

A Letter from the Late, Great Larry Brown

— WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY —

KATHY PORIES

Those of us who were lucky enough to have spent any time with Larry Brown knew that he wasn't just a prolific and gifted writer of stories and novels; he also wrote the kinds of letters that were so good you'd want to read them over and over and over again. I still have one that sits on my desk at work, his oversized handwriting on the envelope, and then the three-page typed letter where he talks about the writing shack he's still building, the creepy guy who wouldn't stop staring at him at a party, the novel he's working on, the land he's clearing, his grandbaby soon to be born, his uncle Everett almost burning down his house down the road (the five firetrucks in the yard trying to put the fire out), the latest book he'd read and loved (George Singleton's stories).

Larry's writing came from such a place of genuineness and desire to convey what he was seeing or feeling, you were there with him. I think that's why all of us who got letters from Larry saved them. And his letters, like his stories, could have been written by no one but this kind, complicated, smart, canny man. The forthcoming collection *Tiny Love* compiles the complete stories of Larry Brown. Before his untimely death in 2004, Larry published nine books, but like all writers, he also received rejection letters. Here's my very favorite letter of his, written to famed editor Gordon Lish after receiving a rejection. Honestly, suitable for framing.

Kathy Pories
Executive Editor
Algonquin Books

29 April 83

Dear Mr. Lish:

I don't hold no bad feelings about it; shit, you got your work to do and I got mine. I figure we're both moving toward the same thing. I'd be lying if I said I didn't feel like laying down and crying when it came back, but nobody ever twisted my arm and told me to try to be a writer. No sir, everything I bring down on myself, every crush, is something I asked for. I wouldn't do the crime if I couldn't stand the time. It'll probably be a while before I bother you with anything again, cause I got to back up and regroup here. git all my trash in one bag per se. I have faith in myself. I have to have that. I couldn't go on if I didn't. I'll write some more stories for Easyriders in the meantime, in between working on the new book. It's going pretty good, I've already done about 20,000 words on it. Sometimes I just don't know, though. I ain't trying to unload my burdens on you, hell, you've got your own troubles. I get down when this stuff comes back. I get down bad. Low. My wife says I drink too much and that all our problems come from my writing. Maybe so. I just wish to hell I had somebody to talk to, you know, somebody who could tell me what I'm doing wrong. I don't understand your letters sometimes. People, editors, tell me my stuff is good but they don't buy it. I know I'm ignorant of things like theme and mood, grammar in places, the basic things. You're talking to a twelfth-grade flunkout here.

You been good to me, though, and I know it. I went to see Mr. Hannah a few times and he encouraged me, pointed out a few of my weak spots. But I can't

keep running to him and worrying him with my stuff. Hell, I'm a grown man and he don't want to hear about others going through what he already went through and survived. I didn't know you were his editor when I sent that first bunch of short stories to you. It was only after I looked in the front of Ray that I figured out who you were. And then, when I saw The Tennis Handsome, I hated I even mentioned his name in my first letter. I wasn't trying to gain any points like that. I wouldn't do that.

Anyway, I guess what I wanted to say was that I appreciate what you've done for me. There ain't but one other man in New York City who's taken the time with me that you have, and that's T.E.D. Klein, at Twilight Zone magazine. He's been damn good to me, writing letters and such, encouraging me. I don't know what you want but I damn sure aim to give it to you. Know this. I decided a long time ago to make this my life's work. I pump a firetruck ten days a month but that ain't my life's work. Writing is. And nothing has happened yet to make me change my mind. Do you need some puppies? My puppies have had puppies. My puppies' puppies have had puppies. You wouldn't believe my Puppy Chow bill.

methodical in Mississippi,

Larry Brown