

Karachi. Sept, 24
Pakistan

L.Gilpin
please return

Dear Everybody:

This is #1 of a circular letter that I hope is going to make each one of you feel in touch with our adventures, as I need to have you be. It makes me feel badly not to write you all separately but I shall not be able to - even in the comparative quiet and ease of Karachi there seems to be absolutely no time at all, I am so busy looking listening (and recuperating!) Please everyone read into what I write the messages I'd be sending to you yourself, and the many things I shall not adequately describe. It is all so new and so terrific, I shall be constantly feeling my inadequacy in writing about it. This is just going to be a stopgap between now and the time when we shall all get together, beside an open fire, and talk the night away about Sept-Oct-Nov-Dec. 1950 and all that the days held. So: apologies in advance for confusion, and misspelled words and too many exclamation points. And lots of love to you all, my dears. I have had the strongest sense of your affection and good wishes.

We are in Karachi. It is sizzling hot. The sky is blue and a steady soft wind blows through this large, high ceilinged marble-floored house. Even with your eyes shut you would know you were in a strange and faraway place - the sounds (birds and bells and distant calls in a strange tongue) and the smells (it is spicy and sandy and musty). A soft footfall makes you look up and there is a little brown barefooted man in a white cotton suit and red fez (with the American Eagle on it) who puts down a pile of laundry on the bed, saying "2 hankies, 2 stockings, one petticoat, one nightie, salaam" and leaves. A minute before, one left you a plateful of beautiful green grapes. We are staying at the American Embassy as guests of Ambassador and Mrs. Warren, who are great friends of the Houstons. On the 21st we whirled in from Karachi's wonderful modern airfield in 2 large Cadillacs behind American flags - it was just sunset and the rows of white figures were kneeling down for the evening prayers. Our trip from London had gone wonderfully, once we finally got started, 6 hours late. Stops at Munich, Istanbul, Damascus. Dark night for the last two, sad, as we could see nothing, but for #3 an early morning creamy light on that green and beige scene - little match box houses against low tan hills whose color and outline reminded one of the New Mexican desert. Here at the Embassy, we just had time to bathe and dress in our best clothes hastily snatched from suitcases, then off to dine in the moonlit garden of Wadged Ali, spelled (like everything else you will read) exactly as it sounds. He was a delightful courtly very handsome gentleman and the garden filled with white dinner jackets and long evening dresses, with here and there an occasional sari. Mrs. Ali did not appear, is still in Purdah, it appears! Almost too dark to tell to whom one was talking or just what one ate but I had a lovely time with a soft spoken lovely mannered Pakistani and then a British colonel staying on after partition to help with the organization of the army. The food: curryish, highly seasoned and delicious! Home and to bed at 2 a.m. in this high ceilinged room as big as a barn with huge fan above, pretty beat with all I'd been doing, seeing and feeling for the last day or so.

Next day (22nd) hot as you-know-where but one learns soon to move slowly, wear as little as possible and take a cool bath whenever you have a minute available, which isn't too often. I am doing pretty well with the heat but it's hard to believe I'm the one who had the energy to hoof day after day in the Alps only a little over a month ago. If the Matterhorn was plopped down in the middle of Karachi, bet it would be unclimbed still, by Whymper or by anyone (xogodysomx)(anyway by me)!

A succession of callers this morning, including a creamy-faced beauty from Burma in a pink silk longhi (skirt) and a Pakistani gentleman and his daughter, she with a diamond in her left nostril! In the afternoon a brief drive around the city. It is all sand and low buildings and bursting with people and vehicles - men selling and crying their wares, women in purdah (muffled to the eyes), widows, draped in black, endless little agile brown people whipping about on donkeys, camels, bicycles, and then the taller, bearded tribesmen with their turbans of glorious colors. You can pinch yourself black and blue and still not believe it is you in such a place and seeing such things. A sacred cow strides by and everyone makes room for him, you included!

A large party at the Embassy that night. Out on the terrace we have drinks with a big moon hung up in the sky and a heavenly evening coolth over everything. Fun to see how the social side of an Embassy works - and it is something - everyone is easily (somehow) introduced to everybody, and not a little but is given clearly and in all its parts. So one moves about very freely and pleasantly. Everyone is terribly interested in our excursion and quite a few of the young attaches say "TAKE ME ALONG". An English general who had been to Katmandu said the view across to Everest from above the city was the greatest sight he had ever seen, and a beautiful princess in a rose and gold sari told me her lovely jeweled bag had come from there. I sat between the Khan of Shewa (he is in charge of all the Pakistan railroads and has just bought 20 diesel locomotives from the USA complete with men to run them) and a little Scotsman in a kilt ("call me Scotty" he said), terribly cute. He is here building buildings in Karachi; said (with a terrific burr) that they were working great guns and had been ever since Partition. Fell into bed at 2 a.m. again, Dears, - see what a pace?! Next morning Oscar and I got the maps out and began marking our route up to Everest in red pencil. Sometimes we follow a camel track or wagon road (the map says) sometimes a foot path - 122 miles in to Mamche Bazar, last town. Then we will go from there to Dinboche and beyond past the region for tracks of any kind. The altitudes vary from 1000 feet at Chatra (where we start on foot) to Namake Bazar 12,000 feet. The map indicates 16,000 in the area just below Everest's SW ridge. (We'd like to get somewhere near here.) Please realize this is being written by a non-geographer - I'll amend as I get better educated! The big blow has been that Walter Wood has just been called into the Army and so will not be able to go with us. Various other possibilities exist and we will keep you in touch with all as it develops.

Mon. Sept. 25 - Three days have passed, dear People, and I am still bursting with new impressions. The Warrens left on Friday - big farewell party with (besides us and them) handsome paleetan ladies in saris, cute little American attaches' wives, olive-skinned Pakistani gentlemen, British army and navy men, and (this time) two Scotchmen in kilts. After dinner a blaze of fireworks and four swarthy bag-pipers from the Pakistan battleship "Himalaya" playing Auld Lang Syne. All out to the airport and a big goodbye to the Warrens whom everyone loves, me included. One cannot imagine the USA represented more superbly or in a more truly American fashion. They hearten everyone they deal with, I hear, and these Pakistani with their terrific national burden need it very much right now. We stay on here at the Embassy till Thurs (Sept 28) when we fly to New Delhi and will be at the Hotel Cecil for long enough to get set for Katmandu and to get our instructions.

Just wish you could see the scene here these last few days - the big high ceilinged house, the Houstons and me beginning the day with trays in their sitting room, great fan rotating above. Am doing real well with the heat, and no longer mind the roaring of the fan overhead at night (sounds just like a S. American conidor about to pounce) or the little salamanders that whip around one's room (they eat insects and so are good to have in this buggy land). Have had a swim in the Persian G and found one COWRIE (En please notice). Water is warm but refreshing and fine waves. Camels parading up and down the beach. I always thought you perched between the humps but mostly you hang on the very rear, it appears, - balancing by putting your feet against the inside of their back legs. Sorry I cannot explain by drawing a picture of this! Now a word about food - it is marvelous - long cool drinks appear like magic and trays of delightful things like minced chicken wrapped in steaming little pastry envelopes, crescents of broiled buttered shrimps (seafood is a specialty here). All soups are wonderful, and you are usually handed rice to put in and a lime to squeeze. Goes fine! A curry in Karachi is so unlike a USA curry as hardly to merit the same name. Cant go into this now but will when I have had time to get my operatives to work on the matter. Fine fruits, like papaya, and a pale cream melon, new to me, and wonderful juices of lime and lemon, and big greengrapes. Lunch at 2, dinner at 9. Nobody ever goes to bed; you just sit for hours out in the evening cool and listen to endless talk about Nehru, Jinnah, Liaquat Ali Khan (Mr. Big around here), Kashmir, the refugees (there are 800,000 right here in Karachi and 150,000 are sleeping out on the streets at night) and the super human task of making things go, that faces Pakistan today. We visited their Museum this afternoon - most beautiful: sculpture and colored tiles and drawings. How long has the Museum been open, we asked, expecting some answer like "50 years". "Six months", said the earnest slight young man who was taking us around. Everything is like this, - just beginning, just planned, just being built. People are just learning, just being trained. It is a thrilling story to hear, - from the Ambassador to the Pakistani you sit next to at dinner - how they are starting from scratch, determined to learn, determined to stand alone.

Dear Pets - This is being writ in medias res as you can see. We are just home from an Air Corps party. We are getting to know people and can say "Hello Commodore Hill, Good evening Colonel Miller, Hi Mr. Wadged" etc. Everyone so pleasant, soft spoken and well mannered, whether he be American or Pakistani. Tomorrow we arise at 6 and go to the Mogul ruins at Tatta - will tell you about them in letter #2. Hope you don't want your money back for letter #1! Know I've been so SPEECHLESS over all this is happening as to make our correspondence hard to bear for you. But - I do love you all and feel we are in touch - now - even though only through this ill-expressed letter. Hugs to all, and so much love.

Betsy