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Mr. Agustin Basave,
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My dear friend Agustin:

For the past six weeks I have been away from San Francisco; to New York, Boston, Chicago, and Denver, but most particularly to our great wheat states of Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Colorado. And, unfortunately, your notes of May 10th and June 5th have been following me from place to place.

From my stories, I am sure you will realize that, though my business holds me generally to the cities, my heart is in the country -- and with the country people. It is with them that I have been visiting. The W. W. Norton Co., my publishers, wish me to write a series of three books on our wheat country -- the sad country which is now threatened with becoming a dust bowl -- and I felt that before starting the work I needed to again atune my ear to the language of the people who live there.

Now to answer your questions:

I was born December 16, 1898 in a little mill town (Rochester) in New Hampshire. My people were of distinguished blood lines, but very poor. My father (a direct descendent of John the Moody, brother of King James II of Scotland), was born of deaf-mute parents, was entirely uneducated, and contracted tuberculosis soon after my birth. At the close of 1906 we moved from New Hampshire to Colorado for his health.

My mother was well educated, a descendent of Deacon John Brewster -- leader of the Puritan Pilgrims who settled at Plymouth, Mass. in 1620. She was, and is, the best oral reader I have ever heard. The chief entertainment in our family was her reading aloud from the English and American classics.

One Sunday afternoon, in May, 1908, we had gone to a green valley in Colorado for a picnic. Mother was reading to us from "John Halifax, Gentleman", and had reached a point in the story where I found a lump growing in my throat. I looked up just in time to see my father wipe a tear from the side of his nose, and he said to my mother, "Mame, you're an artist. You hold my heart strings in the throb of your voice."

My mother closed the book, looked off across the valley for a moment, and answered, "No, Charlie, I am not an artist. The man who selected from all the words in this wonderful language of our, those which would best enable him to transfer his own thoughts, feelings, and emotions from his mind to the mind of a reader was the artist. I can only lend expression to the words he selected."

Her words went over and over in my mind, and I determined that, one day, I would try to be one of those who selected the words. From that day, I have never read anything without carefully observing the author's technique in the selection and arrangement of his words. Through this, I realized I had had the finest teachers among the students of English, but, because of lack of education, doubted that I should ever be able to write.

Five years ago, when my daughter was in high school, she came to me for help with a short story for her class. I was obliged to say, "My dear, I would have no idea as to how a short story is written; you know I am only a book reader. But I'll go to an evening class and see if I can learn something which might help you."

I did, and was assigned the task of writing four pages of personal experience. When the paper came back, it was marked, "This should be expanded into a book." During that winter of 1949-50 I spent every spare moment in writing more pages. In the spring, I took the bundle of pages back to my teacher. That time, his note read, "My friend, you have written a book." The book was "Little Britches". The other two have followed because of readers from many lands writing to ask for more of the story.

I have obtained no prizes, but all three of my books have made the national best-seller lists, and all three have been book club selections. Above all, they have made hundreds of thousands of friends for my people and for me. I am delighted to count you as one of them.

Most sincerely,

Ralph

Little Britches and Man of the Family under separate covers. Shalishpeare, and the King James version of the Bible are my favorite reading.