

March 5, 1955
Friday

Dear Syd:

I have some terribly bad news. Bob Wright was in an auto accident Monday in which he suffered severe cranio-cerebral injury. He is still unconscious.

I would have written you earlier, but ~~that~~ Thought that Peter Dunlop would see you as soon. However he has postponed his trip back to Australia. Bob's parents have been notified, of course. I assume that Mari will keep them fully informed. I want to tell you that I will write you immediately there is any decisive change. I hate to have to give you such news in such a suspensive state, but was even more concerned you would hear about it elsewhere and get an agonizingly fragmentary picture.

His condition is critical, though his general physical state, vital signs, etc. are remarkably good. The injury removed much of the right parietal bone, and some temporal. There was some, not very extensive cerebral laceration in the right precentral. There ~~must~~ have been a basal fracture as well (otorrhea), but no further signs have developed. Of course, until he regains consciousness, it will be impossible to evaluate the total injury. He is beginning to respond, though very little. The immediate danger of infection, hemorrhage, hematoma seems past. Fortunately, he has had excellent medical and surgical care. He was presented already fairly decompressed (with the open fracture!) but a temporary dural suture at the laceration, and sub-temporal decompression was done with the debridement and closing. The surgeon does not expect any acute crisis; we are all simply waiting the possibility of neurological evaluation.

The accident occurred on an icy patch of road about 40 miles away from Madison. The car went out of control and overturned. Mari and another passenger were with him, but unscratched. It makes a good case for the use of safety belts. They were, as it happens, on the way back from a trip to Carbondale to visit Lindegren.

I hardly have to tell you how we feel about it. It may be gratifying that, after a merely casual mention of the need, no less than 15 people lined up for blood donations to replace the (few pints, don't be alarmed) supply that had been used to cover him during the initial shock.

If you don't hear any more right away, his situation will not have materially changed. It is impossible, to predict, of course, how soon he will recover consciousness. Mari is taking it pretty well though she tries to spend 24 hours a day with him. She's a brave girl.

Yours,


Joseph Lederberg