

Belle Mead, N.J.
March 2, 1992

Dear Ralph, Walt, Neal, and Howard:

You probably have regarded Mom as a very feeling person, whose skills are largely domestic, her interests politics, history, and biography, as well as a bewildering variety of ladies' crafts. Well, did you know that she is in fact a coldly calculating, incisive, scientific thinker? Let me tell you what will undoubtedly go down in the annals of science as one of the most incredibly rational, intuitively discriminating examples of scientific deduction that has occurred in the last several centuries.

The problem emerged subtly, but insistently over the course of several weeks. At first it seemed to me that I was a little impatient, waiting for the last liquid to filter out of the grinds basket when I prepared your mother's coffee each morning. After several days, it became apparent that the change was not in me but in the filter system. Mom paid little attention as I grumbled about this, but after another week or so, when things had reached the stage at which I was using a spoon to clear the obstructing coffee sediment from the filter, without much success I might add, she herself became a bit impatient and entered the picture. We agreed that it must be the grinding of one of the four varieties that I used in the preparation. Clearly one of them had been ground too long and the fine sediment was clogging the pores of the paper filter. So, very scientifically, I prepared the coffee, omitting on successive days one of the four coffees. No effect.

We then agreed that it was the unbleached filters, which Walter had recommended to prevent our getting, I think it was, mercury poisoning. You know, I pontificated, it's all well and good for them to make whole earthy things for health nuts, but there's nothing like a good professional high tech product to function properly. We then contentedly disposed of our fairly voluminous supply of unbleached filters, and looked forward to the end of our frustration.

The next day was clear and crisp, just the sort of day to start with a brew of good coffee. I proceeded, and as usual, there I was, using the teaspoon to clear the standard, white, bleached, chemical-laden filter. I was at the end of my rope. Mom in her wisdom spotted a critical flaw in our research. She said, "Make some coffee with the white filter, omitting the grinds entirely."

Now, boys, you know I'm not one to put someone down for expressing an idea, no matter how ridiculous it seems. So I played along with Mom's wishes and brewed some plain water. To my astonishment the filtered product was murky. It clearly contained a fine suspension. This was enough for Mom. Having

reached such a moment of triumph, she tore off her laboratory coat and scientist's cap and declared that she was getting a new coffee maker. She had been wanting to do so for a long time anyhow. I, on the other hand, was intrigued and got her to agree that I would disassemble the coffee maker, and that she would await the outcome before making any purchase.

Epilogue: Opening the coffee maker to inspect the water chamber was not difficult. As I removed the cover, I was treated to a revolting sight. The chamber was loaded with decomposing clots of what appeared to be large, swollen grains. Of course! Something like this had happened to me once before. The mice had brought in a cache of soybeans. In this instance they had then decomposed, producing particles that had been clogging the filters. But how could the mice get into the water chamber. Mom looked at it and said "It looks like cereal". Suddenly I remembered! One day, weeks earlier, I had been taking 12-grain cereal from the shelf behind the coffee maker and had spilled it. A good deal fell onto the coffee maker, some of it into the water-filler grate. I brushed off the part that didn't enter the water compartment, and promptly forgot about the rest. As they say, the rest is now history.

We now have a perfectly functioning old coffee maker. Our only loss was the mercury-free filters. But it was well worth this small loss to discover Mom's great hidden talent as a laboratory scientist. We should all be very proud.

Love,

Dad