

Hotel Royal Madeleine
Paris
September 8, 1947.

Dear family, one and all;

We are safe and sound in Paris, and beginning to know a couple of the subway routes to and from our hotel. This is a very nice, very clean little hotel, only three blocks from the Madeleine, in the direction of Boulevard Haussmann, and we are very comfortable. The rooms cost us about five dollars a day (~~x2xxxxxx~~) for both rooms, and we can have breakfast sent up. We found it in as strange a way as we do everything else.

Thursday morning, after the boat was docked and we had been checked by Belgian immigration authorities, found from the company agent that they would tend to getting our tickets to Paris for us, and negotiated a loan of enuf Belgian francs to pay our streetcar fare, we headed in to Antwerp to see what there was to see. On the bus from the docks, we noticed a man wearing so many cameras that we said "Aha! tourist". He got on the same street car when we changed, and started talking to Hews, saying it seemed so good to hear American children talking—he'd been out of the states ten years. Then he directed us to the American Express to change our money, and talked to Hews all the way there. Next day when we caught the train for Paris and finally got ourselves settled in a compartment, or rather two, as the train stopped at Bruxelles, our friend of the bus appeared to settle his baby and mother-in-law in our compartment. By this time of course we were old acquaintances, and Hews asked him if he knew a good cheap hotel. He gave us this address, and we walked in and found ~~at~~ three rooms as beautifully as if they had been reserved for us. This is really a lovely place. It's an old building, 16th or 17th century, but very clean—spotless wall paper and paint, furniture and drapes a little worn but in such good taste that they are more attractive for it. And we are right in the middle of ~~a~~ everything here. Furthermore, we find food plentiful and good and, at our exchange, quite cheap. There are carts loaded with grapes, peaches, and pears at every corner, and we have found one restaurant already where three dollars bought us ~~at two~~ orders of delicious escargots, three beers, all the ham and fried potatoes the five of us could hold, and three orders of yogurt and jam for the children's dessert. And tipped the waitress besides. The bread that everyone complains of so seems pretty good and a lot more interesting than plain white bread, as far as we're concerned. We like it. We haven't done much exploring in Paris so far. We took one day to get ~~x~~ settled in the hotel and recover from that night trip across the borders, which was pretty bad even though the children and I were allowed to stay on the train so they could sleep. Then Hews and Herbert are room hunting near the school (neither of them likes the Cite), and we've done a good bit of window shopping and general touristy walking around, trying to get oriented. The shops are really fascinating, I begin to understand why every body who comes to Paris talks about them so. As for prices, they are little if any higher than in the states when you translate them into dollars. At least that's true of the better things. I haven't seen any lowcost clothing at all, even of poor quality. On the other hand, most French people seem rather well, if oddly dressed, and the women do such nice things with their faces and hair that any old thing would look good on them. It was so different in Antwerp. There the people were heavy and stocky, their clothes fitted atrociously, and they all looked haggard and worried in spite of the fact that their shops are full to bursting of candy, milk, cheese, meat, and clothing--the first three being almost unobtainable here. Even when the ~~x~~ people laugh or smile, which seemed very seldom, they didn't seem to mean it. There was something driven about them. Perhaps because they suffered so much more than Paris did in the occupation, or perhaps it's one of those fundamental differences in races and peoples that I have never quite believed in.

Anyhow, we like Paris very much better than Antwerp already. And after all the Flemish we heard there it was a relief to get back to the sound of something as familiar as French on the streets.

As for our boat trip, it was pleasantly dull. There was almost nothing to do on the boat, but it took up a great deal of time, and we never had quite energy enuf to get anything constructive done. Of course I had to chase kids so continually that I could never settle in one place long enuf to do any writing, but nobody else got any letters written or any work done either. I did finish one pair of wool socks, which came in very handy up in the North Atlantic when it clouded up for a couple of days and turned really cold. Aside from those few days, tho, the trip was one long sunbath. We are all quite tan now, and we were never even faintly seasick. The first night out in the Gulf, there was enuf tossing to make the trunks rattle, but from then on the ocean was so well behaved that it was sometimes hard to tell, lying in our berths, wether we were in a boat or a train. For us the English channel lay as still as the Huston ship canal, and we watched the cliffs of Dover slide by in a sunny mist, while faint on the other side we could see the hills of France. The North sea was almost uncomfortably hot. Then all of a sudden the trip which had seemed to drag on so long began to rush to it's end with unnecessary speed, and there we were in Antwerp. We made so many friends on the boat. The children helped in the kitchen quite regularly. (One of the men down in the kitchen told Hews "It's good to have children on the boat. We are all fathers down here".) Sometimes they would shape the dough for the loaves of bread. Often they they set tables in the dining room and rang the bell that called us to meals. Occasionally they were allowed on the bridge to hold the wheel for the helmsman. And we watched flying fish skip out from the bow wave even as far North as Newas foundland. Then we began to see porpoises playing about the ship, and we came near England, the gulls joined us.

We learned a lot of French songs on the trip, too, because there grew up a lovely custom of sitting around after meals over a glass of wine and a cigarette and singing -us passengers and all the young officers we ate with. There are some wonderful songs with lots of very interesting verses, and simple cathy choruses that even the children picked up in no time. It was a very pleasant bunch to spend three weeks with.

The children have been playing cards quietly like perfect little angels while I wrote this, and I must stop now and take them out to lunch. I wont write again till Mourmelon, where we go some time this week, because we're going to be awfully busy with registering as foreigners, getting ration tickets taking the big baggage thru customs, and maybe even seeing a few of these vistas that we glimpse from the buses. This pretty well brings us up to date, tho, so-see you later.

I've found out already that one thing that should be regularly included in packages is this thin typewriter paper. I can see now that what we have isn't going to last any time at all.

Good-bye, my dears, We'll be looking for letters.
We love you.

Cecile