ROSARY COLLEGE
RIVER FOREST, ILLINOIS

Sunday, September 27, 1959

Dear Mr. Hammerstein:

You and Mrs. "H" have had a rugged experience this past week and I can appreciate the tension it has generated because I am a member of the club! Although I deeply dislike any intrusion on the privacy of others, it occured to me that it might help a bit to hear from someone who had been" through the mill". After innumerable tests, I was popped into the hospital last February with what my doctors were reasonably sure was cancer. Since I'm a born ham, I had a wonderful time during the two days I waited for surgery. In my mind (my imagination is always hyper-active) I wrote touching farwell notes to friends, made speeches to members of my family I was sure would live in their hearts forever, died most heroically, and had a regular block-buster of a funeral! At this point my sense of humor asserted itself and I laughed so hard the nurse thought I'd flipped under the tension. The doctors were right, the tumor was malignant. However, when the chips were down, I knew that the last thing in the world I wanted was to worry those I loved - so only my Mother General and my immediate Superior at Rosary know that my subsequent trips for "check-ups" were actually for radium treatments.

In retrospect, the only thing that disturbs me is that fact that because physical activity, such as swimming, was curtailed for several months, I put on thirty pounds, twenty-five of which are still with me - darn it! Otherwise, I'm truly grateful for the experience and that's not just "pollyanna" talk, it's the truth!

First of all, I actually had my philosophy tested and it is a joy to know that not only has it given me a wonderful life but it also carried me with ease through a serious personal crisis; it proved to be one I could face both life and death with, happily.

Secondly, the experience gave me a much deeper compassion for and understanding of others. " Child of a good love born", I've lived and breathed in the atmosphere of love all my days and have taken it pretty much for granted. In the hospital I was able to think of people who have not been so blessed. Aristotle once wrote," Virtue is a habit that must be active". For me " caringness" has always been a most important human quality; it's terribly important that we care <u>about</u> people and things not just <u>for</u> them. So many people think they are good because they are not actively doing harm and as a result they frequently become smug, dull and selfish; I certainly would not want to spend an eternity with them. Heaven, I think, will be populated with people who have learned to love widely, deeply and boldly, even though they have other qualities that might seem peprehensible to the rightous. During the days in the hospital I tried to plan some practical ways of expressing my own "caringness" a bit more effectively. For example: because I simply <u>cannot</u> dictate personal letters to my secretary, and each year my personal correspondence grows heavier, it has become increasingly difficult to keep in touch with those I love. I realized that my mistake was in thinking in terms of <u>letters</u>. We have twelve minutes between classes and since all mine are taught in my studio-classroom, I just put on a record, listened to music

ROSARY COLLEGE
RIVER FOREST, ILLINOIS

I loved until the second bell rang. Now I write a brief note while listeneing to the music, and, in that way, without any effort at all, canget out eighty or more notes each month. When something really important happens, I write a letter but in the meantime the notes keep those I love aware of the fact. A couple of other ideas I cooked up at the time are working equally well.

Thirdly, the February frolic gave me time to take a long, hard look at my life to be sure I was getting maximum mileage. Although I've always found life tremendously exciting and have never gone stale about it, I had been taking very much for granted - the ability to know the world and ourselves (at least in part), the wonderful co-ordination of the senses, the magnificence of the human mind solving a problem, the beauty of movement, the excitement of sharing oneself through speech- all this and so much more! Now, like Christopher Fry, I try to " turn every corner as if I were seeing life for the first time!" - each flower is one made especially for my delight, each color shines for my happiness, each person and thing reflecrs a loving God and, in a way, is a minor miracle. Do you wonder that I am grateful for the experience that made me acutely aware of all these things. Since you have a poet's heart and eye, how much more beautiful the world must seem to you!

It will not be easy for you to put on the brakes but you will have to give that body of yours a little tender and loving care for a time. Don't fret and worry about anything including THE SOUND OF MUSIC; I'm sure it will breeze into the winner's circle but even if that were not true, YOU are much more important to your colleagues than a dozen" hits". Although I dearly love the arts in general and the theatre in particular, I get somewhat irritated with the " art for arts sake" bit. We should use art to re-create our spirits and give us a better understanding of ourselves, our society and our universe, not deify it. No work of art can compete with a human personality - you are more important to your wife and friends than all the art in the world. Is anything else as important as that knowledge?

The Hallidays, to whom I am devoted have been chanting the praises of the Hammersteins for several years. When I met you this past summer you reminded me of my parents whom I loved deeply. In some strange way I seem to have gotten my feelings for Mother and Dad, Richard and Mary, all tangled up with you. Nothing else could explain my temerity in writing this letter (unless, I have a strong sub-conscious urge to discuss "my operation" which I doubt.) However, whatever the cause, from this point on, I'll limit myself to praying for your welfare and stop driving you both quietly mad with my long, badly-typed letters. Be good and God bless you both.

A happy club-member!

Sister Mary

PS Don't answer this; it isn't meant to have one!

SMG