

Methodist Girls' High School,
Nanking, China,
May 21, 1939

Dear Mrs. Held:

I was sorry not to get to see you while I was home. I rode past your house several times on my way to Sioux City and my sister and I were always talking of driving out to call on you, but we just never did.

Life is very different out here than at any time during my missionary service. In many ways it is much harder and more discouraging but at the same time it is more challenging and interesting. It seems to me that I never had such a welcome as this time. My old job was gone but how the other jobs have piled upon me until I find myself loaded just as heavily as ever.

We are now called upon to do things which two years ago were being done by our fine Chinese workers. Most of them, especially the younger ones are gone to "free" China. We are dependent upon relatively untrained very young folk at a time when the church seems to be the only institution that is being able to carry on.

Miss Golisch and I are just now in the process of reorganizing the children's department of the Sunday School. The teachers are young girls from our school and while they are willing enough, they have no experience and few ideas as to what to do. The only thing that we have plenty of is children. Not enough seats, nor classrooms or teachers. But just try to make suggestions to a teacher struggling with fifty-some little second-graders, crowded three in a seat. It is a problem that I am still thinking about. I'm not sure that I know the answer.

Then after Sunday school, there is a junior church in which I am struggling to bring order out of chaos. About half of the seats are regular size seats and the other half kindergarten chairs, and it is really pathetic to see them struggle to get at the little chairs. You know how small children love little things. Then I noticed how the feet of even the biggest children sitting in the big chairs did not touch the floor. But you should hear them sing. I'm sure that no one could listen to them and think about what they have been through in the last year and not be moved. They insist upon singing all the stanzas no matter how many and feel really hurt when I try to enforce my ideas of singing only part and singing more different ones.

Periodically there is martial law clamped down on us when all traffic is stopped on the big street on which our big gate opens. Yesterday Miss Golisch and I both got caught out in it, she one side of the street and I on the other, just a few steps from the school gate but not permitted to walk those few steps. I don't know how long it had been on before I got to the big street, but I waited nearly a half hour before some cars escorted by trunk loads of soldiers heavily armed drove past. The Chinese accept such things in good humor and even laugh at some of the petty restrictions, that is privately. When one feels discouraged, a talk with one of them is enheartening.

In our "Central" church, which is a large four story building, there is being held what is called a "Review Class." This is for the first two years of junior high school and is theoretically at least not doing advanced work, but is conducted with the idea of giving these students something to do and at the same time give employment to the group of teachers. There are more than two hundred students, about two thirds of them boys. I teach a class there in English Bible, with fifteen boys and one girl. During my first term in China, I taught boys and I've always enjoyed them. They are so responsive that they endear themselves to their foreign teachers. They have no equipment aside from the rooms and desks and blackboards. There is no library, no laboratories or playground. It is simply an emergency project.

Before I left home, I rather dreaded to come back to this compound which was formerly so crowded with girls as I had pictured it as being empty and deserted. When I got to Shanghai, I got the news that there was a large primary school being conducted in our building with four hundred students in it. Actually there are nine hundred. It is something like the "Review Class" in that it is a relief project, but it is meeting a real need. There are many more boys than girls and I said that we usually managed to have a boy up every tree. School starts at eight-fifteen and they start coming about six thirty. In fact that is one of our problems out here. Children always come to anything anywhere from an hour to two hours early. It is quite understandable in the school for the compound is of course a pleasanter place to play than their crowded houses. Anyhow it looked good to me to see the place filled up even beyond its usual capacity.

Every Saturday afternoon we entertain Chinese guests, whoever wants to come. Every week some comes who I have no seen since I got back. Sometimes we have as many as twelve or fifteen and then again only five or six.

We have a very fine young people's meeting every Sunday afternoon. There are between thirty and forty there usually. They take complete charge of us and the meetings are really very inspiring. I did not go this afternoon because after struggling for three hours with that mob of children, I was rather worn out. It takes most of Monday to recover but I hope in time to get them better organized so that things will proceed in better order.

There was a great deal of destruction in the city, but fortunately our compound here suffered very little. We were not even looted. The soldiers entered the house several times and took some things they were in need of, bedding and warm clothing, but other things were not touched. I told one of the servants that it was really quite insulting that they disdained most of the things that we prized. But there was no wanton destruction here at any rate. Plenty of it elsewhere from tales I hear. Now the city is being rebuilt mostly by the invaders, so that there is a measure at least of economic recovery here. In some of the smaller cities conditions are much worse because all local industry has stopped so that many people are unemployed. But the quickness of the recovery has been remarkable. One wonders if any other people could do as well as the Chinese in so short a time.