

# BETWEEN THE COVERS RARE BOOKS

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## **W.D. Snodgrass**

### *Archive of Letters to his Parents*

1935-1950

\$24,000

A collection of 93 letters from W.D. Snodgrass written mostly to his parents while he was serving overseas with the Navy during World War II. The letters consist of approximately 284 pages and include 51 ALS and 36 TLS, about half of which include their original envelopes. Additionally present are 10 letters to his parents from either his first and second wives. Also included are two "pony" editions of the New Yorker (smaller edited editions of the magazine intended for the troops) and several Navy newsletters, all with varying degrees of annotation by Snodgrass, as well as two programs from musical events at his High School and one program from his graduation. All items are near fine or better with some occasional light creasing and edgewear.

Snodgrass was drafted into the Navy in 1944 after graduating from Beaver Falls High School and completing a year at Geneva College. His service lasted until demobilization in 1946 and comprised roughly two years during which time he wrote numerous and detailed letters home documenting his travels and time in the service with humor, quips, and drawings. In places where his pen or typewriter has malfunctioned he tends to write humorous annotations such as "sluggish pen" near a "D" that was faint, or "Good heavens!" when he forgot the date and had to blot it out and start again or "can't spell" next to a scribbled out attempt at writing "Christmas."

In one ironic (considering his later hirsute appearance) letter dated January 31, 1945 he relieves his family by telling them "Nope, I have neither beard or mustache. I was growing a beard coming over but it wasn't too good so I gave up." A few of the letters have been censored by military authorities and have parts missing from them, most involve locations or his orders. Another letter thanking his family for a money order has a postscript that reads, "this letter just cost you \$3.00 a word." He often teases his parents when they forget to add articles they mention in their letters, "Jive! What would I ever do if you remembered to put in a clipping after you said you would. You're just like me - no memory at all to speak of." He later writes, "yes, I'm sick to death of seeing SNODGRASS, W.D. on all my clothes - hope I never do again."

He mentions his first wife, Lila, throughout the letters, asking his parents to give her a copy of his Navy pictures, and discussing how she's doing. In one letter he writes, "oh come now, Mother, what kind of place would it be if we were satisfied with things as we find them? Of course, we're perfectionists - why not? It merely shows that we have become accustomed to perfection - or striving for it. That's a compliment to you if you hadn't realized it."

When he isn't being silly he writes what he can of the War and the immediate post-War efforts of the Navy, although from time to time he is censored when discussing sensitive matters and locations. He writes, "In [the picture] with the thumbs, you will notice a little path over my left shoulder. Right there is a big cave that was FULL with Jap ammunition... For two days all you could hear was those shells etc. going off. Anyway, when we got here, there were all kinds of mortar shells and rockets packed up there. All these cockeyed kids had to experiment with it - they were taking stuff apart!!!!... I LEFT." He continues, "[The caves] were full of bodies and the stench was overpowering. All Jap - apparently they had been going over the place and removed all the Americans." In a letter dated August 17, 1945 he writes, "I guess it's really done. We keep hearing stories of fighting still going on - mainly by the Japs but I guess it's all over but the shouting."

The later letters to his parents (perhaps two dozen of them) from 1948 until 1960, discuss his writing, various places he was moving to, and eventually mention his second wife, Janice. Many of them are addressed to his family, but a few are sent directly to his father, usually when he had a serious issue that he wanted an opinion about. One of these is in a letter dated May 15, 1956 which reads, "I have a problem here and I want to lay it out. My plans have more or less collapsed for this summer -- I had been promised a Rockefeller grant which has now vanished and Jan is not well enough to continue working. This leaves us only two choices: either stay here while I get a construction job for the summer, or else bring Cindy down there for the couple of months we have her." A letter to his father from the year he divorced Lila reads, "if I find myself lying on my own back (more than ten hours a day) I'll send up a flare." The same letter includes a typed poem, "Ten Days Leave."

Also included in the collection are four letters from 1935, when Snodgrass would have been 9 years old, written to various family members on stationary from the Hotel Empire in New York City. Even at that tender age his wit and writing ability shows through. In a letter to an aunt he writes, "Do you cook, sew, knit, or do you play cowboy?... Keep quiet! Pardon me I meant that for the dog, Kenny." He finishes it with, "Hoping the bill collector's aren't around. Yours truly, Dewitt Snodgrass." To his uncle he writes, "writing you a note of bad luck, bad advice, and ugly things." And to his father, whom he refers to as "Daddy," he lists 10 points of good advice which include, "do not drink," "do not gamble," and "do not be a law breaker."

A wonderful collection of Snodgrass' letters describing his years during the War and from the decade leading up to his triumphs in the poetry world, including his winning of the Pulitzer Prize. [BTC#401138]