

American President Lines
On Board S.S. President Jackson
December 28, 1946

Dear Family and Friends:

Everyone is frantically writing letters. We are due to arrive on the 31st. I just passed two nuns sitting on something down in the hold with their skirts flowing far and wide over suitcases, basins, and toys writing long sheets full of fine wavy lines. Up here in the dining room there are hundreds pounding on typewriters. You can't hear a thing above the steamers and choppers that are cooking our lunch, (because this is the kitchen too, or part of it). But you can watch the faces intent on telling about this trip. My! how I wish I might read the letters that are being written! I suppose there are 670 different versions of this trip.

The other morning I sat beside a powerful woman from Honan. By way of conversation, I said how much I enjoyed breakfast because of the butter (the only meal we have it); and she staunchly rebuked me by telling how for seven war years she had no butter, milk, or meat in Honan. When she came out, her blood count was practically 100%. Beans, peas, and eggs are good enough for anyone! I can imagine what her letters are like! -- all pure joy to be on her way back to Honan.

At the other extreme are the young mothers with small babies who have really suffered in steerage. Call it what you will! -- "Emergency" or "Mission" class. It is steerage when 215 children and babies and several hundred women crowd into the hold of a troop ship.

Then there are those of us in-between who aren't so staunch and glorious, and who have not suffered a bit on the trip and who have laughed until we ached - and have had a grand time of fellowship.

How can I describe a troop ship? It is long and narrow and gray with a great many pipes and beams everywhere inside. From the upper deck we go down three flights of stairs to the hold with no port holes naturally, but ventilation from pipes and stairways. Bunks are two or three or four deep (ours two). They are held up by pipes and chains. In our hatch, there are eight in a section - 4 upper, 4 lower. The four uppers are like one big bed divided in four parts. Between us and the next section of eight there is a narrow alley wide enough for one person to stand. Then more sections of eight as far as the eye can see. This means that you dress in a space 2' x 7' with a minimum of four people!

The farewell letter from the Foreign Missions conference suggested that our soldiers had travelled this way, and that as good soldiers of the Cross we also....." Of course the G.I.'s had no baby pens lashed to the lower bunks, or baby beds in the 2 x 7 alley, or diapers hanging all around their bunks, or girdles to get on and off! In our little section we are surrounded by four small children - two of them babies about a year. The baby directly under me has pneumonia. Sulpha shots every few hours are helping; but the mother is so tired and worried. Can you imagine standing in the narrow passage and ducking your head under the upper berth (just two feet above the lower) and taking care of a baby with pneumonia? The hospital is full and the ship's doctor is furious at mothers who brought children aboard. Every morning at five or earlier (we set our clocks back each night so the children awaken earlier each morning) I see a mother start up the stairs

in the dark. She is tall and pretty. Her hair is neatly combed and the curls piled high on her head. She is wearing a rose dressing gown. In her arm she has sixteen months old Peter, and in that hand his kettle of bottles and spoons. With the other hand on the iron railing she pulls herself up the stairs - and that is something when the ship is pitching and rolling. She is on her way to the kitchen where she prepares his early bottle. Arthur contends that the pioneer missionaries had it harder than this; but he is in a hatch with all men and no babies. I say no! Anne Judson had the run of the sailing vessel, and Narcissa Whitman had the wide prairies while these mothers don't have a place to step. I have just discovered that this pioneer mother - the five o'clock one - has a beautiful contralto voice, and will sing the solo on Sunday. The Reformed Church can be very proud of her. Her husband went out to Amoy a year ago on a freighter.

We are shocked to know that we are 58 denominations on this ship. I had never before seen the extremely conservative type about which one hears and whom Pearl Buck describes so vividly. Now I have seen them in the flesh (yes, literally - tho I didn't mean to put that in!) When it comes to entertaining the children, and doing all sorts of helpful jobs, these extremely conservative ones are right there.

There is a woman across the aisle from me who has kept purdah throughout the trip, by hanging a brown quilt around her bunk. It reaches from the ceiling to well below her knees when she stands dressing. There are others whom you wish would keep purdah! But as Mary Cochrane says, "There are so many of us that you just don't look." However someone did look and reported in awed whispers on the striptease of the nun next to her.

Betty says she is sure that there are more than 215 children on this trip - "500 at least". They are everywhere - and when it rains, as it often does, one can't step in the hold without stepping on or over one.

Edaik runs in a pack of twenty younger teen agers and is having a wonderful time.

At XMas almost everyone was up tho we were having our roughest weather and there were three big parties for three ages of children. All were wonderfully organized and fun.

Arthur has had visual aids programs P.M. or evenings and has had a wonderful chance to start his work right here on the ship.

We have met some of the grandest people from every part of China and we wouldn't have missed this fellowship for anything. There are twenty-nine A.B.C.F.M.ers aboard.

One day I collected all the children who are going to use Winnetka school material - 20% of them - and we wrote letters to Mrs. Carvelti, director of the school.

Gertrude