

Letters from Home

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Lettres de chez nous — un compte-rendu personnel
d'une femme qui maintient vivante son histoire familiale.



Beth Wigmore, June, 1936

Letter writing for my mother is only partially a hobby. More importantly it is a way to keep in touch. Back in the good old days, picking up the telephone for long distance calls was too costly, and, in her mind, continues to be today.

Writing became somewhat of a necessity when as a new bride she moved West leaving her family behind in the Maritimes. Then her husband went off to war for three years and the letters became golden treasures. As her five children grew up and scattered over North America she wanted to write to each one of them and share their news. She turned to typing her letters with six copies per page — the extra letter going to a grandmother, a relative or a special friend.

(Occasionally a letter arrives with total jibberish for the first page. There would be an apology for the carbon being in backwards — and a suggestion that the page be read in the mirror!)

Sunday morning became a special time for her. She pulls out her typewriter, shuts off the radio and settles in to talk with her family for a few hours. She has a strong feeling about family unity and her weekly letters keep a busy, growing family close. History shows us that women wrote their diaries and letters unconscious of the fact that they were recording much of our early history that would otherwise have been lost. In just the same way my mother faithfully records the events around her each week. Her letter is a diary of all our lives; it is a gossip column with a little philosophy added; it shows her humour; it gives us new recipes as well as good advice and the Saskatchewan influence is always there.

There is a strong thread of optimism and joy throughout the letters. By the end of each one we have a feeling we could return home knowing what has gone on in our absence. Through them we keep in touch with family and friends and we follow the seasons through another Prairie year. And although there may be four pages of double-spaced typing — and after a busy week they may increase to ten, little is said about herself. Maybe just a paragraph or two about her activities. After writing a letter home, it is fun to think whose news will be included in the family letter.

'Do not save my letters past answering!' she writes. Luckily, I did not heed the advice and now I have many years of family memories.

Although mother is not a native Prairie girl, over 40 years of living there has made her very appreciative of Saskatchewan. Each letter carries with it some news of our home province. So how could we forget our Prairie roots?

'Two weeks from now I hope to be disentraining in Vancouver, with sun shining and flowers blooming! No flowers here but there certainly is glorious sunshine today, and rather mild temp (36° F). The beautiful cover of soft snow which came down on Friday will be melting I guess, and that's the way we prairie people want it this year — slowly, slowly, and no more falling. It certainly has been a handsome winter, but the problems of getting around have been fantastic.'

Soon after arriving on the Prairies, Mother commented to a native son that there were so few wild flowers. She was told she just didn't

look. And to this day she passes on her love of nature.

At the lake: 'I'm having a lovely time looking around for new flowers. Found two nice ones yesterday which I managed to get identified — Western Berganot which is a gorgeous showy thing with a big mauve head — of the mint family — characterized by a square stem and minty odour! I've felt the mint plants here too and you'd never believe how square those stems really are!'

Mother is interested and amazed at women's roles today. She takes note of women's achievements, but to make it relevant to her she relates it to her experience.

'Makes me think of a book I'm reading now — by Virginia Woolf, lent for my holiday reading by Louise, and entitled *A Room of One's Own*. It's based on some thoughts when she was asked to give a talk "Women and Fiction" and is really quite delightful — developing the idea of why women haven't written more. Just one thing I'll mention, is the fact that the early outstanding women who wrote were all childless — but lest I forget it, I must tell you that the CMA has its first woman as a president and she is the mother of six!'

She feels that each of her career-minded daughters tries to squeeze too much into a day. And we often do because our main role model did exactly that herself. No matter how much work goes on during the week — Sunday is set aside to share with her family. She is continuing the practice of many pioneer women — recording history in an unpretentious and unnoticed way. A woman's way. ©