



JOHN E. COCHRAN FAMILY ASSOCIATION

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OMIE WRITES HOME

Ed. Note: The following letter was written by Omie Cochran in Nome, Alaska and sent to her sister, Ethel Shinn, in Canfield, Idaho in 1923. It has been stored away these 63 years in the original envelope with its 2 cent stamp. The letter has a number of references to the Shinn children. Peter was Louis; Polly was Edith; and the 'little black rascal' referred to Maurice. Miss Saville was the nurse at the Nome Hospital that was mentioned in the article by Inez in the family newsletter two years ago.

Nome Alaska August 26, 1923

My Dear Ethel et al.

I don't know when I did write or when you did but I am going to write now however and never the less. But I wish I could talk (I can yet but I mean to tell you all) instead and see ole Unc Pete and Polly sit up and listen and that little black rascal of yours would fairly sparkle with listening. Can't I see him listening now to all the yarns we told last summer?

You see, we-Miss Saville and I, took a trip north on the Buford and it was very interesting. We went north thru the Bering Strait into the Arctic and as far as the Ice Pack. There the captain of our craft and some other mighty hunters went out first in kayaks and later in row boats and shot seven walrus. When they also took a movie man and camera, so you will likely see all this in the movies before I get to tell you. They came back on board and the ship went up along the icebergs and the walrus were 'heisted' on board by the use of the crane which loads tons of freight and the beasts were so huge that they made the pulleys just creak. They were over 12 feet long, as big around as three cows, had no feet but toenails on their flippers or flappers, no head but their body just suddenly ended with a hole for a mouth and big bristles



all around it similar to a currycomb in coarseness; no ears but huge tusks of ivory. They are the most repulsive looking animals imaginable and tho I have always read about them I never expect such disagreeable looking creatures. They had a rough brown hairy skin and some of them looked warty. They must have weighed two ton at least. Ere we got them back to Nome to the natives they were getting extremely odiferous—in fact, you could scarcely stay on the ship with any degree of comfort unless you had per chance lost your sense of smell.

Then we went north to a few minutes beyond the 70th degree of latitude and thot for awhile we would go to Wrangell Island where some men from Steffonsons ship were supposed to be stranded but we didn't get there and instead stopped at a small native village at Cape Serdz in Siberia. These Eskimo were very primitive. One white squaw man lived there and had for 23 years. He was a Swede--who else could. Their houses were circular and built up with dirt 2 or 3 feet and then skins were stretched over it and weighted down with rocks. Inside, the room was partitioned off at the sides with skins for sleeping quarters. In the main part they had the fire on the ground and the fish drying on lines and the skins hanging around and the dogs and babies and children. They wore skin clothes entirely. The women's were made like bloomers and were heavily padded for warmth. They wore high mukluks and really looked very comfortable. The babies were in fur skins with the fur inside and they looked like little Teddy bears with faces. I guess they had never seen white women, not so many at one time anyway. We went ashore in 2 life boats and a launch pulling them. On the launch was a six piece band playing and the rear of the last life boat was the movie man. 'Twas very thrilling.

The other place we stopped was at Whalen, a trading post in Siberia. There these 'towerists' went wild. They rushed helter-skelter, hither and thither, here and there, trying to find something to buy. Prices raised right before your eyes. One would but something for \$1.00 and the next might have to pay \$2.00, \$4.00 or \$10.00. That made no difference. They had to have it. One man I was sort of taking care of, tho he had his son along for the purpose, bought 2 ivory tusks, 1 pup, 2 moccasins, 3 or 4 billikens, 6 or 8 ivory and silver rings, one fishing line, hooks, floats, etc. and two bird slings. The slings have rocks at the end and the little natives throw them at the flocks of geese and ducks which fly close over the village and the slings entangle their wings and legs, sometimes more than one, and they can't fly. They come down and the natives capture them. There was more junk brot aboard than baggage, I do believe. And they say that at the first stop it was worse than here. The red flag was flying over Whalen and the Russian soldiers were there—a few, one or two or three, I forget the number.

We got home yesterday morning at 5 a.m. but missed the first lighter in so had to stay out until 2:30. The girls had prepared a big meal for us and invited up the Hartfords and then let us talk. Miss Saville talked quite a bit. Any how if you folks don't like this I don't care, it is all I had to write about and I know Buster'ud listen anyway and I'd soak ole Peter's head if he didn't and Polly would in my lap and I don't know much about the youngest one of yours so likely he would be squawling. But we did surely enjoy our trip and were gone just long enuf.

I expect there were 150 passengers on board and almost or more of the crew and helpers. We had a stateroom down next to the kitchen and 'twas pretty fierce for odor at times.

I have had jobs nearly all summer but not very much in them. Next week, September 4, school opens. I wish they would wait for a week but you know these school men. Wouldn't make any special difference I suppose for I would just fritter away the time but still one likes to postpone the inevitable.

I just now stopped and re-read your letter and it sure was a bird. I don't especially blame Ray for reading over your shoulder. It would seem, then that you have bright children. Maybe they do know something about Geography. But it is ridiculous to speak of Louis finishing the eighth grade. Why you and I were grown children when we finished and he is only a baby. I am rather afraid he doesn't know much. I quite remember your little timid Maurice and how he shifted his affection from his Aunt Om and yelled and howled and screamed steadily for a week while his mother went to S.S. Ask him is he recalls this little interview. Do you suppose he does?

Ever hear from Zen? or Inez? They don't seem to be very writing inclined tho Zen has done well this year. Even sent me a telegram a few weeks ago. Well, if anything else ever happens, I'll write again. Don't suppose it ever will, tho.

Lots of love to all,

Ome

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