

Letter to His Astronaut Son

Scott Carpenter, 1962

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Dear Son,

We share this adventure

Just a few words on the eve of your great adventure for which you have trained yourself and anticipated for so long—to let you know that we all share it with you, vicariously

As I think I remarked to you at the outset of the space program, you are privileged to share in a pioneering project on a grand scale—in fact the grandest scale yet known to man. And I venture to predict that after all the huzzas have been uttered and the public acclaim is but a memory, you will derive the greatest satisfaction from the serene knowledge that you have discovered new truths. You can say to yourself: this I saw, this I experienced, this I know to be the truth. This experience is a precious thing; it is known to all researchers, in whatever field of endeavour, who have ventured into the unknown and have discovered new truths.

You will get a great peace from the experience of discovery.

I believe in a higher power—

You are probably aware that I am not a particularly religious person, at least in the sense of embracing any of the numerous formal doctrines. Yet I cannot conceive of a man endowed with intellect, perceiving the ordered universe about him, the glory of the mountain top, the plumage of a tropical bird, the intricate complexity of a protein molecule, the utter and unchanging perfection of a salt crystal, who can deny the existence of some higher power. Whether he chooses to call it God or Mohammed or Buddha or Turquoise Woman or the Law of Probability matters little. I find myself in my writings frequently calling upon Mother Nature to explain things and citing Her as responsible for the order of the universe. She is a very satisfactory divinity for me. And so I shall call upon Her to watch over you and guard you and, if she so desires, share with you some of Her secrets which She is usually so ready to share with those who have high purpose.

I ask this higher power to watch over you.

With all my love, Dad

Note: This love letter, from a father to a son, shows the inherent beauty that can be bound up in writing to someone who is going off on an adventure or even just on a vacation. It also reminds us to think about how we value other people. Rather than a simplistic, "Have a good time," this father offers his son a connection, an insight, and a blessing—all in one short piece. In this classroom exercise, students are asked to use the foundational structure of this letter—its focus on sharing common ground, foreseeing the outcome of a future experience, conveying beliefs in a higher power, and asking for protection—to craft their own "Bon Voyage" essays.