Ike's Letters to a Friend, 1941 -1958

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On 22 January 1948, Eisenhower at last put an end to speculation when he released a letter to New Hampshire publisher Leonard V. Finder, in which he wrote that his "decision to remove myself completely from the political scene is definite and positive."

26 January 1948

Dear Swede:

By this time you have possibly noted in the public press that all your remaining questions about a political career for me have been definitely answered. Several of my warm friends—men whose judgment I completely respect—differed from me sharply as to the wisdom of issuing such a statement. In fact, I had only two real supporters, among all my friends, in my belief that I must do so. There were many factors other than those mentioned in my letter to Mr. Finder that had some influence with me but I think I am honest in saying, as I did in the letter, that personal desire and convenience were not predominating among them. Now that it is done, I can at least devote my mind unreservedly to a number of other important things and will not feel like I am constantly on the "witness stand."
I read the letter from your friend [Harold W.] Whicker and I must say that I found it most interesting and intriguing. Discounting or even eliminating his over-generous opinions concerning my personal characteristics and qualifications, the letter is indicative of the thinking of a very, very large number of people in this country today. Most of them, however, have not Mr. Whicker's ability to express himself. Incidentally, some of his sentences are a little on the lengthy side for my simple mind but even so he succeeds in expressing himself clearly and forcefully.

I also read his letter on our educational institutions. You have asked me to return it and I shall do so in a few days but first I think I should like to have a copy of it made because I shall want to refer to it from time to time. My most persistent reaction to his two documents is that it is a tremendous loss to our country that he is a confirmed invalid. We need crusaders; he is obviously the type of man that would never give up in his pursuit of an objective and even though some would certainly accuse him of lopsidedness (I am speaking now particularly of his castigation of our educational system) he would certainly make a lot of complacent, ritualistic people most uncomfortable. If ever I get out in that region I am going to look him up because I have the feeling that an hour's conversation with him would be truly stimulating. When you write to him please assure him of the profound impression his effort made upon me and tell him that the highest praise I can give is: "Our country needs more of his type."

Washington is undergoing a touch of real winter. The temperature must be somewhere around 15 or 20 today and we have quite a bit of snow. The forecaster says we shall continue to have no change for two or three days. I suppose that you have gotten a touch of the same thing down at Chapel Hill.

I have seen pictures of Dick Scott of the Navy [an All-American football player and class president who would soon marry Swede's older daughter] and from them I should say he is a fine-looking boy. I should like to get a chance to have a real talk with him because I should like to subject to microscopic examination every young man fortunate enough to run around with the Hazlett girls.

I do not remember whether I have told you that Mamie and I are counting on being grandparents in early April. Far beyond this, we are already counting on the selection of the school the young
grandson or granddaughter (I wish we could figure on twins) is going to attend.

Within ten days or two weeks I expect to turn over this job but I shall be around the city until May 1st, when I go to New York. Right this minute we have a household upset with sickness—Mamie’s Dad became quite ill while visiting us. However, anytime you have a chance to get up this way send us a wire and count on staying with us, certainly up to the middle of April—after that we’ll always have an extra room in New York.

With love to Ibby and the girls,

As ever,

P.S. Tell Whicker to get a description of the effort being made at Amherst [College] to revitalize educational processes.

On 12 April 1948 Eisenhower wrote Swede a short note, apologizing for its brevity and assuring Swede that “no one writes me letters that are more acceptable and intriguing than yours.” He was far more reserved, however, in responding to a proposal that Swede passed along on April 21. An editor at Dodd, Mead and Company, which had published a children’s book on submarines by Swede, had proposed that he and Eisenhower “collaborate” on a book based on Eisenhower’s Abilene boyhood. While Swede assured Eisenhower that he had “never had even the slightest desire to capitalize in anyway on what is to me a precious friendship,” he nevertheless seemed to be genuinely interested in the project. Eisenhower responded with characteristic circumspection, offering to provide Swede with information but carefully maintaining his own distance from the project. Eisenhower’s own memoirs, Crusade in Europe, was scheduled for publication in the late fall.
Dear Swede:

In the note I sent just before going on vacation I included my apologies for its brevity. I now repeat them.

I, of course, have no objection whatsoever to your writing any book, article, or pamphlet that you may think worthwhile doing. If the subject should happen to be anything connected with me or my life I would be delighted to provide you with whatever factual information my memory might still retain. On the other hand, I could not be a collaborator in the book—it would have to be your effort alone. As I see it, the difference between you and someone else writing on such a subject is that you are fully acquainted with the Kansas background from which we both came. Moreover, because you are one of my oldest and dearest friends I would spare no pains to help you dig up facts. Beyond this I could not go, and I believe that your publishers are a little bit off the beam in suggesting that we should "collaborate."

If you should decide to undertake such a task you can provide me with a questionnaire and I will do my best to fill it in. The matter, therefore, is strictly between you and your publishers and you can act in the certainty that I will be as helpful as is possible. I should think that the decision you would have to make was whether or not the effort would be worth-while as I cannot conceive that there would be any great demand because here and there in books, articles, and just plain commentary there has been an awful lot written about the Eisenhower tribe. It is only fair to say, however, that while it all has pretended to be factual reporting some of it has gone deeper into the fictional world than you would possibly dream of doing even in a book that was frankly fictional.

I did not go fishing on my vacation. Mamie and I simply went down to Augusta National with a few friends and lived on the golf course there for 10 days. Incidentally, I did not improve my playing a bit, but I did have a whale of a lot of fun. It was the best two weeks I have had in many years.

I cannot be sure what my schedule calls for on the 6th of June [when Swede's daughter was scheduled to marry Richard Scott]. It is my impression that that is the exact date of one of the busy commencement programs at Columbia. However, I assure you that even if I could get off for a few hours in the afternoon and fly to your daughter's wedding, to return that evening to New York, I
would feel it a great privilege to do so. Won't you please write to me again at Columbia University about the end of May to remind me to make a special effort?

One of the reasons I accepted the Columbia job was because I thought that while doing something useful I would still be in a position to relax a bit; to base myself better than I have been able to do for the past many years. My schedule of appointments for the first month there has already grown to appalling proportions. If current indications provide any index of what my future life there is to be, I shall quit them cold, and deliberately go to some foresaken spot on the earth's surface to stay until I am fully ready to go back to work on the only basis that it appears I am ever to be allowed to work, namely under full [and] heavy steam.

I do not know whether you occasionally make trips to New York to see your publishers. If you do, you can always count with certainty upon a warm welcome at our house and a roof under which to lay your head. You know that there could be no more welcome guests for us than you and Ibby.

Last weekend I went to Kansas. I tried desperately to avoid making the trip because it cropped off the last three days of my planned vacation. However, Mr. Harger, who is about the only man of the older generation left that helped me get into West Point, made the invitation so personal that I felt I had to go. The meeting was at Wichita but a few Abilene-ites headed by Mr. Harger were present for the luncheon. I was in the city only a matter of two or three hours.

With love to the family and warmest regard to yourself,

As ever,
man with an ingratiating sense of humor and a flair for cultivating the friendship of Washington's politically powerful, including Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman (who in 1945 appointed Allen director of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation), and Dwight Eisenhower. He later wrote about his experiences in a book entitled Presidents Who Have Known Me (1960 ed., New York: Simon & Schuster).

6 October 1948

Dear Swede:

I am not astonished that you find it impossible to come to the party here on the 12th. It will be quite a formalized affair and the crowd will make impossible any real contact with such old friends as may come. From my viewpoint, I would far rather you make a trip to New York at a less hectic period—in which case we could really make some progress in settling the world's major problems. Incidentally, I think I have told you there is always room for you and Ibby in our house whenever you can come this way.

I tender my most sincere sympathy in the loss of your dog. You do not have to describe to me what he meant to you, but I do hope you will be successful in finding his brother to take his place.

While many people have tried to make something of my friendship with George Allen, the fact is that it is just that and nothing more. His wife and mine have been very close friends for years, and I met George at the beginning of the war. Since that time my contacts with him have brought me nothing but satisfaction; he has never attempted to dump any kind of problem, political or otherwise, in my lap. He is one of those delightful persons who has a rollicking attitude toward life and he himself is always the butt of his innumerable stories and jokes. In addition to all this, he has behind his clownish exterior a very shrewd clear-thinking brain. If ever you meet him you will understand what I mean.

You mention some columnist saying that George and I were conniving for the 1952 nomination. He unquestionably got his lead
on that one from a telecast made by George Allen during the Democratic Convention. Some reporter asked him a question, “Are you for Eisenhower for President?” Quick as a flash he replied, “Of course, like everybody else I think he would make the best President this country ever had, but I am for him in 1952 not 1948.” That is the sole incident when I have heard George say anything about 1952, and he was definitely kidding a reporter.

I had no idea that I was putting you on the spot in my answer to your query about a story on our youthful days in Abilene. To correct that error, I simply give you carte blanche to quote me as you please on that subject—if you want to tell your publisher that I violently object, go right ahead. On the other hand, if someone is going to write that kind of a story I secretly would rather have you do it than anyone else. I still fail to see, however, how any great amount of interest could be engendered in a story of the commonplace happenings involving a bunch of boys in a small western town of forty-five years ago.

My love to the family and, as always, warmest regards to yourself,

Sincerely,