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MCLAREN - DRAWER 2 - 006

40 Donfern St.,  
 MT. GRAVATT. Q. 4122.  
 16th August 1988.

Mr. Barrett Reid,  
 OVERLAND,  
 PO Box 249, MOUNT ELIZA. V. 3930.

Dear Barrett Reid,

I cannot believe I can no longer write to Stephen Murray-Smith. We have not been writing long - mainly through this year only - but I (as a struggling writer) could not believe the time and energy that he spent writing to me, the confidence that he gave me to persevere.

It came as a personal loss to me when I opened up the Saturday Australian on 6th August, and was confronted with the heading to Geoffrey Dutton's Farewell. I could not believe it. The very day he died, I had posted to him a letter in answer to one he had written to me a few days before about my writing. In my letter, I had asked him 'what he meant' by one of his statements to me - (viz. '... success is partly luck and partly talent and partly determination and partly courage; and no doubt with some, but perhaps not with you, knowing when to cut your losses'. I worried over that last section - and could not work out what he meant; on my daughter's advice, wrote to ask him - and now will never know!)

Why did someone like him have to die, and some old villain like Joh B.P., for example, apparently be destined to go on forever? I am certainly one of that SWAG of writers who will miss him, dreadfully, - and only through the short notes he sent me, did I know him.

With my letter posted on 31st July I included another story - THE REAL TRAGEDY. (I am sure you still have it). Dr. Murray-Smith was writing to me about another story you still have : MY FRIEND JULIE - on 13th April he wrote me TWO TYPE-WRITTEN PAGES, largely about this story and how I should try re-writing it! (I could not believe his generosity in time and effort - and his implicit support) He told me, 'inter alia' to 'Read it as an Overland reader would read it. Tighten it a bit, not by rubbing out a word here and there, but by -preferably - typing it out again, with a critical eye...' I could not seem to understand what he meant - and then suddenly, just this last weekend, I looked at it again, and REALLY RE-WROTE IT - in the process reducing it by about 400 words, ~~the~~ - cutting out the over-writing, the flowery phrasing, that seemed to suddenly jump out at me. It was strange, the way it happened - suddenly I could see what Stephen Murray-Smith meant (I think). I now enclose the result. You probably have the last, previous version (if you gather my meaning) under the title MY FRIEND JULIE - now you can compare it with this new version. Dr. Murray Smith said he would like to publish it, if I brought it up to scratch - have I now achieved this? Perhaps it would still be better called MY FRIEND JULIE rather than IN THE GATTO

I hope that OVERLAND will continue - it is one voice of sanity in a rather crazy literary (and political/economical) country. I enclose my cheque to continue my Subscription (\$10 as a concession subscriber - (I am an age pensioner) - plus \$5 donation).

I also enclose an SAE - as Stephen Murray-Smith advised me always to do.

Yours sincerely,

*Betty Birsks*  
 BETTY BIRSKYS.

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