

September 30, 1947.

Dear Family,

It isn't that I don't love you, it's just that when it comes to a choice between writing to my beloved family in the U.S. or cooking, ironing, shopping or housecleaning for my beloved family here, the ones who are on the spot manage to be more vocal in their demands. However, the house is beginning to be in a little better order, and school starts tomorrow, so I may reform just any day.

Hews has gone back to Paris, too, to start school. He plans to be back here Saturday, but I have just found out that schools in Mourmelon run Monday thru Wednesday, Thursday off, and Friday and Saturday. If the Beaux Arts does the same thing, he may not be able to get back than. Oh, well, I'll worry about that if he doesn't show up Saturday.

First of all, I guess you want to hear about our house. It really is pretty nice. It's fairly modern, and built in very comfortable bad taste. It really is a strange mixture of things that were so expensive that they couldn't help being beautiful and things that are so ugly they're funny. For instance, the curtains are all very heavy damask, with the most beautiful lace and embroidery glass curtain I have ever seen. The wallpaper picks up the drapery colors about three shades off, and leans heavily to badly designed stylized flowers about six inches in diameter. The worst of the so-called modernistic period about 1926. The mantels in each room are marble, and rather nice, with perfectly beautiful gilt framed mirrors over each one. On the mantel in our room are two cheap yellow and blue glass vases with the Spirit of St. Louis & Lindbergh's) flying across them. The long casement windows open onto small balconies with here wrought iron railings. The first thing I saw when I walked in was the head of a ~~man~~ wild boar leering at me from over the dining room door. We have certainly ample provision for keeping ourselves clean. With our bedroom there is a large dressing room containing a lavatory and bidet. With the spare bedroom there is a dressing room containing a lavatory. With the bath, (tub) there is a lavatory and bidet. There is a toilet in a little closet to itself on this floor and one on the ground floor. The hitch is that the water heating equipment connects to the furnace, which hasn't as yet been put into operation. And won't be any oftener than absolutely necessary. We have a cellar full of wood down there, but our ration of coal for the winter is only 900 lb and the "cold" months are January thru March. It generally snows in November, and we are already wearing as much clothes as we do most of the winter in New Orleans. i.e. - a sweater and a light coat. But the days have been sunny a great deal, and it's not an unpleasant cold at all. It makes me feel wonderful. I walk so much getting around here that I like this briskness very much. However, it does add up to making bathing an adventure. I begin to sympathize with the peasants who se their children into their clothes for the winter, and for the first time I realize why the educators who insist that every child have a complete bath every day have met with so much opposition from parents. To bathe the children, I generally plug in the electric heater, fill the basin with hot water I heated on the stove, and wash them down one at a time, soaping, rinsing, and drying like a bed bath. ~~xxxxxxxx~~ Occasionally, I'll accumulate enough hot water to fill the tub to a depth of three inches, and pop them all in together. The same for me. It's amazing what a satisfactory bath you can achieve in three inches of water if the water's hot enough.

The children like it here very much. The Christelles have been

as unfailingly kind and helpful as anyone could possibly be. Really more so than I had dared hope. The first week we were here and getting settled, they insisted we eat all our meals with them, all five of us, and are expected for dinner and supper every Sunday as long as we are in Mourmelon. There is always someone to help me find anything I need for the house. Any vegetables they have in their garden are ours for the asking. We are not to buy anything that they can give us. We needed some things, like a coffee mill and a covered container for the children to get the milk in (a quart and a half a day), that were unobtainable in Mourmelon; so Lucien took the day off and went into Rheims with Hews and me and Cile to shop, while the other two spent a delighted day with Maman and Eliane, the oldest daughter, who took them for a long walk in the afternoon. Rheims is 25 minutes away by express, and a lovely town. The shops are ~~very~~ plentiful and fascinating, the cathedral is very beautiful, and the whole town has somehow a more authentic look than Paris. I hope I can go thereoften. Lucien has also taken each of the children in turn into the country to pick apples with him; on his bike, and had taken Dorothy into Rheims with him one day, taken her all over the cathedral, and she had a very happy time.

So many people have been kind to the children. They are ~~xxxxxx~~ constantly coming home with a huge bunch of dahlias, or a skirt full of apples or pears or tomatoes that someone has given them from a full garden. The roadsides here are thick with blackberries, just waiting for little girls to pick them, and they have made friends with half a dozen other girls their age already who are always ready to show them some wonderful new place to play, like a meadow where the blackberries are very thick, or a pasture where there are some baby goats that they can help bring in in the evening. Another custom here that they like very much is the Sunday night dance. It's rather like Grand Isle used to be, only a little more formal. All the girls wear skirts, and most of the men coats. But it costs 20 francs to come in, and from then on you're on your own. The girls come in groups, or with their families, and return to them after each dance. You are supposed to dance with anyone who asks you unless you are honestly too tired, and the fact that you don't know each other's names has nothing to do with it. It's always very decorous and there are lots of little girls there to dance with my three. Dorothy has been rather adopted by an older girl not much taller than she is, who has really been teaching her the steps. (There are six unmarried Christelle brothers, ranging in age from fourteen to twenty-seven or eight, and all handsome) I rather think that Yvette is well aware of this, too. But that doesn't change the fact that she has been extremely kind to Dorothy, who adores her.)

Mom, dear, and Pops, dear - It was certainly nice to have all those letters. Mail from home is a wonderful thing. The only thing I could ask for is more gossip. You or no idea how interested I find in such details as ~~what~~ stamps are still a major issue with both him & Mike and what Louie's doing and if she's ever gotten any decent help in the house. I wish you'd show this to Sam & Louie. I tell them they'll have a letter all to themselves one of these days but as yet I can't tell when. Have you seen anything of Bobby?

I had a wonderful long letter from Lee talking in the same breath about coming to see us & starting a baby.

as soon as Etki gets out of the army. Also complaining about not hearing from you.

I have found that one of the things I will need regularly is starch. Make it cornstarch, & I can divide it as needed between shirts and sauces. We have a good year's supply of soap and flour with us, but we will always need fats & oils, chocolate, condensed milk, and meats & fish products. I have seen anchovies here, but haven't priced them yet. Pate de foie gras startled me by costing 420 francs for an eight ounce can. I don't think we'll be eating much of that. Fresh fruits & vegetables are still very plentiful & very good. I see by the papers that terrible things are happening to the price of food at home, too, though.

Will you forward the New Yorker's & Alice Child's files to us, please. We don't care about any magazines but those. Also, I'd very much like to have your used Saturday Review of ^{its} if you're not saving them. Why don't you change ^{our} address with the publishers to yours?

I'd be much obliged if you'd give my love to any relatives you think might be interested. Specially Nettie & Felicia.

We love you very much.
Ceals