

February 4, 1937

My dear

Bess:

I am not going to try to tell you the general flood news that you have gotten over the radio and in the newspapers. These give the situation as a whole much better than I could. Believe everything that you read for conditions could not be worse. Last Thursday, after listening to radio reports until my alarm clock at night said "flood disaster" instead of the usual "tick-tock" I volunteered to take my car to Louisville with a motorcade of two hundred cars. As mine is radio equipped and heated, it would be especially useful.

We left here about nine o'clock and drove at the rate of from fifty to sixty miles on the good road. Over a very bad detour made necessary because of high water, the leader also took us at a rapid rate. The nervous tension of driving at this rate of speed in a motorcade was terrific. By the time we reached Louisville many of us had become separated. At the edge of the city I found myself one of a group of about 5 cars. We reported first at New-ohal Refugee Center and there they directed us to go straight in the Bardstown road to the water's edge. We found this to be just about two blocks beyond the Cave Hill Cemetery.

When I reached there the officers had me backed down hurriedly to the water's edge and without asking, they placed an eighty-four year old man with his nurse and his little Boston bull-dog in my car. He was quite crippled and had just come out of the boat. He held on to his little dog and said that if it had not been for his pal he couldn't have lived through these past days with water all around his home. He was a man evidently in good circumstances but lack of a bath for more than a week was the cause of most disagreeable "s.o.".

At this time I learned that this old man wanted to go to his daughter's about three miles out in Louisville. The officers who had put him in insisted that because of his crippled condition, I take him on before rejoining the Bowling Green group to bring the refugees here. To make a long story short, we were sent from relief center to relief center before we finally filled all of our cars. I think we visited at least ten or twelve centers including Newman Field Churchill Downs, Audubon Country Club, and Okolona. At Okolona the man in charge of the relief was Red Knight, an old student at Western. When he came to my car he asked me to please listen to the radio for a few minutes to try to get instructions from headquarters as he was having a hard time to try to direct the relief at this place without even a radio.

Of course you understand that everyone was without lights and heat and only water for drinking. Some of the women told me that when they were given a glass of water to drink at meal time, they would

Wanted to write to the family & several others & knew I'd never have time for anything except to type with a pen - I don't write & understand & forgive

save about an inch in the bottom of the glass to pour over their fingers to wash them off at least a little bit to touch their food.

While in Louisville when I asked at several places for a ladies' toilet, I was directed to little shanties built in the middle of the street where the authorities had tapped the sewers for this new kind of Chicago "Specialist". I couldn't make up my mind to accept this type of accommodation. Our five cars finally picked up our load of refugees at the Audubon Country Club. While I was waiting at the club for the people to get ready to be moved, I had my heater going and the light turned on. I was reading the copy of the Courier-Journal which was being published in Shelbyville after the power plant in Louisville had to shut down on Saturday night. This was a one page limited edition.

The manager of the club came up to my car and because of a life-long habit of courtesy, I suppose, invited me as the only woman driver at the club to come into ~~the club~~ to keep warm. Though I was most comfortable, I accepted only to find on going into the club that the big room was lighted by one tiny candle and cold as the North Pole. I laughed at him and told him I would go back to my car where I at least had good heat and lighting. He enjoyed the joke. There was a small fire, I was told in the room where the refugees were. They had built an outdoor toilet through Chick Sale's type about two hundred years out on the golf course.

When we were ready to start I had in my car four lovely people of the better class--an old man and his wife about sixty-five years old with their son about thirty-six, and their daughter about thirty-four. All refugees were loath to leave Louisville and go further away from their water covered homes, because they wanted to get back as quickly as possible to look after their property personally. Many had to be compelled to do this in spite of the hardships they were undergoing at the refugee centers.

We started back to Bowling Green from Okolona at about 7:30 that night and to our delight found that the water had gone off the road and we could come down the straight Highway 31E to Horse Cave and then 31W to Bowling Green. The trip home with a full moon was really a delightful one and though the children in one of the cars caused us to stop a number of times we arrived in Bowling Green about 12:30. We first drove to Legion Headquarters as required in order to let the refugees register, then on to the Westminster Presbyterian Church where the men and women were served hot coffee and food. It seemed that all Bowling Green was awake and at work. I then took my car full of people to the Armory as the gymnasium at the college had filled their five hundred beds.

As I walked out on the street after leaving these people, who were above the type that you wanted to leave herded in such a mixed group, I met four other refugees. These were four old maid sisters

between the ages of thirty-three and forty-eight. They were the most attractive and interesting people I have met in many a day and as there seemed at that time no place for them to go, I brought them on home with me, where I kept them for two days and nights until I found a lovely home for them with Mr. and Mrs. Roger Porter. They will live at this farmhouse until they can return to Louisville.

I can never tell of the joy that we all got during the time these women were with me. They had a keen sense of humor and a courage that was unbelievable. They had but moved three times in one night while the flood was rising. First they were taken from their home in a boat to the Baptist Church. As the water rose here, every one was moved in a box car to Lowe's Theater, and from here the two thousand people who had found refuge had again to be moved in a truck and these women were sent to Audubon Country Club where they joined about thirty-five others. Here they spent one night and day, at the end of which time we picked them up and brought them to Bowling Green. For three nights they had had only two hours sleep with standing up or sitting in chairs the remainder of the time. At the club there was one davenport where the seven women took turn about lying down.

You understand that none of these people took out with them anything except the clothes they had on and in some cases these were scant. Often they were their older clothes in which they had been working in their homes to move their belongings to higher levels. None of them had had a bath for days and they were all cold from lack of heat for days. The wonder is that all of them did not have terrible colds and pneumonia if exposure brings these about. The fact that so few have seems to prove the germ theory.

The next day after we got to Bowling Green, the four Sisters slept until late and we had a jolly breakfast. They told of two soldiers carrying a woman who weighed three hundred and twenty-five pounds and tossing her into a truck. While the soldiers boasted that they could do it with ease, the old maids said that they noticed that their knees were shaking before they got her in. After watching this heavy load carried, Miss Milly, who is a light-weight decided she would help the soldiers by jumping as they threw her to the truck. She did this with such good effect that her feet hit the ceiling and she would have had a terrible fall if the truck had not been so crowded.

Miss Rosie said that she had never thought that the time would come when she would ride in a box car and be locked up in it, and Miss Josie replied, "Well, if Crist was not too good to be born in a manger, we are not too good to ride in a box car." They had a lot of fun telling about a fat woman who is a friend of theirs and a widow for the second time. They say she will be sure to marry again as she is "that kind", and that they are responsible for her getting her second husband as he wanted Rosie very much but Rosie didn't want him, and so turned him over to her buxom friend.

That day at noon I went back to the Armory and brought the two couples that I had taken down in my car and left there the night before. I found that I had two of Macon's best suits left that fit the two men exactly except that the sleeves and the trouser legs were too long. As the four sisters were seamstresses, they were delighted to do a tailoring job and get these things ready for the men. All four of these people had a good hot bath. I sent out and bought a change of underwear for them and we collected in the house enough coats and hats dresses etc. even to pocketbooks and gloves for them to look and feel as respectable as they ordinarily do. Once again I will say that more than all else were they grateful and thankful for the hot water and baths.

This is now Monday and every minute of the time in between I have spent in various kinds of work with these people, part of it serving on committees to help serve food to the five hundred refugees we are taking care of in the College Gym.

Just a word about my own family. Bess and Joe, as you know, live in Castlewood in the Highlands where they were high and dry. I have been unusually fortunate in that I have been able to get in telephone communication with them every few days. We could have brought them to Bowling Green with our motorcade, but they were unwilling to leave as they have been working night and day with the refugees who are quartered at their church in the Highlands. Of course they have no lights, little water, and little gas, but Bess says they are getting along in good shape. Last night the president of Joe's insurance company called me from Chicago. He was worried about them and urged them to come to Chicago both for vacation with him and Mrs. Summers and at the same time said his officials wanted to talk over a nice promotion for Joe in making him general agent for another state in addition to Kentucky. I got Bess over the phone after trying eighteen hours and she said that she and Joe would likely fly to Chicago today or tomorrow.

Before I close I want to tell you one or two stories that are going around. When a little boy of ten was asked to register he gave his name as Refugee Campbell. The officer told him that he wanted his first name, knowing of course that he was a refugee. The little fellow replied, "But you see that is my first name, you see I was born in the flood of 1926 and my parents named me "Refugee". A baby born in Louisville last week was named by his parents High Water Howard.

O Yes, I forgot to tell you, for the last three days Joe had had a very important post at his relief center. They appointed him "Chairman of the Toilets", and he says that the tales the old ladies bring in and their complaints are too funny to ever finish telling about. These stories would fill a good book of humor. So you see there is a funny side to it all as well as a tragic one.

Hoping this hasn't bored you too much, *& with love*

I love to you & Mabe -

Mary -

(over!)

Wed. morn.

Word from Bess & Joe last night -
They had reached N. Vernon Ind - in
our car - Many detours, & 4 hr. wait
in one place.

So glad they are to be in Chicago -
for 2 reasons - First because they
are already overworked, & I was afraid
they would be sick - Second,
because Mr. Sumners told me they
were going for additional territories
(another state in addition to Ky) and
that means much to him -

Write when you can - Big
thinking of you every day -
M -