

Mr. Dennis M. Shea
Chairman of Selectmen
Town Hall
Scituate, Mass.

Scituate, Mass.
March 17, 1944

Dear Mr. Shea,

The enclosed letter has been delayed in the mailing because I wanted the go-ahead signal from all the Boston newspapers, and not just the two concerned.

However, time is of the essence, so here it is now.

With my best wishes,

Sincerely yours,

(May Futrelle)

Mr. Dennis M. Shea
Chairman of Selectmen
Town Hall
Scituate, Mass.

Scituate, Mass.
March 8, 1944

Dear Mr. Shea,

I thought you knew my professional reputation, just took it for granted, I guess, that you did. But since thinking it over, although you have known me personally for forty years, I believe you honestly haven't the slightest idea of it, or you surely would not have said, publicly, what you did about "all writers" at Town Meeting Monday night.

Locally, here in Scituate, I suppose I am just "one of the folks," but really and truly I am somebody in the big outside world, even in the International world; even now. Perhaps I'd better tell you about me, even at the risk of telling you some things you do know. So, here goes to write you a letter of "information."

For your information, and as a clarification of your remark at Town Meeting, a writer does not think he is a writer until he has sold and had published his writings. This, of course, means that he has readers to read what he has written. A recognized professional writer is one

who has been selling over a period of years. One does not have to write a so-called best seller to become a recognized professional writer, as many of our best writers are “literary,” a term applied to writers of exceptional and educational ability and printed in what we know as “literary” magazines. For instance, our own Ralph Bergengren.

I, myself, am the best seller type, a doubtful honor in the eyes of some of our literati, but my first novel in 1911, a very best seller by actual selling numbers all over the world, put me into the commercial author class. It means that we, the best seller type, are read by millions not just by hundreds, and gets back to your Town Meeting remark.

I started my professional life by having my first story in the Sat Eve Post in 1904, with millions of readers (re your remark) I’ll show you. The SEP at that time had only two million subscribers, but it is estimated that at least five persons (the ratio is higher now) read each subscriber’s copy, not to mention those copies sold on the news stands. That at the very start of my career, you can see, gave me a reading public of ten millions. But the sale of my first novel in 1911 really established my professional reputation and gave me an entry into “Who’s Who” (a highly professional publication) but most important of all sent my “price” sky-rocketing. That is how I was able to carry-on on my own after the Titanic disaster and raise and educate my children. For your information, too, I shall say that my husband left no life insurance whatever, and the laws of the United States did not include, and still do not, indemnity in shipwreck for its citizens. So that financing my family for a good many years was done by me personally, and made possible by my best selling reputation, established on the firm foundation of my millions of readers; also getting back to your Town Meeting remark.

I’ll round out my professional reputation in “Who’s Who,” based on my reading public, by pointing out to you (you may not know this, either) that I was renewed in the recent 1940 issue, when 36000 names were dropped, according to New England newspapers, because of my radio broadcasting in 1938 (see CBS official records) not only doing the actual broadcasting but writing the script as well, and for a television “appearance.”

Which brings me to my rather newish radio reputation.

I broadcasted on CBS my own radio program “Do you want to be a writer?” It was distinguished by the presence of WEEL’s most exclusive editor, Mr. Roger Wheeler, who introduced me at each broadcast and asked the necessary questions; I started with an estimated twenty million listeners. The question in your mind, naturally, is why I am not still on the radio. I’ll try to make it clear briefly. I had to stop after my contract with CBS was out, because the fan mail and the story scripts that poured in so literally swamped me I could not physically as well as mentally keep up the pace. Jack Benny, for instance, has nine script writers for a once-a-week broadcast. I had two secretaries to attend to the mail, but even that help proved inadequate. Of course, I had started these broadcasts with considerable fan mail because of my established professional reputation – and good publicity.

Last summer I had another radio hour added to my broadcasting reputation. I had two radio plays on “Murder Clinic,” a well-known program with listeners here in Scituate; you may be one.

But with the most unique piece of writing I've done I'll admit did not have my usual number of readers. It is a Federal law known officially in Washington as S5477, a copyright law, and was passed through the efforts of Senator Lodge and our Representative, Chas. L. Gifford. It was signed by the President March 15, 1940.

It just so happens that I am the first writer of fiction who ever authored such a bill (Mark Twain was one of a committee who sponsored the original Copyright Act in 1873) and I shall take it for granted you know that the first in anything or of anything is worth a newspaper hurrah. To make the passing of this bill into Federal law all the more exciting, the President sent me the pen with which he signed it (a signal honor for the National League of American Pen Women who sponsored it, and I, officially, presented the pen to the Boston branch, my branch) Mrs. R. gave the Pen Women a tea. She, herself, is a Pen Woman (I am on the National Board, see Who's Who"). The final thrill was a presentation to me of a picture of the bill by the State Department's Division of Copyright, which I had framed and now hangs on the wall of my studio here in Scituate, and Secretary Hull gave me his autograph, dated. There is, of course, much more to this, the so-called society side. I have only briefly stated the important side. My readers, however, were only some eight thousand Pen Women, and twenty thousand members of the Authors' League, whose literary property the bill protects.

But I must be getting on to my teaching (of writing) reputation. I had my first story class in Atlanta GA., in 1920. And I think it would be interesting to tell you that one of my first pupils was Margaret Mitchell, author of the highly successful "Gone With the Wind." I went to school with Peggy's mother, when we both had youngish ambitions to knock the writing world cock-eyed (there was not such word in use in those days) and her daughter did exactly that.

Incidentally, perhaps I should tell you that I have taught all over the country (in person as well as over the radio) sponsored by well-known Writers' Clubs and colleges; also by Scituate High School. In support of my teaching reputation, I might add that I was asked to be one of the speakers at the A.L.C.S. (Authors' League Craftman Series) conducted by the Author's League in connection with New York University last spring and fall; where experienced writers of reputation told young and inexperienced ones what to do to write stories and get them published. (and, of course, have readers) My years of teaching experience made my practical views on the subject especially needed; and with my copyright experience I could instruct these young people how to take care of their literary property. But I had my job to do at the Allen Library, and could not go to New York to speak at the Series. Naturally, you have no knowledge of such an activity (Authors' League Bulletin, Feb. 1, 1944) and of the forty-three distinguished writers who took part; including J. P. Marquand, Boston's top author at the moment (who, I think, used to summer in Scituate) and our own Inez Hynes Irwin.

I was also asked to be a member of the Writers' War Board at Washington, but had my library job to do here.

I think this will give you a glimpse of my professional career, the highlights at least. I have not space here to go into my newspaper special assignments – among them, the page story of the famous 1913 Harvard-Yale football game, syndicated all over the country, the Mohr trial

at Providence, where the now famous Westbrook Peglar was one of my colleagues, the Leo Frank case, the Asa Candler (Coco-cola millions) deBouchel breach of promise trial at Atlanta, Ga. (I must remember I am writing a letter not a book) the list seems endless now that I am attempting to set it down in black and white; and have not mentioned my seven movies, now relegated to the old silent dear dead past days (thank goodness) but perhaps should credit myself with three recent movies, talkies, made in England for English quota cinemas, by M.G.M's Joe Rock, with all of England's top stars in the cast. If you saw "David Copperfield," made in Hollywood, you saw them and know who they are. So, it begins to look as if I used May Futrelle to promote the library.

If you read my letter this far, I should like to say that I, personally, bear you no grudge for exorcising all writers at Town Meeting Monday night. But I'd hate to speak for the Hollywood gang, or the newspaper bunch, headed by Mr. Westbrook Peglar. The experience I have gained in my travels all over the world, and selling stories in several languages, has taught me to take honest criticism in my stride. The immortal check from a first class magazine for a story is really the answer. Monday night was my first experienced in being publicly criticized along with all writers, at least by some one not familiar with the actual "business" of writing. I suppose I should be a good sport and say I liked it, but between you and me and the gatepost, I honestly didn't.