

Letter to my nephew explaining 1941-45 letter

March 26, 1972

Dear Ronald:

Before we were allowed to return the field, the Board required us get medical clearance, and in 1959 when I was ready to return, they sent me to Iowa City to have a doctor there give the examination. Dorothy drove me down and I asked her to let me look about the campus a little before we went home. As I walked through the old Liberal Arts Building, the whole scene seemed very familiar, and yet I had the feeling that I was not the same girl who went to school there 40 some years before. I have somewhat the same feeling as I have reread these carbons of the post war period in China. As I see myself now, at 76, it seems impossible that I could have done all the things I did then. So perhaps that is why I find it difficult to give you a little background. Somehow the memory is very stirring and I almost can't stand to go over them.

During the war, after I got back in 1942, I spent the time in Berkeley, the first year or two at the univ. studying Chinese and then at a job. My job was with a firm that manufactured knitted materials, such as sweaters etc. and the head of the firm was very much interested in China and in me because of my China background. When the war was over, I decided to quit my job and go back on the Board payroll and go to Cornell Univ. for a special course they were offering. I recall that when I told the boss that I wanted to quit, he didn't want me to leave, and offered me a job as his personal secretary. I think he had some fantastic idea of branching out into the China market. What interests me about the situation now was that my reaction to his offer was an instantaneous refusal. I didn't ask to think it over although it was probably the best job from a financial standpoint that I ever had a chance at. As it turned out, my decision was the wise one as I heard later that he went bankrupt!

I planned to have about a ~~year~~ month in S.L. with Ruth before going on to Cornell. Some time after I got there, I can't remember how long, I had a long distance call from the transportation secretary of the Board in N. Y. saying that there was a chance to get on an army transport going in two or three weeks and could I go? This time my answer was an immediate yes. I can't remember how long I had to get ready, but I recall that Ruth took me to St. Joe to see Clara and I remember buying some dresses there. It was a problem because of shortages to get an outfit to return with. Ruth came to the rescue of course and gathered up all sorts of things for me to take, some old curtains she had discarded, and anything else that she thought I could use or that I could give to someone to use. I remember some wool union suits belonging to Putt which I passed on to a Chinese pastor.

New York was supposed to call me back as to the exact time of sailing and I was getting ready in an leisurely sort of way. But just then there was a telephone strike so that New York couldn't call me. For some reason, I got uneasy and was able to put through the call (only emergency ones were put through*and the operator at S.L. accepted my explanation of the emergency) and got word that the boat was due to sail ~~in~~ very shortly. I think I had only a couple of days to get off. But Ruth gloried in such a situation and packed my trunks and got me off. She complained that when she finished that she was suffering from battle fatigue.

As I look back on it, I don't know what I was the one that was sent. I felt immensely proud at the time about it, but I think that probably I just happened to be one of the three Methodists who could or would be able to get off on short notice. There was plenty of room on the transport which sailed a few days after I got to New York. There were a bunch of Unra workers mostly women and two other mission lies, Baptists. One of the other Methodists was the treasurer in Shanghai. The other was a nurse. I recall that the Board sent some cases of vitamins, One -a day" brand, I believe, but out of date. I was advised to tell folk to take a double dose because they weren't fresh.

It seems to me there were some other things too but I can't recall what they were. Because they didn't know what would be the situation when we got to China as to money, they gave us each a check for a thousand dollars. This was to pay for travel expense (other than boat fare) and any balance would be an advance on salary.

We went through the Panama canal and left off a bunch of GI's there and after that had the boat to ourselves. It took us about six weeks, I think and we went across the Pacific without stopping although passing within sight of Okinawa. We landed in Shanghai after Christmas. There was no customs. Maybe it was because it was an army transport.

After America, I found China very chilly, partly because the price of fuel was so high that there was very little heat in the house there. I didn't know if a big check like that would be of any use in Nanking and someone advised me to go to the army paymaster and get cash for it, so I did. I sent word to Nanking that I was coming and in a day or two started for Nanking.

I remember getting into Nanking late at night. There was a Chinese family of an old teacher who had been in Hwei Wen School for forty years or more, in fact he felt he owned the school. He was living on the compound and I think it was his son who came to meet me. The station at Nanking is about four miles from the city. They gave me supper and had prepared a place for me in the missionary residence, made up a bed and built a fire in the fireplace. The house was a couple hundred yards from theirs. They took me over to the house which was dark and empty, and after they left, I discovered that there was not a door in the house that could be locked. It was a rather large house, seven bedrooms upstairs. There was nothing to do but to prop a chair against my bedroom door and hope that nothing would happen. Nothing did!

There were a number of other missionaries in Nanking. The only other Methodist was a man who had chosen not to be repatriated when I was in order to be on hand when the war was over. He had managed to survive three years in a prison camp without any bad effects but he was anxious to get away, so he turned all accounts over to me and left as soon as he could in a week or two as I remember.

Things were very much disorganized. I was welcomed, not heartily not for myself but as a sign of things returning to normal. I was very anxious to see how the Chinese co-workers had fared. They had suffered along with everyone else from war conditions but mostly they had seemed to manage very well. Everyone that came to see me got a thousand or so vitamin pills. That was the size of the bottle. I don't know if it did them any good except psychologically. One preacher came back to me for another bottle because he said he was sharing them with other folk who had been good to him when he was without support.

Everything was terribly high. And prices went up almost from day to day. The only fuel was a sort of balls made of coal dust and clay which could be made to burn only with great difficulty and then seemed to give off very little heat.

For a few days I ate with the Chinese family while I tried to get a servant. The one I had had before I went home spoke quite good English and had a job with the U.S. army. With pay I couldn't compete with. The old cook who had served in that house for years and years, I was told was sick and unable to work. I decided he had to come if at all possible and I found a ricksha man who knew where he lived so I took a bottle of vitamins and went over to look him up. He didn't look very sick, did have a cough, and maybe was just recovering from something. Anyhow the vitamins cured him. One of the problems he faced was fuel and he cooked my meals on a little Chinese stove in which he burned either charcoal or wood. One thing that had survived was an electric waffle iron and he used that to make all sorts of things.

Before I left, I had scattered the furniture about among Chinese friends and some of that came back. Some of it was sold. The residence had been occupied by some Japanese teachers and was badly infested with ~~bed bugs~~ bed bugs. For some reason, they refuse to bite me, so I didn't realize it until I had a guest who made a terrible fuss because she couldn't sleep. The US army sent someone who deloused it later on.

I am writing this not in order but just as I happen to recall it. So now I'll stop and talk about the Army. Soon after I got there, a week or two or more, a young Methodist pastor whom I had known slightly in Berkeley where he was studying Chinese called on me. He was not acting as a sort of liaison officer in the army, i.e. trying to ease relations between the ordinary GI and the ordinary Chinese people. His name is Tracy Jones and he is now high up in the N.Y. office. He put me in touch with the chaplain who then acted as a sort of big brother to me, (only much younger of course). Coffee, I recall, sold for about \$7 a pound, so I drank tea for breakfast. I'm fond of tea but if anything makes me feel sorry for myself it is to drink tea for breakfast. So Woods brought us coffee and other things from the army. ^{p. 7}

The first letters I wrote home seem not to have survived. The first letter is dated Jan. 20. I had been there maybe three weeks. I must have written some rather touching letters about needs, so Ruth got busy collecting used clothing to be given to the Chinese workers. I have copies of her letters for that period which are rather interesting.

The missionaries there were folk who had been in West China during the war. The Army flew them back, I think, in an attempt to make things return to normal as soon as possible. I was the first to arrive from America.

In the letter of March 2, the mention of a medical book is for one of my students who had finished medical school and was now an interne in the hospital there. I notice the mention of a fellow missionary, Marie Brethorst. So she arrived sometime before. In that same letter, I find that it was Irene who had some of my furniture. She had a job in a government hospital, so things were safe with her from the Japanese. You can see in reading my letters to Ruth and hers to me, that there was very little that we did not say to each other. I have many reserves with most people. I mention in that letter- "Junior's sweater." Junior was my boss in Berkeley. After I left, he sent a sweater to be sent to me. The dishes were some green glass ones from the cottage, not worth much.

In the April 14th letter, there is talk about some "seats." They were for the church in Chinkiang, another part of our conference. Pastor Tsui must have asked me to help him buy some seats for his church. I don't remember anything more.

The Chinese have a good sense of humor and they enjoyed having me act up a bit at Marie's ~~birthday party~~ welcome party. Part of the joking had to do with Mr. Kiang's speech. The Chinese have a lot of proverbs which they like to quote on such occasions and he used one which I had never heard and had no idea of what it meant, but he stroked his beard and used this terse saying, so I pretended to stroke my chin and used the same proverb which I admitted I didn't know the meaning of. One of the few occasions when my Chinese rocked the audience back on its heels!

About the \$20 check, that was the pastor of another denomination. He probably brought it to me because he thought I was an easy mark. I think it was repaid all right.

Going on to the letter of May 18th, there was an old Biblewoman whom I worked with of whom I was very fond. She was very deaf and that restricted what she was able to do although she was a very capable worker. I tried to get her a hearing aid.

In the letter of June 4th, on the second page, there is mention of "home study" classes. The Biblewomen went,

regularly two or three times a week in the afternoon to homes of church members to hold classes. ~~From~~ Neighbors were gathered in. Those who did not know how to read were taught to read, and for the others, a Bible study was held. There would be a small group, not more than eight or ten. Often only three or four. It was a significant work however because these Chinese women had very narrow lives and it gave them something different to do and many non-Christians were brought into them.

I notice there is a gap of letters from June 30, 1948 to July 18th, 1949. The Communists came in sometime in April, 1949. The letters in between were lost, for it ~~was~~ was possible to send out letters during that interval. From the time the communists came in, it was not possible to send letters out for a while. Apparently the July 18th letter is not the first one out.

I worked out a system of sending letters through Hongkong. That is, we had a missionary there and she had a Chinese address, so I sent all letters to her to be forwarded. I don't know of course how many got through. Maybe there is why there are not more letters, i.e. they got intercepted.

I left China finally in Feb. 1951.

Keep these letters as long as you want and then send them back to me as I think I'll edit them a little before I send them to Yale.

With love, Jessie

My nephew wanted to read
these letters before I got out of
them. This is the "evening" letter
I wrote explaining. J. H. H.

BRITISH
ONION SKIN
MADE IN U.S.A.