

March 20, 2016  
(January Letter)

Hi Samantha,

I was busy going through some old papers this week and came across many from when I was your age. It was February 1962 when I turned 18 so 8 months after that made it October as the equivalent time to your current age.

October 1962 was my second year at UBC. As I mentioned in one of my previous letters ([May 2015](#)), I had graduated a year early from high school since I was in an “accelerated” program. It meant that there were not many people from my graduating class at university and I remember feeling very lonely and insecure during that period of time.

By the time the second year came around, I was doing much better, however, since I had figured out the system a bit and, although I still didn’t have many friends, the large classes were not so intimidating. I expect that since you have such a small cohort of fellow students in your program, some of this type of intimidation is not what you experience.

The summer of 1962 included the three months when I worked on the fire suppression crew near Duncan on Vancouver Island – I also told you a bit about this in an earlier letter ([July 2013](#)) – and a week at Naramata at the end of the summer.

I remember the fall semester because I got up enough courage to join an “extracurricular” study group of Dietrich Bonhoeffer that was led by the United Church Chaplain on behalf of the Student Christian Movement (SCM). This was when I first met Jack and was most impressed with his approach to studying religion. It was a thoughtful and critical approach that asked plenty of questions about the social and political context of the various writings as much as the content of what people said. It freed me from the more doctrinaire approach that one tends to find in religious groups – where they seem to be trying to tell you about what to believe, rather than exploring various approaches and interpretations of belief.

It was in the SCM group that I met a group of students who seemed very compatible with me. They were concerned with the social and political events of the day, questioning about the meaning of these things, and exploring how their own lives might fit within them. Most of all, they were interested in figuring out what was important in their lives.

There were plenty of people, groups, and events that served as challenges for young people at that time. This was right around the time of the Cuban Missile crisis (Oct-Nov 1962) that you might have heard about. It was a scary time since the Cold War between the USA and Russia was in full swing and the threat of nuclear war was always in the news. The Cuban missile crisis brought it to a head. It is particularly pertinent to today since it is only now that the USA boycott of Cuba is being lifted by President Obama.

We were pleased to see that the Canadian government did not agree with the USA’s boycott during those days so it was still possible to visit Cuba from Canada – so long as you didn’t travel via the USA. There were plenty of student events and exchanges (including via the SCM) with

Cuba and the information we were getting from them did not fit with the horror stories coming via the USA. The regime was very strict in Cuba, but it was impressive how the Cuban people cared for their population first – even under the severe constraints of the boycott. It's about time that the USA dropped that silly policy.

This was also the time that Medicare was first introduced into Saskatchewan – in spite of huge protests by doctors – by Tommy Douglas. It was an important step in the development of the national program of universal health care in 1966 (under Lester B. Pearson's Liberal Government). The Saskatchewan initiative reinforced the movement of federal health care from its initial form in 1957 to the universal one in 1966. It was an important initiative and one that makes Canada an attractive place to live.

However, we are constantly pressured by businesses that wish to take elements of health care out of government hands and shift it to the private sector. This is a bad idea since it means that only the rich will be able to afford high quality care and that public care will deteriorate. The only way to ensure that the powerful people devote resources to high quality health care is if they must also share in those services. If they can opt out by buying higher quality services, then the poor will suffer since fewer resources and attention will be allocated to the public institutions. I would make a similar argument about the emergence of private schools – as opposed to public ones. It's why I am more confident when flying with the pilot on board (as opposed to a robot) – since the pilot will suffer the same fate as the passengers if he or she does not pay attention to the condition of the plane. Do you think this is a silly argument?

I looked at the other things that happened in 1962 and found the following items.

- The Trans Canada Highway first opened. This was the highway we (mostly) followed on our road trip.
- Canada's first satellite was launched
- The first African-American enrolled at the University of Mississippi – but only with the escort of federal troops and US Marshals. There were riots on the campus relating to this.
- The Beatles released their first recording (Love Me Do)
- The last execution in Canada took place

Love,