

Monday

Dear Dad and Family,

In answer to your letter of the tenth.... thank-you so much for the photographs. They are excellent, especially the one of you before the fireplace. Craig looks as beautiful and aristocratic as ever. Also noticed there was one of Mr. Foster. Apparently you are not getting all my letters.. some of the other parents have been complaining too and now even two of the cables sent out never arrived. At any rate wrote well in advance of Christmas to find out whether Mr. Foster was well since the last I had heard was in Mother's last letter the end of November and at that time you did not expect him to live. Did not hear from you and consequently have not sent them Christmas greetings as I had everyone else. Would appreciate knowing so that now I could at least write a nice letter to them. Also included in the same note my thanks for the arrival of the two checks.. you write that you never heard, so thank-you again and will have plenty to hold out until the first part of February at least. Will write an account separately since I would like to tell you about Christmas while I have or rather am neglecting my paper on Delacroix and David to write. Before I start.. have exams the end of Feb. and you'll know then how I'm doing. At this point all fronts look rather good and unless I manage to get rattled by these weird French exams all should be well. Just got ~~add~~ your letter and was looking over the pictures again trying to account for the background in the one of Mr. Foster when I realized that it is behind the kitchen and that you've built that stone wall. It looks beautiful why didn't you ever say anything? Sorry to hear the weather has been so bad. Perhaps this will be the end and you'll have a good spring. Again This year I won't be there to see the tulips. Now I've just reread your letter and see that you've mentioned the wall!!!! In my excitement of seeing the pictures I must have missed that line this morning.

Was quite ill, with the grippe sort of a cold that has been going around Europe, just before I left for vacation; but managed to leave as planned on the 22nd at 11:55 PM with Peg Jackson, a lovely blond girl living now in California, but born and raised in China. We had no trouble at the border...Valorbe since we had nothing to declare we were not even searched. Several Italians in the crowded compartment (was meant for 8 but we had 9) made the ride rather a noisy one. They all seemed to think they were opera baritones and so we had an Italian opera all the way. It might have been fun, but between midnight and noon it becomes a little fatiguing. However changed safely at Brigue and by 4:30 PM the afternoon of the 23rd we were all settled in the Breithorn in Zermatt. I also wrote you that our hotel had been changed because the Gornergratt was not opened this season.

The train-ride from Brigue to Zermatt was most breath-taking. The train was, to be exact, a two-car electrically run affair that followed the most treacherous route I have ever seen-over the Ungfrau section of the Alps. We ascended continuously and I had to keep swallowing to keep my heart where it should be as well as to equilibrate the air in my lungs...mostly out of fright I guess! And then we came into Zermatt!! You have never seen such a lovely village! It is nestled in the bottom of a real valley, with not only snow-capped ranges of mountains, but the Matterhorn, in French called the MONT CERVIN.

For most Swiss villages of one or two houses, in general, Zermatt was quite large. It has at least six fairly good sized hotels, several good ski-equipement shops, a beautiful ice rink with a hockey and a curling (fascinating way of bowling on the ice) rink as well. A brook runs through the town and the houses of the people themselves are as old in appearance as the mountains, built always of wood, they are sometimes set on stone sort of stilts and usually have huge stones on top to hold the roof down. The streets being covered with snow, the townspeople have to use sleighs and the hotels send lovely ones to meet the trains...horses all shined and garnished with sleigh bells like the ones in the haall at the farm. To hear the sleighs go jingling down the tiny main street was almost unreal.

Before we could possibly settle down for a nap and even though because of the mountains it was already getting dark at 4:30, Peg and I had to see the village and make arrangements for our skis so that we would not lose a day of fine weather. Fortunately Zermatt had rather wonderful snow from the very beginning. Switzerland snow reports hit a new low this year and most of the group in other towns brought back disappointing ski stories. But we had to pick the biggest mountain and even though we were forcibly kept from ascending as we had wished we had plenty of opportunity to break our bodies and spirits skiing.

Of course Zermatt had to be in the German sector and though almost everyone spoke french as well as German, and sometimes even a type of english, we managed to have a little difficulty with the pronunciation. By 5:30 however we had rented skis and poles which were to be fitted to our own boots, bought our ski lesson tickets (we had been previously advised not to attempt the open slopes without some instruction and Peg had never been on skis) and headed back to unpack. Despite the lack of sleep we got down to dinner at 8:15 PM.. Now is the time to start raving about the food.... I had almost forgotten what really wholesome food taste like, between the french conglomeration of bread and potatoes, and the wonderful but rather sugary things you all have been taking the time and energy to send me. (and I don't mean that I don't appreciate the boxes because they are wonderful and help over the cheese, stewed fruit des erts of the meals here- though I'm not really complaining for the meals now are at least a hundred times better than what they were during the war ... so they tell me though looking at what we get now I don't know how so many managed to survive To get back to the point, we had butter, fresh, and more than we could eat and real, white, soft bread, real meat, potatos and vegetables like we would have on the farm if Mums fixed it or Grandma. At the end (and we could have all we wanted too) I dared after much deliberation to inquire about milk...which I would never drink at home if you remember, but which I hadn't even smelled of since I got on the boat since of course it is still rationed and only to children under twelve Thereafter, we had a large glass of cold milk after dinner each night even if they did say it was an extra (not included in the rate). Immediately after dinner as you can guess got right into bed ... but I won't let us go to sleep until commenting on the beds. .. They are arrange with a bolster under the upper part of the mattress which raises it about five inches, there are two pillows a small and a large one and beside a light blanket one has a small square of the lightest down puff (actually about 50 ins. sq.) yet I had no trouble keeping perfectly warm all night. P.S. to note...the rooms were all very well heated... and so off to a much needed sleep the first night in Switz..

The next day, the 24th dawned blue and clear and we were up and breakfasted by 9:30 all ready for our lesson at 10 AM. In the valley itself, as I mentioned before, there is sun very little of the day. It rises about ten and goes down about 4:30. The sky for about five days was the most wonderful blue I have ever seen, as clear and clean as a freshly polished mirror. The first day we went to a slope in the village and learned kick-turns, slide, proper stopping and a little stem turning, but the hill was smaller than in front of the house on the farm and the whole thing seemed much too simple!!! Little did I know!

We went back to the Breithorn for lunch after two hours of lesson and a half hours practise much exhilarated by our mornings efforts. Need I repeat again the goodness and abundance of the meal?

At two we were off again for a lesson, determined by this time to be expert skiers by the 26th when Mal Maeruder one of our group who had been in the mountaineer division skiing in northern Italy during the war, and Di (pronounced Dee) Long, also an excellent skier whom you, Dad, met at the Cocktail party in New York before we left. (the one who asked you if you could speak french and almost died when you said "oui, un peu", remember?) were arriving. (I do managed to get in the most involved sentences. Please excuse.) This time we headed up on one side of the valley for a steeper slope and by 4:30 PM after snow plowing and stem turning for two and a half hours again we were about ready to call it a day. However, the instructor was lavish with compliments and we still had not given up our high hopes. By this time, however, pillows were beginning to seem like a practical idea... we really were giving it all we had and more too!!!!

We napped 'til about 5:30 and then went for some hot chocolate with two englishmen, Lieutenants in the British Naval Air Force on leave in Zermatt for two weeks, whom we had met in our ski class, Kenneth Lee-White and Don Dick. Then dinner back at the Breithorn. After dinner the two englishmen came back along with two frenchmen we had also met, and with them and Cathy and John two other english who were staying at the Breithorn Peg and I headed off to see what Swiss wine was like after three and a half months of France. We had a lot of fun playing.. 'I drink to the health of Cardinal Puff' which I will be glad to explain when I get back. It's much too complicated for paper. At twelve we all headed to mid-night mass for it was Christmas eve, though it never seemed it, so far from home.

The church in Zermatt was beautiful, yet very simple. There was the crèche at the altar and pine boughs all over the church. The village choir sang during the mass in german and the whole of that town I'm sure was there. It is very nice and quite inspiring to find some things exactly the same wherever you may be.

After a most exciting and interesting day we finally, at about 1:30 got to bed.

The next morning Peg was up first to wish me a Merry Christmas and to give me your cable. Truthfully, it was the most wonderful thing that happened the whole vacation. Before I had left I had tried to call you but the lines were filled for a week and then I knew you wouldn't all be in the same place until too late..for the lines were