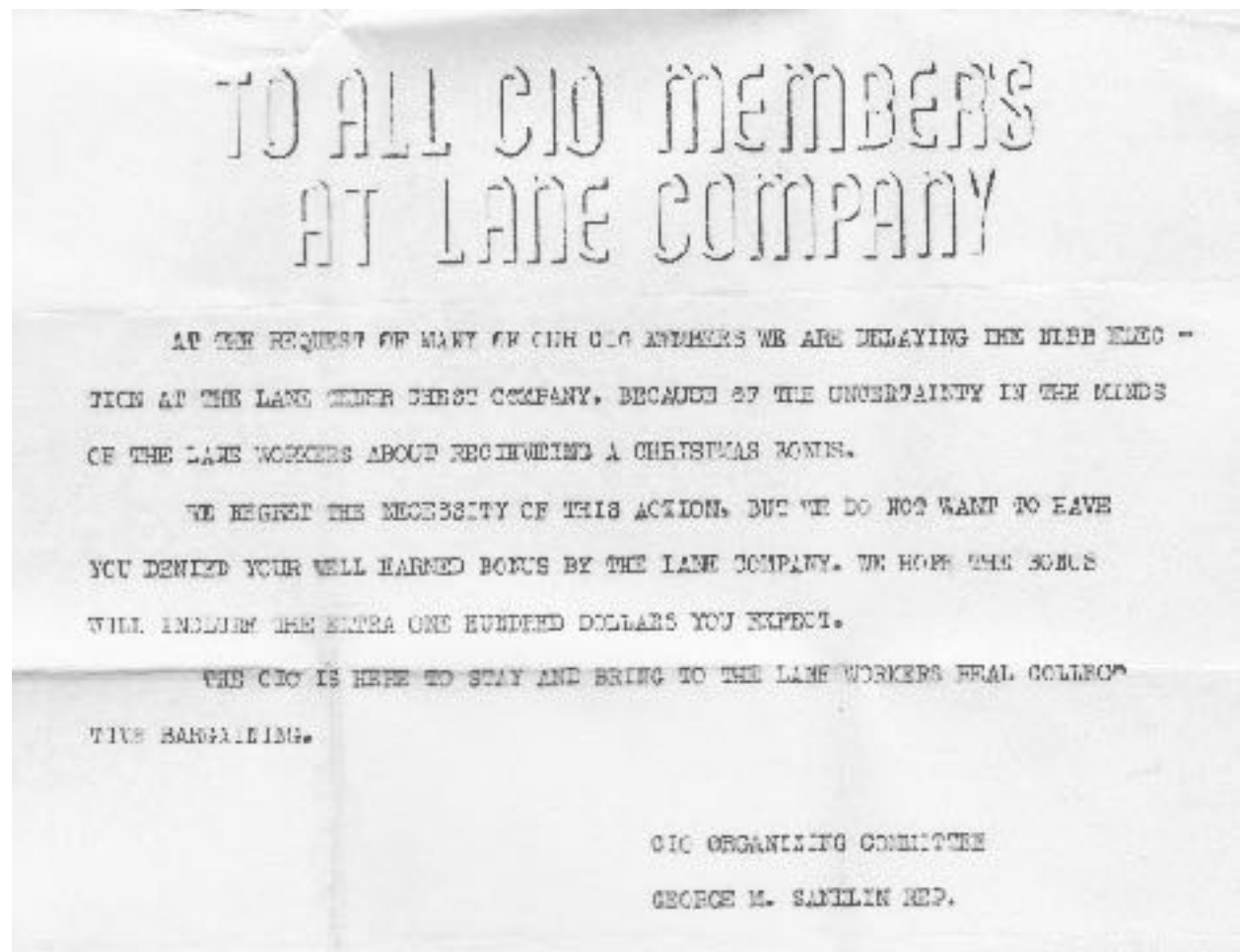
the election results would not change.
the regular yearly Christian bonus.
Failing to get it, we introduced an
petition. I am sure the fear of
losing their Christian money would
have caused us to lose the election. So
the All-weather campaign isn't finished
but continues.

To-day I will be in Harrisville
Va. and hope to be home to-night.
We had a nice Thanks giving day and
I left Friday for Astoria.

Uncle is shaky writing.

Love

Daddy.



Excerpt of letter of Tuesday January 21, 1947, John wrote to Patty: "John Riffe and I went to Birmingham Sunday night and Mother went with us. We got back Monday night and today I expect to go to Sheffield, Alabama where 400 A. F. of L. people beat up our organizers and wrecked the office." The C. I. O. was inclusive and organized to match industries while the A. F. of L. was organized like guilds; both wanted to be the official representatives of their members when dealing with the companies. John believed in being inclusive.

Sat. Mar. 1, 1947 (1947 not a leap year!) John age 44, Patty age 19:

The Tennessean

SOUTHERN
RAILWAY SYSTEM
NORFOLK AND WESTERN
RAILWAY

EN ROUTE

Feb. 29, 1947.

My dear Betty:

In the last letter I have read from you, you raised the question, "How do I get in these things?" That is what I have wondered all this week.

I am here in Chapel Hill N.C. participating in the Religion in Life Week of The University of North Carolina. after traveling from Sheffield, Ala. a week ago via train to Ashtell, car to the airport and plane here I found a programme outlined for me as follows:

Sunday - 10 A.M. - Methodist Young Adult Bible Class
6 P.M. - Dinner - Wesley Foundation -
Caught up in sleep in between

Monday - 11 AM - Personal Problems class
 4 P.M. Seminar - Social Justice "A Christian
 Goal."

Tues - 7 am. Breakfast Presbyterian Co-ops.
 8 am - Personnel Management class.
 11 am - Corporation Finance class
 1 P.M. - Men's Faculty Club Luncheon
 4 P.M. - Seminar Religion + Labor
 5:45 - 11 P.M. Sigma Chi - Dinner + Bull Session

Wednesday - Day in Greensboro, N.C. endeavoring
 to settle a strike in Triett Steel.
 4 P.M. Seminar - Co-ops
 6 P.M. - Dinner Home of Dr. Ashby.
 8 P.M. - Address with Rabbi Abraham
 Feinstein and Father Edmund Benard.
 "Topic" Religion + World Order.

Thursday - 9 am. - History class
 10 am - Philosophy class
 2:30 - 3:45 - Methodist Social Action
 4 P.M. - Seminar - Class Slips etc.
 6 P.M. - Ministerial Dinner Greensboro N.C.
 9 P.M. - Presby - Bull Session

Friday - 9 AM - Political Science class
10 AM - Psychology class
11 AM - Labor Relations class
1 P.M. - Fellowships of W. Churchman Lunch.
4 P.M. - Seminar - H. A. Waga.
6 P.M. - Dinner "Snaff Buckets" Presby.
8 P.M. - Greensboro.

Sat. AM - Spartanburg, S.C.
P.M. - Home?

Ink going - Love
Dad.

Mon. 3rd - Home.

Not enough ink was left to
address the envelope and now here
I am home again. It is cold here and
there still is not enough gas to heat
the home.

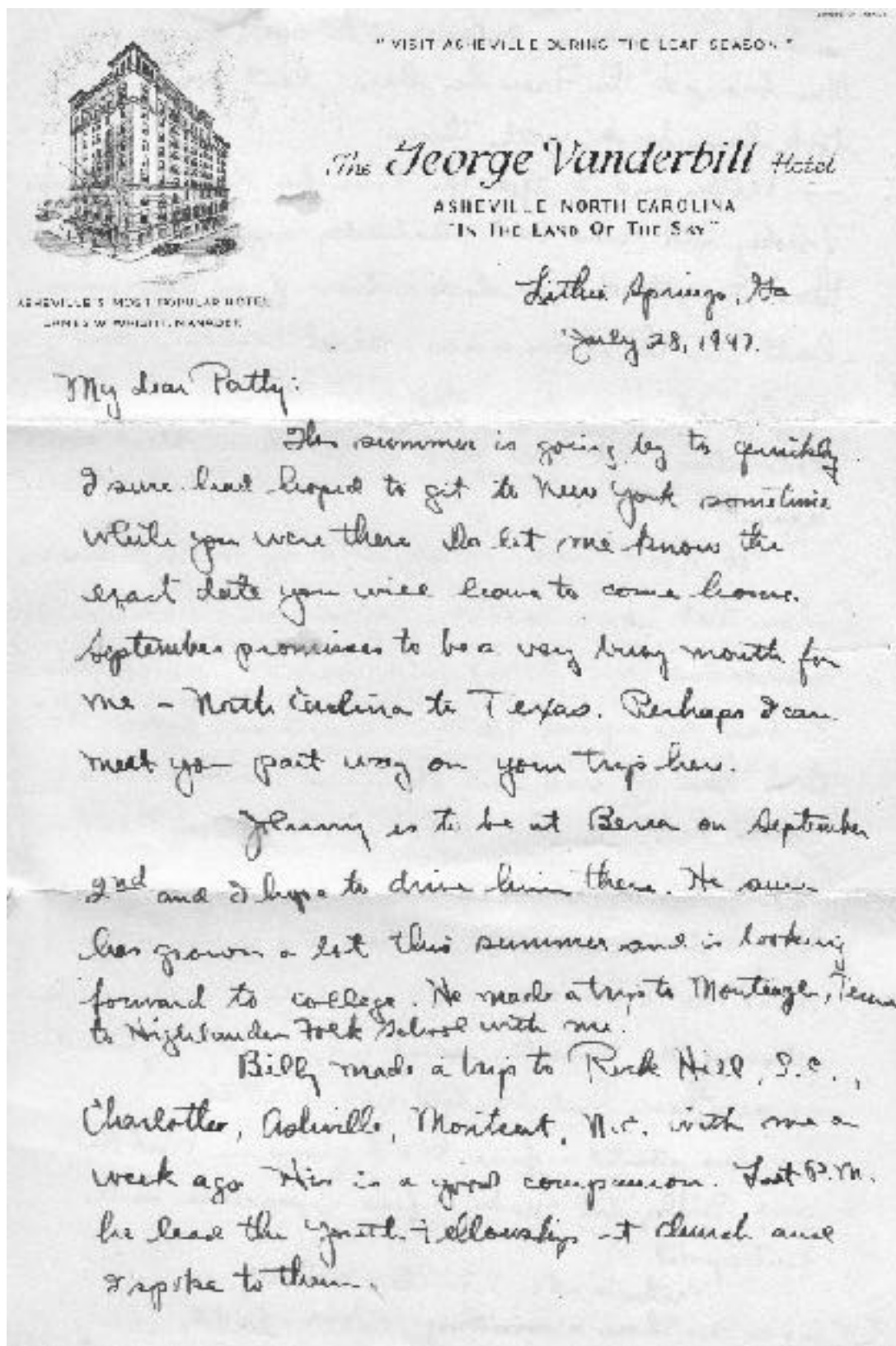
Do not worry about finances for the coming year and do not drop any course at this time. It looks promising for Johnny to go to Berea, which will be a big help in finances.

This summer will be clear for you and we can talk more about it when you are home. My schedule is not complete as yet, so you had better make reservations home, either by air or Pullman whichever suits you best.

Mother sends you love, as I also.

Daddy

Monday July 28, 1947, John age 45, Patty age 19:



Dicky is now in Orlando, Fla. Kathy & I brought the Frenches here last week and took him back with them.

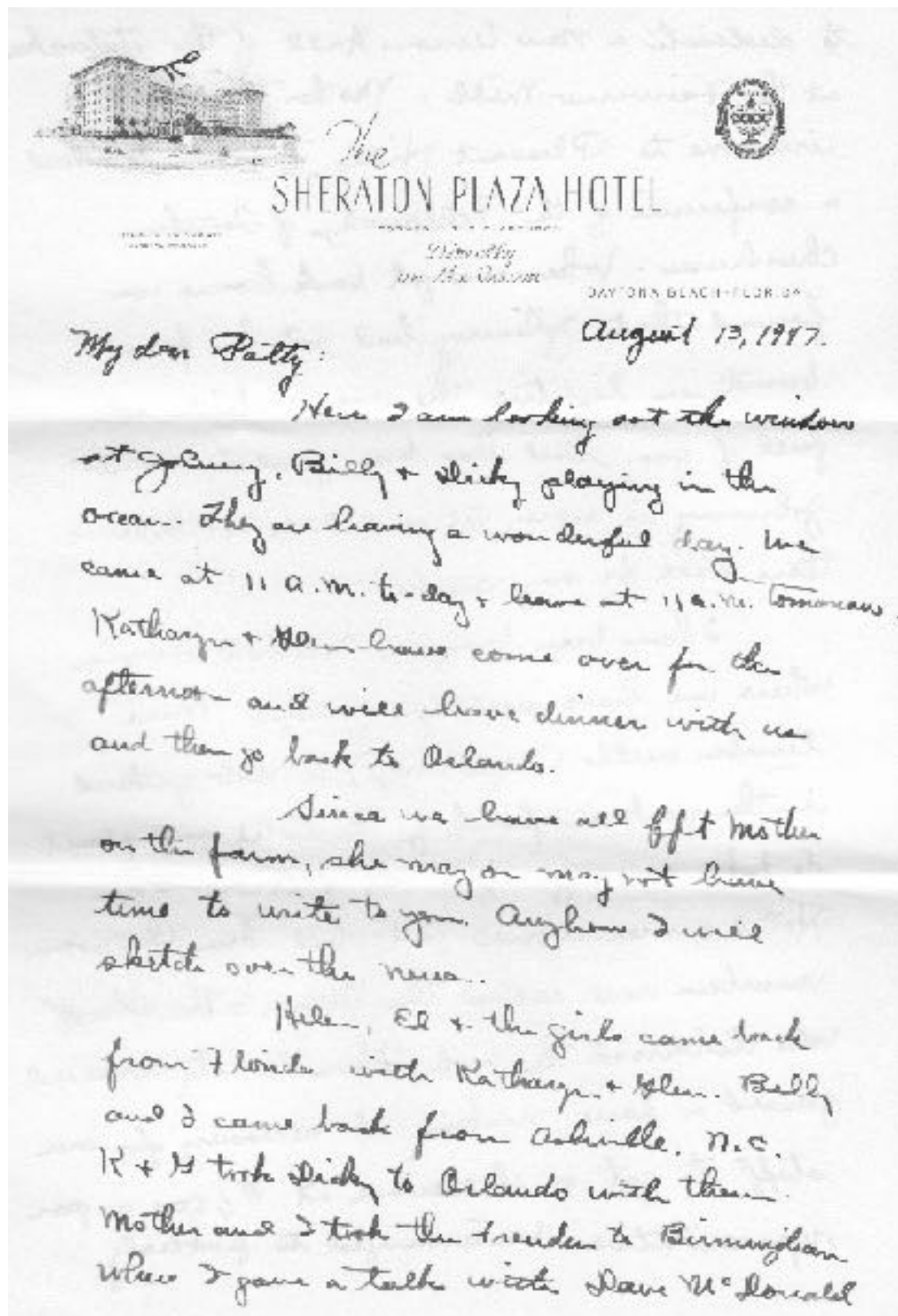
Mother and I took the Frenches to Birmingham Friday and came back Saturday night. While there I attended a dedication of a new union hall in the Fairview steel mills. Dave McDonald came down from Pittsburgh to do the dedicating. It was good to get to a steel meeting again.

At Rock Hill, I was told by Father Maurice Shan that some catholic laymen in Anderson, S.C. approached their Priest and forbade him to come to hear me speak to the Ministerial Assoc. He told them off and then they said a committee would meet the train and see that I did not get off. God was with me so I was guided to fly to Greenville and have one of the boys drive me to Anderson. It was a good meeting and showed the minister what we are up against as all of them had been told not to attend.

We started a fine R & I group in Rock Hill and Billy did make a fine appearance as he participated.

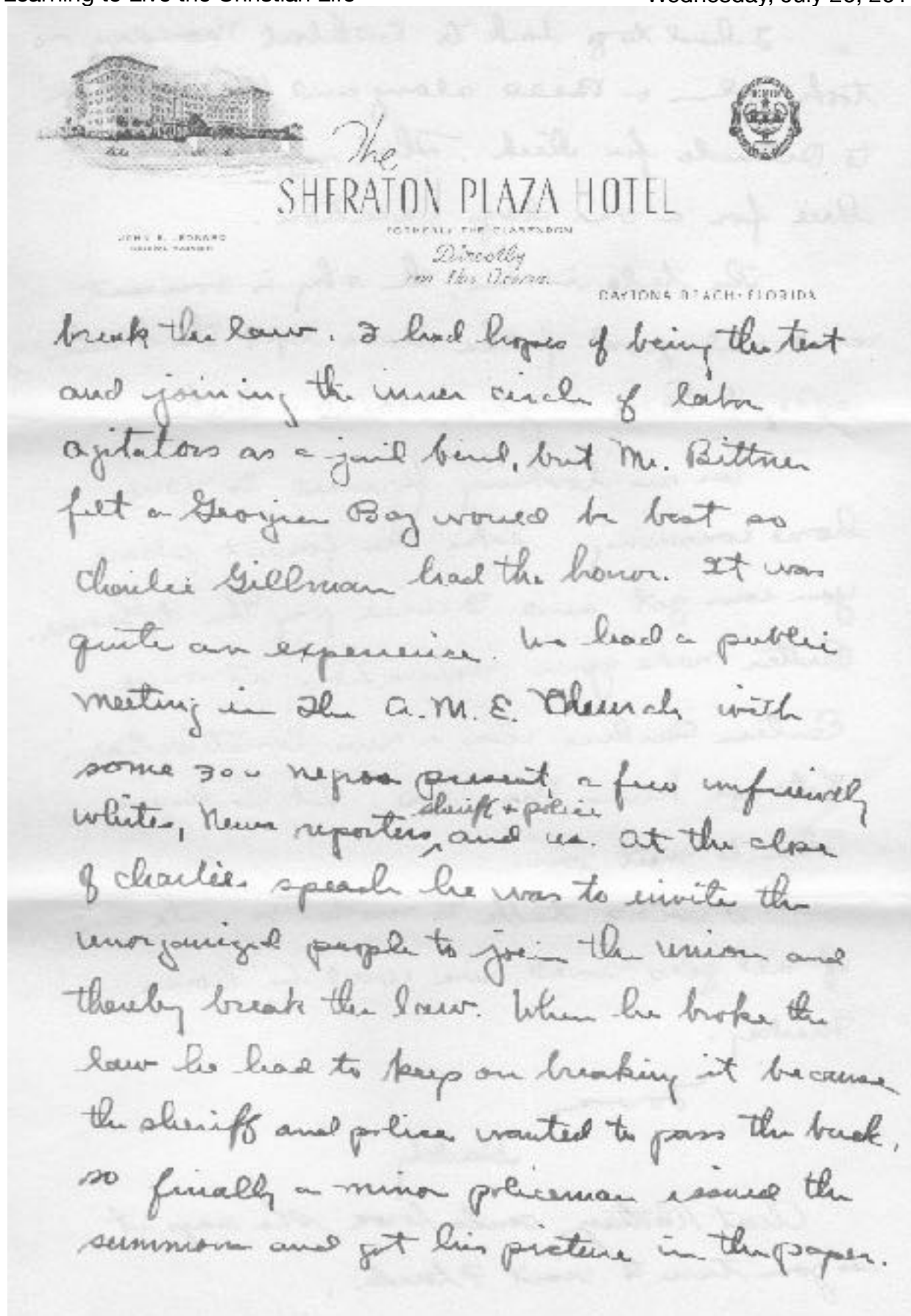
Mother is at a S.S. class meeting.
\$5.00 See an "Old Show" or something. Love Daddy.

Wednesday August 13, 1947, John age 45, Patty age 19:



to dedicate a new Union Hall of the Steelworkers at the Fairview Mills. Mother then went with me to Pleasant Hills, Tenn. to attend a conference of the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen. When we got back home we found that Johnny had got his face burnt in lighting the oven which was full of gas. God has been good to us as Johnny is now OK and I do not believe there will be any marks.

I have been busy in Cuthbert, Georgia where we have recently organized three lumber mills (Negro help). A mob gathered in the park in front of the hotel and planned to take our organizers out of town. The Hotel owner would not tell them the room numbers and called the Mayor & the Sheriff who disbursed the mob. Then the city council passed a law making it necessary for our staff to get a license at \$1,500.00 per representative. We arranged to publicly



I had to go back to Cuthbert Monday so took John + Bill along and came down to Orlando for Dick. That is how we got here for a one day vacation.

The tide is in, the sky is overcast and all good folks have left the beach: ie, except three - John, Bill + Dick.

We are looking forward to your home coming. Take the fastest plane you can get and I will pay the difference. Better make your reservation at once. Eastern Airline has a new Constellation. I do not know the time. Let us know when to meet you.

I will talk to mother to - nite and if all goes well, we will be home Friday.

Love,

Daddy

Aunt Kathryn sends love. She says it is your turn to visit Florida.



Operated By Interstate Hotel Company

Векторы, Матрицы.

Feb. 29, 1948

2. 2000

Dear Father:

Just a little over two hours ago I left mother at the Atlanta Airport. I had planned to drive home, but gave it up as I am sore and weary.

We took quills on fire at our place yesterday afternoon. Going up over the hill back of the barn over the Mangrove and down to the bank. The road the Japs had made kept it from going towards the front and the big woods.

Every one was out fighting with bush
beating. My head looks as though I had been
in Florida taking sun baths. No swimming
was burnt and I don't believe the damage
to lives was great.

I have been busy in Methodist
this past week. Last Sunday morning I
gave the sermon in Church, "Learning to live
the Christian life."

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★

This was the first time since I have been in the labor movement that I have been invited to speak from the pulpit in the home church. The occasion was Methodist Laguerre's Sunday.

Monday I spoke to a Methodist Youth Conference in Dallas, Tex. on the subject "Youth and Alcohol." Mohr had addressed this group a while back.

To day we received our March copies of the "Student" and an article I wrote last summer appears in it. It is "Some Industrial Idealism." He hopes you can get a copy from a Methodist friend.

Ms. Margaret Garity called on me this week. She is a representative of the P.H. (Public Health) Council who is arranging non-segregated meetings between Negro + Whites. She will be in Columbus and will contact you. It would be fine if you could arrange a meeting for her at the Foundation. It would be well for our Presbyterian to know of the new phase of the Catholic Activities.

To morrow I speak at the Minnesota Assoc. here. It will be my second opportunity of the kind in Minn.

Best wishes to you

Dad.

for tent

In this letter, John Gates Ramsay gives me, his son, an appropriate title for this collection, *Learning to Live the Christian Life*. It was Dad's abiding mantra to ask himself, "What would Jesus do?" I think that these glimpses of how he applied his respect for God's creation on earth will inspire us all to love one another as he loved us. What he learned was timely during the industrial age, is also timeless and need to find applications in this electronic age!

John Martin Ramsay
St Louis, Missouri
27 July, 2017

From Wikipedia:

In 1921, ARMCO employee John Butler Tytus developed a process for producing rolled steel that was much more efficient and used fewer workers. The sheet metal was rolled into large coils. The old process produced approximately 520 tons of sheet per month, but the new process produced forty thousand tons a month. ARMCO experimented with this new process at a plant built in Ashland, Kentucky, but soon the company used the process at all of its facilities. Its innovations made ARMCO one of the most successful companies of its kind in the nation. Over time, ARMCO changed its name to Armco Steel Corporation, and then in 1978 Armco Steel Corporation became Armco Inc. The headquarters for Armco Inc. were located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

And I add:

We must keep in mind that the industrial workers devoted their lives to getting the job done! They deserve to share in successes.



Patty, Dicky, John Gates Ramsay, Billy, Gertrude Eleanor Ramsay, Johnny.
"Quiet Time" at 48 East Garrison St. Bethlehem, PA, 1939.