

Nanking, Feb. 9, 1940

Dear Family:

They say that the best time to answer a letter is the same day that you get it. I want to send these letters to Shanghai to be mailed and have the big stamps put upon them again. I am therefore getting them off a little early for I'm not sure when the next boat goes. I see it is the fifteenth if the paper is right so this may come along a day or two after my last letter. That boat has been postponed. Originally it was dated the 5th and now it is down for the 11th. They are supposed to go two weeks apart.

This is the week of Chinese new years and things have been rather slack. We had several guests to whom we served tea and cakes, etc. The streets were jammed with people so that one could hardly get through the last few days of the old year, people laying in supplies for the new year. Mostly food for the feasting which takes place at that time.

We were invited out last evening to dinner. Our host was a dentist, formerly very wealthy but now living in our dormitory. His wife is quite a famous cook and it was a home cooked meal. It was really too good, for I had enough about half way through it and after that did not enjoy it very much. They are Hawaiian Chinese and feel very much their lowered economic condition, for they formerly had a big house and everything nice. He is trying to set up business again in Nanking but has lost a lot of his equipment and his house is occupied by soldiers, or at least by people of another country and they cannot get possession of it.

I'm thinking of moving into a house by myself. One of the General Beard families is leaving on furlough and the wife wants me to move into their house during their absence. It is about half way down to Wesley church but as it is on the big street, it is very convenient. I could ride my bicycle to and fro. It is about settled that I am to take it although not altogether. The house where Marie has lived has not proved very satisfactory as it has been very cold, but this has been an unusually cold winter. This house I've been offered is fully equipped, electric lights, radio, electric stove, refrigerator, and nearly everything one would need. I feel strange to be moving out of this house where I've lived since I came to Nanking, but then I had good training in my youth in not getting too attached to a place and if I am to work down there, I must be nearer. I'll send you my new address when I find that I am really going. In the meantime, I shall be coming back this way too, even if I move for I still have quite a few irons in the fire here.

We had guests for dinner Tuesday night, a former teacher or rather two former teachers from our school, and a graduate of our school. They played Monopoly until about nine o'clock and then discovered that they were scared to go home at that "late" hour. The student assured them that there was no danger and I told them that I had never been stopped on the street by a soldier, but they reported the next day that they were stopped by a soldier just in front of their house who demanded to know where they were going. They said that they were teachers at Hwei Wen and had just come from the hospital where they had been called by an emergency. I tried to explain to them how much better it would be to tell the truth for if the sentry had demanded their passes and discovered they were from Shanghai, he would have wondered what they had to conceal, whereas as a matter of fact they had nothing.

The teachers in the primary school here on this compound are mostly young girls and I've felt that they were in need of some healthy recreation so that we have tried to plan some activities for them. As often as possible, (but not so often as I wish) we invite them to our house for the evening to play games. I've initiated them into the mysteries of Chinese checkers and it has been very popular with them. My sister sent me a Monopoly set and those who knew a little English played that. They have all gone away now for the winter vacation, but I hope through the spring term to have them nearly once a week for some sort of fun. If my day time activities are not so heavy, I shall feel that I can spare an evening now and then. There are no electric lights in the dormitory so that in the evening they cannot read or work, and the result is often that they spend the time in ways which are not beneficial.

I've had an English conversation class too which I've enjoyed. I guess the students have liked it too for they have come very faithfully. They are mostly high school graduates and are anxious to keep up with their English, especially to get a little more familiar with English as she is spoke. My method is to use a picture as a subject of conversation, ask them very simple questions which they can answer easily. Sometimes I tell them an easy simple story and then ask them to tell it back to me. But mixed in with this more or less serious study there is always a lot of fun. They joke me and I try to keep even of course.

I've spent at least half my time studying Chinese these months. I've done some speaking in public, have led Chapel several times and also have spoken to my junior church, i. e. tell a story. That is the hardest of all. I've not yet reached that degree of perfection but that I need a lot of preparation. I also want to get acquainted with the material which is available for children's work. That is not an easy task since I have to read it with the help of a teacher. But it seems to me that I have made a great deal of progress. In my ability to express myself and to understand, I can see the difference over ten months ago when I came back. Onenever makes much progress in Chinese until one is in a position to use it constantly. Next year, I shall probably see still greater improvement when I am living alone among a group of Chinese.

If you were to walk down the street in front of our school, (one of the big streets here) you would think that you were in Tokio because so many of the shops belong to people from that country. Many of these buildings were burned during the war so that in being rebuilt, they have taken on the style of architecture of their new owners. The city is being slowly rebuilt, especially along the main streets, although the side streets in many parts are still masses of ruins. It is interesting to see the change that has taken place since last March when I came.

Conditions among the people are still very bad due to high prices. Rice is nearly three times its normal price, and fuel is three or four times what it was before the war. Everything is high so that the suffering of the poor is very great. Most of the men are tied up with relief work, although the money sent is nothing like enough to meet the need, the problem is all the greater to get it to the people who need it most. They made a hard and fast rule that no help was to be given to a family which had a male wage-earner in it. But the rule works hardship for there are many unemployed young men, who would be glad to work if they could. But the line had to be drawn somewhere, and even among the widows and orphans there are more than they can possibly take care of. Some money is being administered through the churches, to needy families, but there are many middle class families, formerly comfortably fixed who are now destitute. Many of them are too proud to ask for relief money.

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One of the missionary families here are going on furlough this spring, and they loaned me some books. I got altogether twenty-two, all very good, big, solid books, mostly biography, which I picked out myself. I feel as if I were living in a public library (my idea of heaven!) for it will take me a whole year to get them read. Just now I am reading Wagner's autobiography, two big volumes.

Another condition which adds to the troubles of the poor people is the shortage of money. It is very difficult to get money changed and if one is armed only with a ten dollar bill, it would be impossible to buy something which cost less than a dollar. The merchant would simply refuse to make change. To get a dollar changed into ten cent pieces, one must pay a charge of a few cents. The burden of this falls on the very poor who usually buy and sell in small amounts. They don't have money enough to lay in a week's supply but depend on their day to day earnings. They use postage stamps but the post office is tightening up on that and will not sell stamps unless they have reason to believe that you intend to mail some letters. There are all sorts of devices used. The shop gives tokens of various kinds which can be used later.

Another one of my projects is a kindergarten. It was a good deal of a farce last term because I had no trained teacher and knew nothing about the matter myself. Now I think I have a good kindergarten and I hope that we can have a school that will really amount to something.

They say it is better to be born lucky than rich. We felt that way one day when someone asked to store a radio in our house. It is an old model R. C. A. with a victrola as part of it, a very handsome piece of furniture, and while the radio doesn't compare with later models yet it gets Shanghai and Manila usually pretty well. The Manila news is the best that we get, and I have to sit up to the terrible late hour of eight-forty-five every evening to hear that. Since I get up and begin to study at a quarter past seven in the morning, you can see that I am ready to go to bed early.

An invitation has just come from the American Embassy inviting everyone to a reception for the Ambassador who is passing through this city on a trip up the river. This is really his official residence but he keeps his family in Peiping. It gives everyone a chance to dress up in one's good clothes because it is the only place in town that is warm enough to wear a silk dress in. Here in our house I wear a padded Chinese coat most of the time. And our house is considered outrageously warm by our Chinese friends. I also have a pair of Chinese shoes which are my joy and pride, made of black velvet lined with camel's hair cloth, and big enough to wear an extra pair of hose or two. Even that much doesn't keep my feet warm in these cold unheated hurches. I don't know how the Chinese endure their unheated houses unless they let their feet freeze up for the winter and don't thaw them out. That is what folks do with plants you know. They get dreadful chilblains on their hands and feet, sometimes so that they are actually sick with them.

I've been reading a book of letters in one of which James Russell Lowell says the following: "The true use of a letter is to let one know that one is remembered and valued, and as you are sure of that, perhaps I need not write at all! No, the true use of writing is that it brings your friend to you as you write, and so I have your sweet company for a while, and you need have only just as much of mine as you choose to give yourself."

I know that is a bad way to end after letting your letters go so long without an answer, but you know---there is some truth in it anyhow.

Lovingly, Jessie