

April 27, 1976

Mr. and Mrs. Hank Schievink  
109 Oshawa Blvd. S.  
Oshawa, Ontario  
L1H 5R4  
CANADA

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Schievink:

Please accept my apologies for the delay in my response to your most welcome letter of December 13, 1975. My typewriter has been in the repair shop and I don't seem able to manage without it since I work fulltime and my schedule is quite full. Your letter arrived on New Year's Eve and I considered that a good omen for advancement on the book during the year of 1976. I am most grateful for your generosity in sharing with me your personal memories of Bert. I am particularly appreciative that you told me both good and bad memories. It helps me better understand his hesitance to talk about his family and perhaps I can project for you what I feel may be possible answers to your questions.

It is true that he had a visit from Mrs. Voorthuizen. I am not certain why he swore her to secrecy regarding his visit from her, but I know that he did for he told me so. I conjecture that it was because he felt his family disapproved of whatever he did and he could bear no more disapproval or what he perhaps considered rejection of himself. To get to Bert's cabin one had to walk down the beach along the ocean and wade through a stream that ran to the sea and then hike through the sand dunes for about a half mile. He lived in a clearing surrounded by willow trees. One would never have known his cabin was inside it if they didn't know where it was. You had to bend over to get through the narrow and barely visible path. Inside his space was about 1/4 acre. There was a shed for storage and a two-room shack with a little kitchen with a wood-burning stove made of brick and a bedroom. He had many books and a transistor radio on which he listened to Beethoven and the talk shows. He had a well outside from which he got his water. He grew vegetables in cans on a table (so the rabbits wouldn't eat them first) and mint for his tea in a covered garden. He was always

neat and clean, very much aware of what was going on in the outside world, very astute about world affairs, politics, and the paradoxical dilemma of human beings as they are caught up in the quest for affluence and status while neglecting the small kindnesses, concern for one another, and spiritual growth. How strange it is that your parents had to grieve over Bert because of his lack of faith in God for he was what I would consider a mystic, one of the most religious men I have ever met. Not in the orthodox ways one expects from churchmen, but he was a man engaged in a lifelong pursuit of the good, the beautiful, the meaningful. He left his Buddhist Bible to my husband and I and in it we have found much that explains and clarifies for us the way of life which he chose. He was a magnet here in America as well as in Holland, as you remember him. People from many walks of life trekked to see him out in the dunes and to seek his advice and his company. I have interviewed many of them and each of them was drawn to him by some indefinable attraction.

Perhaps it will relieve your mind about the stowaway episode to know that the reason Bert refused to pay the Holland American Line for his passage was because he had worked his way across by washing dishes, serving meals, etc. and he undoubtedly didn't feel that he owed them anything. I always found him to be extremely careful never to become indebted to anyone and that has been the experience of every single person I have interviewed.

I am not yet a published writer, but simply an aspiring one. I have taken creative writing classes and my college professors indicated that I had the potential to become a successful professional writer. Thus far, I have been working along with my husband so that our two daughters, ages 15 and 19, will have college educations. I plan to quit work in about four years. If the book is not complete by that time I will finish it then. I decided to write a book about Bert because he was one of the most unique men I have ever known. He was true to himself in a way that I have never seen before. He refused to compromise because of someone else's value system and was steadfast to his own. That is very rare in this modern world. He was keen of mind and had a beautiful quick wit about him that was a delight. Not one person that hiked through the dunes to seek his company (whom I have interviewed) ever went there without feeling they had been given something very rare and special from him. He often did astrological readings for friends. We often talked about writing a book together about his life, but reticence made him put it off. Before he died he made me promise that

I would do it. Bert went into the hospital on August 9th. We returned from a short trip on the 10th and learned he was hospitalized. We made the journey to his bedside every night but one from that day until his death on August 21st. Prior to that we had hiked into the dunes with food and concern for him every weekend for two months. He was bed-ridden by this time. I cooked for him; my husband and I brought in water for him and my husband shaved him for he would not yet go into the hospital. He knew that when he left his "castle" as he called it, he would never return. Why did we care so much for a man who lived out in the dunes, who was not even a member of our family? We cared because he was a unique and special human being who helped us sort out our values and our priorities in life, because he was true to himself and encouraged us to be true to ourselves, because even though we were often unable to define what we valued about our visits to him, the value was real. We might leave with empty hands, but never with empty souls. Perhaps that was for no more complicated reason than that he needed us and valued us. The hour is late and I can not tell you more this evening. I hope this helps your understanding of your brother. Incidentally, Bert was not poor. Although he lived simply he built up an estate of over \$15,000 by the time of his death. We believe he did this through the stock market. We had no knowledge of this while he was living and were surprised to learn it. A few days before his death he said, "It will soon be over; all that will be left is for Christ and Buddha to fight over my soul." Perhaps that gives you some insight into the person he was.

The next time I go to Morro Bay I will buy a print for you of Bert's shack which was done by an artist there and I will mail it to you. I have one identical to it on my living room wall, along with photos of Bert.

Again I thank you for your response to my letter and your personal thoughts and memories. Anything you can add to what you have told me I will appreciate. Any more questions that I can answer for you I will be happy to answer. May 1976 be a good and prosperous year for you and yours.

Most cordially,

Jane Elsdon

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