

9-- **Great Brains.** RB9b no TQ on printout.) Put any of the dull Don King piece in here? Daddys **Letters** section has some duplication.

**See end

Montague Modder is a dapper, somewhat portly professor of English at Beloit College. He has precise ways, a precise little moustache, and a twinkle in his kind brown eyes. Jackie takes an enjoyable class from him, "Non-dramatic Literature of the Renaissance."

In the late 1940s Monty Modder organizes a club. It's a town-and-gown group of some twelve members, with an equal number of professors and townsmen. Jackie's major professor, Don King, who during the academic year teaches Greek, Latin and ancient history, and during the summer is Daddy's seedcorn boss, is a gownie. Walter Strong, editor of The Beloit Daily News, is a townie. Judge Arthur Luebke is, too. There's also a bank president, and the head of Fairbanks Morse, and the president of the Fairbanks Morse union. Monty invites Ron Dougan to join, Don King urges him, and Daddy, though shaking his head a little, becomes one of the group.

Meetings are held once a month, and consist of a paper by one of the members, followed by discussion. Town and gown alternate. The professors present some aspect of their field, their research, or their concerns. The townsmen do likewise. The name of the group is, appropriately, "Town and Gown;" it's sometimes referred to as "The Little Men's Chowder and Marching Society," but the nickname that sticks is "The Great Brains."

Daddy thoroughly enjoys the Great Brains meetings, and whatever family members are around the next day hear in detail about the topic of the night before. The union head's presentation on "The Relationship between Union and Corporation," with the manager of the Corporation in attendance, results in a particularly lively evening.

Daddy knows what his own topic is going to be. His life, like his father's, is predicated on feeding people, on increasing plant and animal yield. He was a founding member of the Rock County Breeders Co-op, the second artificial insemination cooperative in the nation, and is still secretary-treasurer. He's one of the four board members of the Wisconsin Scientific Breeding Institute. He's developing his own strains of hybrid seed corn. He's deep into genetics. Yet there are forces that threaten increasing abundance, and famine has regularly sat at the empty tables of the world. However much science can do, can it keep up with an exploding population? Daddy's reading includes books such as E. Parmalee Prentice's Hunger and History, Fairfield Osborn's Our Plundered Planet,

and William Vogt's Road to Survival. He plans to talk on the problem of food production and overpopulation.

As his month to give the program draws near Daddy checks more and more books out of the library. He takes voluminous notes. He writes bits and pieces, and then first, second and third drafts. Table talk ranges from how many times one has to boil off the bitterness of acorns to make them edible to Brave New World's Malthusian drills. On one day Daddy will be sure the group will find his topic infinitely interesting and pertinent; on the next he pictures the men sprawled in their chairs stifling yawns. His anxiety, like the population, accelerates exponentially. But when the time finally arrives he delivers his paper in splendid fashion and competently fields the discussion.

"How did it go?" Mother asks when he returns home. Daddy pulls his forelock modestly.

Not long after that one of the Great Brains, Dean of the College Gustav E. Johnson, writes Daddy a formal note, saying that he has a rather peculiar request to make. "The Student Curriculum Committee wants an educated, non-academic person to talk to them about the pros and cons of modern languages. They also want some of your ideas about college training in general." But Daddy turns Woody Johnson and the Curriculum Committee down.

The Great Brains group continues for several years, until Monty Modder drops dead of a heart attack. Don King has left the college for one in Cincinnati. Daddy regrets the loss of his corn boss and good friend. The two remain in touch with letters; they both relish a well turned phrase and they share the same sense of humor. There are also occasional phone calls and visits.

In 1970 Don is dean of St. Norbert's College in De Pere, Wisconsin. He calls Daddy with a proposal. It's like Woody's, but on a much grander scale. He wants Daddy to come for a week and be a visiting lecturer for a new course called "The President's Course: Points of View on American Life." Daddy laughs and turns him down, too, but Don sends on the material anyway.

During most of the 14 weeks of the semester the course will be conducted for a week at a time by outside lecturers, the majority of whom will not be professional teachers. Lecturers will be invited from the local community and around the country and will represent a wide variety of backgrounds and professions. The visiting lecturer will live on campus during the week and eat many of his meals with the students. He will meet with the class, limited to 25 students, three times during the week. . . .

In addition to regular meetings the lecturer will be asked to join some of the students for lunch and dinner and to meet evenings with faculty and students and members of the local community for informal discussions. Each visiting lecturer will decide for himself his own topics and his own format for presentations. It is suggested, however, that the first class meeting be devoted to the lecturer's background, his current position, how he arrived at his present position--what steps, what trials and errors--what he likes about his work and what he does not like, what are the problems, the rewards. The next two class sessions might then be devoted to students' questions and discussions about the lecturer's profession. Students do wish to ask questions of the lecturer on any of the major problems of our times in order to find out how visitors from various areas view our problems.

The emphasis will be on informality and on a personalized approach. One of the major objectives of the course is to have students broaden their awareness of American life through personal discussions with a variety of adult representatives, to question and clarify the stereotypes so frequent in our society. The visitors will no doubt enjoy the opportunity to see firsthand the variety of viewpoints among college students and how they too suffer from stereotyping. . . .

Don includes a list of nine persons who have already agreed to be guest professors. One is vice president of Kimberly Clark, another, the director of the Youth Bureau of the Chicago Police Department, a third, an advertising executive. Two are women. He also includes a list of the students enrolled in the course, their academic majors, their present vocational aspirations, and their topics of interest in the course. There are creative writing majors, and majors in history, theater, social ethics, psychology, economics, management, art. A biology major wants to work in conservation, and his interest is population explosion and eugenics.

Daddy studies all the material. Mother urges him to say yes; Jackie and Craig call and add their persuasions. It seems to everybody the sort of experience that would be Daddy's cup of tea. He would hugely enjoy it. But Daddy writes to Don,

Your material arrived and it scares the you know what out of me. I am so sure you have the wrong pig by the ear--a man of your good judgement to be so badly taken in, and then come to realize what you were stuck with.

Here is a chap who has always appreciated ability--note the wife I fooled into marrying me--but was lacking in ambition and ability himself to plot a career, but fell into his vocation, and did

each day what came naturally.

For years life was a giant swing--that is after I got past about nineteen years of age and lost a bit of my shyness and apprehension--the teens were really bad--I could hardly wait to get home from high school to take my shoes off--I actually got sick when my mother planned a party for me and my little friends --what friends. Oh, on the other hand there were some bright spots--like the time I got ahold of a girl's hand for the first time, standing on the little bridge on Fourth Street just south of Waverly Beach. It was a warm summer night--throb-throb as Craig used to say. But our hands got sweaty, and I didn't know how to disengage, and when she finally slipped away from me I was so embarrassed that I still shudder. Or the ghastly time I took a blind date--American girl--to the opera in Paris, and found we had nothing to say.

I am greatly flattered that you should think of me in connection with this course, The students sound formidable--How about Mary Ann Gallant, for instance, who says she wants "people who will talk openly about themselves and job. Their values, not a biographical sketch. Sort of nitty-gritty feelings, not just air." --How talk about oneself and ones job and still not be biograph- ical? I guess I know what she is getting at, though. They could crucify me--and probably upside down.

Well, life has leveled off and perhaps it is over the hill and into the sunset. Joan and I were going to live forever, as I think I told you once. I am now satisfied with a shorter goal. Perhaps just to rock with the sun in my simple face with folks thinking what significant thoughts are running through my head, when actually there is only a great emptiness. (Did I ever tell you about the city man who saw a farmer plowing and thought, "Here's a man who has time to philosophize, I'll glean some great thought," and waited at the end of the fence and when the farmer stopped, before turning, he said to him, "Would you mind telling me what you think about?" and the farmer answered, "I think about how nicely the furrow is turning over.")

Well, let me turn the furrow over a little longer and you also reconsider. To want a fellow on campus who didn't know where he was when he started, didn't plan where he was going, and didn't know where he was or realize if he had arrived when he got there--what a disaster.

Don responds that since he's become an executive he's learned the dangers of reconsidering--he doesn't do it; he makes the right judgment in the first place. And "as for having someone on campus who didn't know where he was when he started and didn't plan where he was going--most of our students have started and don't know where they are and one of the

reasons they are in the course is that they have no plan where they are going. It might be helpful to them to have an awful example. I will bill you as a humanistic farmer to show that it is possible in the twentieth century to be a humanist as well as a successful man in whatever vocation."

But Daddy doesn't accept. Everyone regrets his decision, except possibly Daddy, and the students who never know what they missed. Mary Ann Gallant, Jackie suspects, would have changed her mind about biography, and the biology major would have had a good time discussing Malthus with a former Great Brains townie, whose own contribution to the overpopulation problem has not been negligible.

members were Art Adams. Fairbanks--a management person, the Union pres from Fairbanks Fred White Chad Walsh Benny Judge Lask Martha

Vogt, William, Road to Survival

Osborn, Fairfield, Our Plundered Planet

Prentice, E. Parmelee, Hunger and History