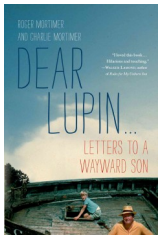


Dear Lupin



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I've always loved collections of letters. Perhaps, it's the draw of reading words meant for a specific person—a stranger that you will never meet. Some books of letters are huge and it's like tackling a life in a thousand plus episodes. But these letters, written by an apprehensive English father beginning during the rock and roll, drug days of the late 60s and 70s, are a more manageable 187 pages.

All the letters were penned by the father, Roger, a former military man, and POW who later became a racing columnist for the *Sunday Times*. In them he offers tons of advice to his wild, drifter son, Charlie. Providing much of the humor in this book are Charlie's comments that describe his reactions to his Dad's words at the time.

The letters begin with a young Charlie as he flunks out of elite Eton. Soon he leaves with a record of very bad grades for a lowly "crammer" school. No "firsts" or "seconds" or even a degree for this young man. Soon Charlie embarks on a series of low-paying jobs in agriculture, oil, and real estate. Even when he lands a promising job, he can't stick with it and bolts off for long vacations to Greece, Africa, and South America. For his Greek trip his dad advises, don't talk politics. Don't do drugs; you may land in a gaol. Watch the alcoholic drinks there, they are incredibly strong. Later, when Charlie sets off for vagabonding through South America, his dad asks, have you ever considered a life in the church?

Despite the fact Roger is always cajoling, advising, and encouraging his wayward son, the dad's disappointment is embedded on most pages. However, his writing style is both light and humorous. He confesses his own youthful failings and his current secrets from his wife about recent car accidents. But when Charlie leaves the army after only a few months without telling his parents, Roger says this is more than he can stand. Roger feels shamed before his friends and his own former army comrades. But within days, "Dad" is back with suggestions to help his son find another opportunity.

Another funny thing about the book is that the father always feigns penury despite the fact that the family lives in a grand house and all three children received inheritances at age twenty-one. If you're feeling upset about your own or your grown child's chances in this world, this is the book for you. If not, this father's devotion and optimism are a joy to share. The *Wall Street Journal* gave a wonderful summary of it, "Among the funniest [letters] ever dispatched in the vain hope of steering a black sheep onto something like the straight and narrow."

For a different perspective, try *It's a Boy: Women Writers on Raising Sons* edited by Andrea Buchanan.

Posted by Dory L. on December 17, 2013

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