Transcriptions of letters to Iolyn Chester Koch, mostly from her daughter Betty Louise Koch Erwin. Transcribed in fairly random order, but put into order as far as possible while transcribing. Began process May 10, 2017.

[Summer 1938? Written while Betty was at a journalism program for high school students at Northwestern University in Chicago. Probably the summer after her sophomore year at Berlin High School. I originally thought 1939, but the first letter’s mention of a German exchange student who says they haven’t got Czechoslovakia yet suggests 1938]

Thursday morning

Dear Mother –

I suppose you are thinking all sorts of mean things about your little daughter, who hasn’t gotten around to write to you.

It wasn’t that I didn’t get around, but every time I started to write I got so homesick that I thought I might as well let it go.

Not that I’m not having a good time, because I am. The kids are swell and everything—even the food is grand.

I have hardly any time at all, so this is going to be a very short letter. Talk about rushing around! This morning, I got up at 7:30, had breakfast at 8:00, and now I am supposedly writing to you. We have classes from 9-12, lunch at 12:15, classes from 1:30-4:00, swimming from 4:00-5:30, dinner at six, then a contemporary thought hour until 10:00. Thursday is “quiet night,” so I shall wash my hair. The idea, of course, is to write our contemporary thought notebooks. Somehow I never can get up any constructive thought, but it doesn’t make much difference.

We have no work out of class, but in class it’s terrific. We have the most grueling reporting sessions, and awful lectures. The reporting sessions are the ones they use for the university students, but we get those of a whole semester in four weeks—or so Floyd says.

I was so much surprized [sic] at Mr. Arpan. He is little and very thin, about twenty six, and has peculiar little brown eyes and wavy brown hair. Very funny looking. The other counselors are all university graduates of two or three years—one is a night watchman at the field [sic] museum—all working themselves through graduate work.

The accents around here are most peculiar. There’s the little girl from Texas—Eloise, but everyone calls her Tex—who says you’all, and all the rest of it.

There is a goofy boy, also from Texas, who has a perfect accent. I was trying to get up an accent when I was dancing with him last Saturday, but he nearly died laughing, and said, “Gul, you’all am puttin’ awn”—so peculiarly.

We have lectures twice a week. Once we had one by a boy—Heinz Butsh, a German exchange student—who believed in Hitler perfectly marvelously. The kids tried to argue him out of it, but he just held on. Someone asked him about Czechoslovakia, and he sort of shrugged his shoulders and said, “Ach, we haven’t got it yet,” so I guess it’s coming.

These trips are terrific, all-day affairs. They begin about nine, when everyone piles into two buses (one at a time, of course) and last until about five or six P.M., generally. Yesterday we went to the stockyards and saw the blood gush out of the pigs when their throats were cut (most educational) went to the Board of trade, and then to the zoo for lunch until four. I was walking around with Newell Wood, and when it started to rain, we naturally ran for the nearest place, which was the hippopotamus cage—you’ve no idea how a hippopotamus smells in the rain.

Last Sunday afternoon we went to Field Museum and the Planetarium, then to the park for lunch, and finally to the stadium for a military show—tanks, airplanes, etc.

A week ago yesterday we went to hundreds of places—International House, Chinese Restaurant for dinner, Chinese Merchandise Mart, and the Lakeside Press.

Tuesday I went to the movies with Newell. There were piles of us who all went to the same movie, so we did have fun. All dates are Dutch, and the money does count up.

I haven’t much more time, and it seems to me much simpler to just tell you about things when I get home, anyway.

Give my love to everyone. I suppose Daddy is pretty mad at me, and the pup has forgotten me, and John wouldn’t care anyway, so—

Love,

Betty

Thursday Morning

8:40 o’clock

[added at top] I forgot—will you send me permission as soon as possible for the airplane ride? If you want me to go.

Dear Mother—

You asked about my clothes—I certainly have plenty. The only difficulty is that they are packed in so tightly that they have to be pressed before they can be worn. I have two drawers and one closet, which ought to be enough.

Some of the girls wear stockings and some wear socks. Personally, I wear stockings, as most of my socks don’t match and I don’t have to change for dinner.

We wear the same thing, generally, for dinner as we do the rest of the day, unless there is an evening lecture, when we put on something a little better.

For Saturday night parties we wear afternoon dresses, which means the yellow top or the flowered blue for me.

We won’t wear our formals till Chicago Night Out.

As you thought, I wear sweaters most of the time, particularly Iva’s pink one. You needn’t send my coral, as most of the kids have come to the end of their sweaters, and are wearing their dresses, regardless of the weather.

We were wondering if it is hot anywhere else, when it is so rainy and cold here. The weather is perfect, except that it rains three days out of every week, at least.

Iva came last night. It was so elegant to see her. She came after nine, when we were all sitting around in our pajamas. I was in Gladys’ room, and she was teaching Kenny to truck. I rushed almost all the way down in my pajamas when I saw Mrs. Masters and ran back up and got a bath-robe. I thought I knew Shirley, but I didn’t think it could be she on account Bo looked so much older than I remembered him. They left me their telephone number, and promised to lend me money if I needed it, which I won’t.

Iva brought her black dress, with the posies on it. Thank Heaven—I was so worried about what to wear next Saturday. It fits beautifully.

We have been having terrifically much to eat. The other day we had a birthday party—ice-cream and cake for the waiter’s birthday.

Yesterday was some day. It was supposed to be trip day, but we did have classes in the morning—a test on current rulers (about whom I knew nothing) and a very short reporting class—a feature story on Minnie the elephant taking a mid-night stroll.

In the afternoon we went to Wrigley’s Field—the Cubs and the Cardinals. It was a rather dead game, but we did sit in the press box. Of course the Cubs lost.

Last night we had a lecture by the most elegant man—Professor Franklin from Notre Dame. He is a very frail, bent little old man in a wrinkled coat and baggy pants, sort of lank dark hair, a huge nose, and an untidy little mustache falling over his crooked old mouth—but he was so sort of friendly and sweet. He talked on creative writing.

We were supposed to have a lecture on Tuesday by the man who invented the City-Manager form of government, but he called up at the last moment and said he had forgotten that he had to lunch with La Follette, so we had [a] free night, and went to the French movie—“Carnival in Venice.” It was perfectly elegant, but we had to go out in the middle of it to get home by ten.

I did hear La Follette. He didn’t say much of anything, but everyone thought he was elegant, and is raving about him.

Please write to me—I never get any mail, and everyone else gets such a lot. Of course, other people write more, too. Love, Betty

Wednesday evening [January 1954?]

Dear mother—got your nice letter today and thought I would write a short answer immediately. The children are in bed and so is Ram. We have had a most sleepless time lately. Very busy at the hospital and when I'm on call I seem to be up all night and my mornings last until five or six in the evening. Consequently a night on call takes another night to catch up. Poor old Ram gets up with Bubby and somehow seems to stay up late anyway, so although I am working part-time and Ram isn't working at all we are both without sleep most of the time. Night before last I worked all night so last night went to bed early. Woke up this a.m. to find that the furnace had gone caput during the night, and Ram was sitting in the living room with his feet in the fireplace and both the children in his lap. Thank heaven for the fireplace. We got a new blower today so all is well again.

Have actually had snow—the first in four years. The whole town went into a panic. Of course it was slippery, but not as bad as everyone thought—much like it is at home for six months of the year, and not cold at all, never below 25. But everyone is afraid to drive—all seem to have an idea that if they shift into low gear and go up a hill at three miles an hour they'll be safe and of course they slip back down. We got chains on both cars and had no trouble at all, thanks to our Minnesota training. I am still wearing my raincoat and Ram his leather jacket so you see we're not suffering from winter weather very much. The hospital is full of skiing and coasting accidents. Most of the children had never been on sleds before, and they run into trees and cars. Have had several head-injuries and today a ruptured spleen. Even grown-ups tie sleds behind cars and it is now ice—not snow—the whole thing is very hazardous.

Finally went to an obstetrician who says it is one baby, head first, about seven months along, and that I am quite a bit too fat but otherwise hale and hearty as usual, none of which is exactly news.

The children are fine, except that Bubby climbs more each day and is more and more difficult to handle. I hope he gets over this fit before you come as it is quite nerve-wracking. With Alice it was of fairly short duration. He seems just to want to get up on something for the sake of being up, and if you give him a graham cracker he climbs up on the table to eat it. Alice continues to talk about her imaginary Gogie, who is apparently the fellow who opens the gate, helps her out of the play-pen, breaks toys, and wakes her up at night. He drives a green and white car, and recently bought some red overshoes and an umbrella.

Your days sound so peaceful and pleasant. John will miss that tray in bed about six months from now when he crawls out of bed at six in the morning to have stale coffee and hard-boiled eggs and a full surgery schedule.

We can't tell whether Alice remembers you or being in Berlin at all. She talks about grandma and grandpa and Iva if we talk about them, but always changes the subject if you try to pin her down to anything specific, or asks me if I remember grandma.

Really nothing else to write. Miss you all very much. Hope by this time that J. and J. have gotten my letter. If people expect to correspond with me they must put up with a little delay.

Much love to all,

Betty

Sunday afternoon [February 1954?]

Dear mother—our weather has taken a turn for the better. The snow is entirely gone and today it is almost springlike. No sun but no rain either and sort of a hazy blue color. Very warm. I just finished spading one of the small terraces and would like to have started the vegetable garden, but have the lunch dishes and did want to write this letter while the children are asleep. So nice to have them taking their naps at the same time. Now if Bubby would just learn to sleep all night we would be all ready for the new baby.

Have almost nothing to write but I seem to hear from you so seldom now that I thought it was about time I made more of an effort to write. Your last letter lacked sparkle, I thought—you sound awfully tired. Is it strain or work or both. I give Mrs. A. lectures every day on how you are not to do anything while you're here—she finally offered to keep the children at her house entirely while I was at the hospital. However, I think that would be too much for everyone and am sure you want to see them. She will, however, take Bubby anytime and I expect to have her here all the time Ram is gone. Alice I think you will find quite good company—she is fairly quiet and quite funny and is very busy with little projects, like trying on all her clothes or rolling out bits of dough or serving herself coffee or playing with her puzzle. Occasionally she has fits of temper when she [has] to stop whatever she is doing to eat or bathe or something but she can be handled quite easily as long as one doesn't get angry. Bubby, of course, can't be reasoned with and has not only fits of temper but moments of grief and frustration when he screams and stamps his feet and rolls on the floor. Also now he wants to be carried the moment he gets a little tired or disgruntled (Alice did the same thing at his age but she didn't weigh as much) and when I try to put him down he rolls up and gets his knees in my stomach and climbs back up. I think he climbs a little less.

I have had a wonderful time the last four days. Thursday was my day off, and then Friday (I can't imagine why when we've worked like dogs all month) I had no cases and I had the week-end off. The house of course is a shambles—it always looks much worse when I'm home than when I'm gone. I did clean yesterday as we had Dr. Smith, Miss Warneke, and Marion (who is a nurse who lives with B.J.) to dinner last night. Friday Alice and I went over to Northgate shopping. A. is a perfect angel when we go anyplace and loves to shop. I bought a Siamese silk stole at an import shop which I had no business buying. It was marked way down but still not cheap and besides Ram and I have agreed to spend no money at all. However, each of us secretly purchase little items from time to time. As is usual in my last month my mind runs almost entirely on clothes, and I thought a stole was something I could buy even with my present shape on account no fit. If I have a thousand babies I will never buy another maternity dress. You will be glad to know my weight is gradually getting around to normal and if I can hold it where it is now (and I haven't gained anything for almost two months) I will weigh just about what I did before B.

Iva's last letter sounded so much happier. She must feel better and am so glad the weather has been good. Their trip sounds so exciting.

You probably know Iva sent me that picture of you—the one that was in the album taken when you were two or three. It was Uncle Oscar's. Alice has taken a great fancy to it and carries it around. She used to say, "grandma when she was a little girl," but now she says, "grandma is a little girl," and "grandma come play with Alice, eat toast, play puzzle." Suppose I had better put the picture away before she gets too confused. Actually, most of the people in her world are sort of half-imaginary, and she tells me stories about lots of people she rarely sees, so she is probably quite capable of calling you grandma when you come and still playing with a little girl called grandma.

We are all looking forward to your coming and I am checking off the weeks for two reasons. Even if John has to stay home a while longer surely Jeannette can look after him? I guess that's pretty selfish.

Daddy must be getting pretty tired of working. You must take the summer off and have a nice trip. West coast, perhaps.

Much love,

Betty

Did J. and J. ever get my letter?

Thursday evening [summer, probably July, 1954]

Dear mother—

Months have again passed since I’ve written. Feel so guilty because I know you’ve been worrying about us and the measles and actually we haven’t had them. That is, Alice had a very mild case of German measles which didn’t discommode anyone, and so far Bub hasn’t had anything. Gerry had very typical regular measles up until she got the rash—that is, she started three days before with runny nose, fever, and cough and had a typical rash with sore eyes, so I got immune globulin for our children and expected a siege. But then the rash only lasted a couple of days and she got better immediately, so I guess she had German measles too with perhaps a coincident cold. Anyway I just haven’t written because I haven’t done anything. Have just gotten pretty sick of everything. The weather was just like January until about three days ago, and we kept on doing our usual number of tonsils and I am so sick of tonsils. And as usual when I get sick of everything I get very tired and just sleep all the time. However, the weather has at last gotten a little summery (though nothing like yours and in fact more like spring) and the surgery is beginning to slow up and I have decided to take two weeks off in August, so things are looking up. Last year we didn’t do anything in August anyway.

We got two movie films back today, so after we see them and if they are worth seeing we will send them to you. The children are in excellent shape. This was my day off and we had a wonderful day. The raspberries are ripe and we spend quite a bit of time eating them. We have potatoes out of the garden and of course the usual onions, radishes, and greens. The lawn is looking pretty good but I haven’t worked in it at all. Ram just mows—he doesn’t trim or weed, so it’s a little ragged around the edges. I am planning to paint the bathroom on my time off—feel if I could just do something different I would feel much better. Also have some plans for the children’s sleeping arrangements, as Victoria is outgrowing the bassinet and Ruth will be needing the crib.

Ruth [Schallert] has part-time work—just what she needs, as she is now about 5½ months along. Ram says she looks as though she’d been pregnant maybe twenty minutes. It is a job as librarian for the state bureau of fisheries, and they expect it to become a full-time job just about the time she’ll be needing a full-time job. Her mother is coming in October, and Ruth has asked her to stay a year or so, but Mrs. F. [Fortun] (I think very sensibly) hasn’t said yes or no. The Tarrants stopped on their way to Alaska and we had a picnic supper here on the fourth. [Probably July 4 as Dad thanks Grandma for a birthday check in the postscript.] Lorena said she thinks Mrs. F. will come out to stay but doesn’t want to commit herself. The Tarrants are certainly good company. Luckily the children were very good and Victoria, at least, was very friendly.

You would get a big kick out of Victoria. She is at the giggly stage—laughs if you look at her, lies around on a blanket kicking and being agreeable. Very pink and white with eyes like saucers of course. Her hair is wearing off and I am hoping for more of the Bubby-type hair. Although really Alice’s is quite pretty and waves quite a bit when just washed.

Bubby is in wonderful shape and talks quite a bit, mostly about food. He comes in from outside saying, “eat, eat, bread, butter, p-ba, milk, more raspberries.” He has finally learned to jump off things, which is not as bad as climbing of course but has elements of danger. Alice counts “one, two, three, jump,” but Bub just says “one—one” and is off. We have probably told you that Alice knows her letters very well but doesn’t get the reading idea just yet. He has gained very fast since his last tonsillitis but is getting longer and thinner, also is now covered with scratches and bruises and looks pretty tough but also sort of angelic. Alice looks just as usual. She felt very sorry for herself when she had the measles, kept saying “my meagles hurt just awfully,” and “I am sitting here in my own chair with my legs crossed having the meagles.”

Ram is working very hard as usual and not sleeping at all. However, so long as his disposition stays fairly good I don’t really mind except we never do anything except work. If he takes a couple of hours off he mows the lawn.

Am so happy Iva’s trip is turning out a success. Sounds perfectly wonderful.

Suppose J. and J. figured they might as well get the baby-having out of the way while he has to work so hard anyway, and then when he gets in practice they can have a little free time. That man who runs the O.B. dept. at Ancker (at least the one who did when I was there) is an absolute fool. They do very little work there anyway. If Jeannette is going to deliver in Minn. she might go to Dr. Holly. If I weren’t working I would have another one myself. It seems silly to stop when you just get so you can take care of them—Victoria is no more trouble than a goldfish. Of course, when she begins to climb it will be different. Suppose things are quiet at your house but that must be kind of nice too. The newspapers are absolutely lurid about the heat wave, but of course Seattle is always gloating over other people’s hot weather, though what good this everlasting gray is I can’t imagine. Evidently this is a bad year for arthritis—Ram’s father has taken a sick leave. Don’t you think Daddy needs a vacation?

Do you think Iva is apt to come out, and if so, when. If she might come the last half of August (I am not very clear as to when they get back) I would take off then instead of the first part. I may anyway as Ram will have a little time along in there.

I have been day-dreaming a little about going home next summer—if, for instance, Ram could get a good course at Madison maybe the kids and I could rent a cottage at Silver Lake where we could see you but not burden you. Unlikely, I suppose, as I can hardly just quit work for that long a time.

As you can see from this rambling letter, I haven’t a blessed thing to write and can’t type very well either. Is Edith James still in town? Should write to her. Have you heard whether or not she is leaving her husband? So many people seem to be doing it—our nurses are constantly splitting and re-uniting which makes for considerable inefficiency.

Much love to you and Daddy, [unsigned]

[postscript in Dad’s handwriting] P.S. I will write soon. I drive Ruth to work each a.m. She said today (Fri) her mother is definitely coming out for a year, in Sept. or so. Certainly appreciate the handsome birthday check. Love to all, Ram

[February 1956]

[at head of letter] Forgot to thank you for the pajamas. You can’t imagine how welcome they are. His old ones were in ribbons. Bubby very pleased indeed and spends hours deciding which ones to wear. Shows me the pirates and admires the blue. He’s so clothes conscious I’m afraid he’s going to turn out like John Torson but is so wicked otherwise I guess he’s masculine enough. [John Archie Torson was an interior designer and art dealer, presumably gay, four years younger than Mom, who had grown up in Independence, WI, near Whitehall, WI. His obituary in the New York Times: http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/nytimes/obituary.aspx?pid=174925831]

Saturday afternoon—Feb. 11

Dear mother—I won’t have very long to write. The babies are asleep but A. and B. are playing in the living room and they can’t leave me alone for along. We got your letter and the Valentines today—A. and B. thrilled with them and are now decorating them with Christmas seals which is sort of confusing. Am so pleased John passed everything but am sort of worried about the business. Both you and Daddy sounded depressed over it. With all the money there is to be made in medicine right now I sure wouldn’t stay in a town where there are too many doctors already. If I were a man I would go to some little place with no hospital but within driving distance of one, like Poy Sippi or Red Granite. How about Taylor? I don’t think it is easy for people to accept a hometown boy anyway. Look at Steve Roebuck. A poor comparison. Of course John is very well liked but that’s not the same as being thought of as a doctor, if you see what I mean. And if he’s going to be having a baby every ten months he had better get out and scratch fast or you’ll be just like Edith. Of course I should talk about people having babies close together but we at least support them, or almost. If R.L. is out of commission maybe Whitehall would be good, if John wants to know everybody. Personally, I like to take care of people I don’t know but he’s more the friendly type.

This is a horrid black day with a high wind. Things look much more dreary this year on account of everything freezing, which doesn’t usually happen.

You cannot imagine what a mess this packing is. I know you have often remarked on the amount of junk we have but it is even more massive in extent (and weight) than I thought. Ram picked up his amplifier and a few choice tools and took them over to the other house before he left. Said he was afraid I would have an uncontrollable desire to simplify his life and he had better get as much as he could out of the way first. Of course it is a wonderful chance to throw away a lot of stuff but the fact is I’ve no place to throw it. You can’t burn anything and the garbage collectors will only take garbage. I’d have to hire a trailer and take it to the dump and that is difficult with four children in the car. Of course I shouldn’t complain about Ram and the basement as I haven’t started the kitchen yet and am counting on his helping me with it.

Am afraid you’re going to be disappointed in the house. It has a lot of rooms and I hope a lot of room but it is not enormous and certainly no beauty. There are ~~thirty~~ 40-two windows—we happen to know because we had a man to look at it to make some screens. Of course like all Seattle houses it has no screens. The windows upstairs are low enough so that Bubby could push Vicky out without half trying. We will not screen them all but enough for ventilation and lock or seal the rest. The man assures us the screens will be baby-proof. As for curtains—I shall just hang up what I have on the top half of the windows and make some to go on the bottom half. I agree with you about the casement curtains for the bedrooms. Suppose for the living room, study and dining-room I will wind up with raw silk on that tape, though I think just those fiberglass panels, transparent, shirred on tape and hung from rings (like in some B.H.’s or other) would be pretty and inexpensive. I can buy those and just hang them on rods to start with, then ring them later. Don’t need ironing. Of course I would love to have all the rooms a different color, but will try not to plunge into an orgy of painting as there is plenty of time.

The children are fine and we haven’t had an illness of any sort (barring a small spell of flu a month or so ago) all year. Am expecting colds as all the neighborhood has them but so far none. Somebody sick on moving day, I expect.

I should go out and buy a loaf of bread, but the lawyer who is closing the deal on our house is supposed to come by with some papers for me to sign. Must stop now, children very restless—All love to you both, B.

[at head of letter] wrote this other letter 2 wks. before [refers to letter of Feb. 11 above] & am just sending it to prove I had written

Saturday morning—25 Feb. [1956—at this point she was pregnant with John, born 8 September 1956, died 21 May 1958. This is probably the illness that she suspected might have affected John’s heart, but when she checked the embryology textbook she found that the heart would already have been formed by this date. The coincidence of the illness with the move would explain why she remembered the date of the illness.]

Dear mother—very short note just to say we got moved a week ago Thursday and that we have all been sick ever since, hence no letter. The house promises to be wonderful, plumbing, dishwasher, etc. all work. The move was rather ghastly but no worse than expected, and all was well for about three days. We had the Eirings to dinner Saturday night, and Sunday the Fortuns, Schallerts, and the Granens (our neighbors from the other house with Louise) came over. Then Monday things began slipping. Vicky got awfully homesick and kept saying, “go home, mama, reawy,” and went from that to a cold and diarrhea.. Bubby was the worst and is still sick—vomited all last night. Alice has been home from school several days and I was in bed two days myself. I don’t know what was the matter with me except that I had a fever and was dizzy, also a pain in my stomach, so that I kept waking up thinking I’d just had a baby, being in bed in the middle of the day with a pain in my stomach. Ram was fine, luckily. He went out Thursday night, and I guess now we’ll all survive. I am still drinking tea and bursting into tears every moment, and we all have sore throats. Seems to be a sort of general virus with ups and downs. Forgot to mention Anne who started the whole thing, being sick the day we moved.

Anyway, as a consequence we are not even all unpacked, but enough to get along on. The kitchen is in good shape. Most of the books are still in the garage. The weather has been frightful so we haven’t been out and are all very lonesome when feeling well enough to care. Sorry this letter sounds so self-pitying but that’s the way I feel right now. Anyway the house is fine and we would love to hear from you. Our address is 120 Maiden Lane. The kids are up and I must stop now—Love, Betty

[Sept/Oct 1956? Not clear which of this and the next comes first]

Tuesday afternoon

Dear mother—if I get through the first sentence of this I will be fortunate. Both babies are on the verge of getting up, and B. and V. are playing in the play room. Ram is out again, and so far we have gotten along well. The weather has been nice, tho cool, except for a day or two of rain. Everything looks very green again and the grass is growing by leaps and bounds. I am keeping the housework up at least as well as usual and gradually getting my own clothes in shape. I weigh 131 and seem to be stuck there. Found an old, tight girdle in which I am about normal size so all my clothes go on—not that I’ve been wearing it around the house. The pears are getting ripe—something I never thought would happen—and right now get ripe five or six at a time. I suppose they will suddenly all be ripe and then I expect I’ll just give them away. Tomatoes also ripening fast.

Little John is just adorable. Begins now to look like Alice and Vicky. Very plump now but I think his rate of gain will begin to slow up as he is sleeping for longer periods—slept all night two nights. I was giving him a bath one day when he was hungry and consequently crying loudly in that whirring fits and starts way they have, and Bubby said he cried like a lawnmower.

Anne is a little better, I think. We still don’t get along too well and I think she misses Ram, but she’s eating better. Vicky and Bubby have been playing beautifully, mostly outside. Yesterday they took trips all day on B’s airplane. B. climbed on a box and caught some stars and put them in a shoe-box, so they carried that around all day and kept peeking at the stars. Alice claimed she couldn’t see them, but Vicky and Bubby could see green and orange ones.

Wednesday morning

Bubby is getting so fat I’m trying to cut down his feed, but of course it’s impossible. Generally I think he’s getting happier. Alice has a cold and is out of sorts generally and I think I’ll keep her home from school today. She wrote a letter to Ram on the typewriter all by herself yesterday. George Hedrick was going to Tokyo last night and took it. Annabelle and her kids were over here yesterday afternoon, but there was such a bedlam we didn’t talk much.

Very anxious for any news of any of you. Daddy certainly sounds better and I hope he gets really well. Maybe a real vacation is in order.

Must stop now. I have regrettably already missed the mailman but I have a thousand things to do. Did I tell you Vicky is off the bottle.

Love, Betty

Miss you very much

[Sept/Oct 1956?]

Thursday morning

Dear mother and Daddy—I am going to see whether I’ll have any better luck writing longhand—don’t think the kids will let me do that either. Also very difficult. V. & B. are playing on the porch & Alice is coloring. John is still asleep and has been for eleven (11) hours. It is a damp gray day so far but it has been clearing with sun in the afternoon and may get better today too. The grass is growing madly & is very green. The leaves are turned so it’s very pretty but not like home. So far I am keeping up with the work pretty well. Made the mistake of cleaning the play room & sorting out the toys, and now they play with them all the time and I can’t keep it picked up. I am going to take up that rug in the dining room as the muddy season is starting.

We are a little dull without Ram and of course Bubby can’t go to school. The Christies were over the other morning. Lil Eiring came in the afternoon, and the Rubicams yesterday, so we have some company. Haven’t heard a thing from the Schallerts. We never did entertain them as Ram had to go out suddenly, so I haven’t seen them since you were here.

Bubby is living in his usual high fantasy vein. He has been reading a book about Old Captain Mac [probably from an Alice and Jerry reading textbook], and so he wears a cap on the side of his head all day, we have to call him Captain, and he & Vicky sail in boats continually. He has invented a new animal called a Snormy who chases them. Alice is very happy in school but pretty bored at home. We have run out of books—will be so happy when she gets big enough to read regular books. We’ve got plenty of those. Vicky is fine when people don’t hit her. Anne fell all the way downstairs the other day and smashed her face awfully. Nose all swollen and bloody, mouth cut in several places inside. Looks better now. She has been going down backwards very well, but I have the gate locked again now.

I worry awfully about you two and miss you very much but guess there’s nothing to do but hope everything will be all right.

Much love to all, Betty

[fall 1956]

Monday afternoon

Dear mother and daddy—this is an awful letter to have to write and I’ve thought of not telling you at all until we know more but I was afraid you’d call and I’d get into a state over the phone. Little John is very sick and although he’s not critical at the moment his prognosis doesn’t look good. Apparently he has a congenital heart, but the precise diagnosis hasn’t been made. I’ve had an idea for a long time that there was something awfully wrong, but just wouldn’t believe it. He’d been eating less and less and just didn’t want his bottle at all. Still, he was happy and slept well and though he was gaining very slowly he seemed alert and not in any distress. I made an appointment last Wednesday (that is, I called on Wednesday) to see the pediatrician on Friday because he hadn’t gained anything the week before and was spitting up a lot. That day he began to wheeze a little but it was very mild and went away when he was resting. Thursday he was worse, and began to be restless, fussed a lot, and spit up most of his feedings. Still he didn’t seem very short of breath—just wheezy. The other children had colds—Alice was home from school with a fever and Bubby was croupy at night. I thought the baby had a cold too, although he had no fever and no runny nose. Then Thursday night he was still worse, though he quieted down and slept quietly several hours at a stretch. But in the morning he was quite short of breath and rather gray-looking, though not cyanotic. I took him right in to Dr. Tucker, who fluoroscoped him, did a blood count, and said to take him to Children’s Orthopedic for cardiac studies. I did, of course. They put him in [on?] oxygen. He got better for a little, and then a great deal worse. Tucker came out and digitalized him, put him on antibiotics. His heart shows an overall enlargement on x-ray, and there is an area of either atelectasis [partial collapse of the lung] or pneumonia in one lower lobe. Probably atelectasis. He’s never been cyanotic. His EKG is within normal limits, as it usually is, I guess. Since then he’s gotten much better—that is, his breathing is easier, he takes small feedings and keeps them down, and he’s no longer restless. Dr. Tucker was in hopes that it was a simple patent ductus, which of course could be tied off. However, today he did a dye dilution test (I don’t know anything about these things) which seems to prove that there is a shunt, all right, but it’s from right to left, which puts him in the so-called cyanotic group. His oxygen saturation is below normal but not low enough to be evident clinically. All of which makes the outlook much worse. Tucker says there’s nothing to do now but sit tight and get him in as good shape as possible.

Please don’t call me because I’ll just cry over the phone. I blame myself very much for not doing something sooner, though I don’t think in the long run it would have made much difference. I don’t know how I can bear to lose him, and yet there’s no use pretending he has much chance when he’s been this bad this young.

I’ll let you know if anything happens and will write again soon. The rest of us are fine and Ram will be home the rest of the month, I guess, as his active duty starts this weekend. He’ll be home nights then. I had written thank-you letters to Iva and Henry before John got very sick and somehow they didn’t get mailed for a couple of days and I just couldn’t write them over, so they’ll think it’s odd I didn’t mention his illness. I’d appreciate it if you’d write to Iva as I don’t want to write it all down again—you would anyway, of course.

Much love to you both, Betty

I’ll be having some other men see him too, I imagine, so don’t think we’re not doing everything we can.

Wednesday evening [spring 1958]

Dear mother—got your lovely long letter yesterday and will snatch this brief opportunity to write a bit. Anne and Vicky are outside, and B. and A. at school. We are in the most awful mess you can imagine (in a housekeeping way, that is) as I seem to have time to do less and less. I am sorting clothes, which, what with people growing out and wearing out and the seasons changing, is an awful mess. And they are all over. My ironing is so enormous I don’t ever expect to do it. I got the windows all washed the other day and then the children did them over again when I was involved with something else and now we can barely see out. However, despite everything, we are having a very nice spring. The weather is gorgeous again, our colds are about gone, Ram is very keen on his job, and little John is doing pretty well. I can imagine you all sitting on the edges of your chairs waiting for the baby. Very exciting but I’m glad it’s not me. Shudder to think of John burdened with such responsibilities and with Jeannette riding him as she no doubt is right now.

Have finished two summer dresses for Alice, and think I will make a sack dress (all the little girls have sack dresses) which she can wear in the fall. I am creating something for you which was to be for mother’s day but lost a vital part of it—when found I will send it along.

Had a frightful day yesterday, in a nerve-racking way. Someone went thru the yard and left the back gate open, and when I went out to check on John he was gone. Rushed out into Maiden Lane (very busy, as you know) and found three cars sort of sideways, having obviously stopped suddenly, and a woman was running up the hill carrying John who was feeling fine. We found a dead mouse on the patio and I had a big fight with Bubby to keep him from taking it to school for showing day. Bubby got lost the other day and Ram went around the neighborhood looking for him. One of the neighbors remarked that he hadn’t seen him “but someone let the rabbits out of the hutch so he’s probably been here.” I have given up on trying to keep track of him and am concentrating on getting him to tell me where he’s been and when he’s going, but he still sneaks away. He seems to have an irresistible impulse.

Boofy, who is the Christies’ second boy, fell off a jungle gym and broke his nose yesterday, also cut it through from skin to mucus membrane. I met Bill at the grocery store at eight o’clock last night, finally bringing B. home from the hospital and buying supper groceries on the way.

The birthday things sound fine. Alice is really small for sevens as yet—they are long and loose, so all should be well. Bubby is getting thinner and taller and looks better, thank heaven. Alice finally lost a front tooth—it’s been hanging by a hair and moving back and forth for weeks. Bubby bumped into her yesterday and knocked it out. She put it in her pocket so as to keep it—they put them under their pillows, you know, and find a dime in the morning from the tooth fairy. Then forgot her tooth and I put the dress in the washing machine—you can imagine the outcry. Finally had to put a note under her pillow instead. Fortunately the fairy came anyway.

Got a letter from Iva which said absolutely nothing about herself. Or anything else, for that matter. Glad to hear, however.

I must hurry in and clean up the kitchen before John gets up. The little girls are in and fighting. I suppose the mailman has been.

Love, Betty

[next letter from Dad]

120 Maiden Lane, Seattle 2, Wash. 5 Jul 58

Dear Iolyn & Doctor:

Thanks so much for the very welcome birthday gifts. The bright red sport shirt is an especial favorite of the children, who wish me to wear it at least 16 hours a day, “My, how pretty Daddy looks!” being the oft-repeated comment. I am of course equally pleased to get the white shirt, and it is exactly my size. The three very nice boxes of candy are going fast, and enjoyed by one and all.

We are having a very fine, relaxed Fourth-of-July weekend. It hit a high of just 90 on Friday, and again today, and is supposed to be exactly that again tomorrow, not a cloud in the sky. But it is dry, and it does cool off in the evening, though not soon enough for the kids to go to sleep at their normal hour.

I think this is the summer the kids are going to learn to swim. The water this year is clean, and of course warmer than usual by a good bit, this being a much warmer summer than usual, and all four of the kids are getting to feel well at home in the water. In fact I think we can say that Bubby learned how today; he also lost his first tooth yesterday, so is really growing up. (Alice seems to lose another every week, and has looked like a jack-o-lantern for some time now.) I have been going down to the beach with the kids after getting home from work, on warm evenings, so they don’t forget what they learned on the weekend. We were down for about three hours yesterday, and about five today, coming home once to put the little girls to bed and going back; taking lunch both days.

Betty’s hay fever or whatever she has is no better, worse if anything, and she is in some doubt as to whether she will be able to work later this month—I suppose she wrote you that Dr. Dodds wants her to fill in for him out at Northgate during the second half of July. We seem to have located 2 or 3 college girls who would be willing to run the house and kids during the day for that fortnight, and we would get one of them rather than some old dragon from the agency.

We had an afternoon and pleasant Sunday dinner last Sunday out at the Granens’—the people who lived down the hill from us in our other house. We fed the total of seven children first, then had quite a peaceful grown-up meal while the children went out and ate raspberries off the bushes. Olaf & Beatrice have sold their house and will be moving soon to a larger house in quite a bit better neighborhood, and quite a bit closer to us.

Another recent outing for us all was on Tuesday, when we went right out after I got home from work to the country place of one of my Boeing colleagues to pick cherries—he invited the whole dept. to come out and pick all the cherries anyone wanted, and we were among the first to respond. We got a dishpan full of cherries and had a lot of fun doing it; it turned out that these people had 50 German shepherds and five kids and some guinea pigs and some kind of a spaniel with brand new puppies and a pony and a horse. The police dogs were penned up, and our kids exploited all these other attractions to the fullest, and had more fun than at a circus. Even Anne had a pony ride. On the way home we stopped at a drive-in so Betty wouldn’t have to cook dinner.

On Wednesday an old friend of mine of 20 years standing turned up from California, John Bullard, originally of Milwaukee. I had last seen him in Atlanta in 1945, though we have exchanged Christmas cards since. He came for dinner, and originally was going to stay for a day or two, but decided to go to Victoria and Vancouver with some other local friends, and to start the day before the Fourth, so didn’t actually stay even one night with us. He has lived all over the country, and has leisurely worked his way around the world, stopping for months wherever he felt like it, so had lots of tales. He now owns a little record and hi-fi shop in a San Francisco suburb. (is a gay bachelor)

We certainly enjoyed the visit of your son John. The children quote him constantly, compliment him in absentia on his fine appetite or his aptitude for household fixing chores, etc., wonder what he is doing now, date everything in the past with reference to his visit “my tooth has been loose since before Uncle John came” “The bath hasn’t been deep enough since the second night Uncle John was here, etc.” I mean to write him very soon to thank him for all he did for us here and for sneaking off downtown to buy the kids a wonderful tetherball outfit. We think he did, as it is so unlike the Bon Marche to tender us with gifts, and we can think of no other benefactor.

We are delighted with the prospect of your approaching visit. B. tells me you may arrive soon after the first of next month, and I hope our good weather holds out. Though if it stays this hot, which it really shouldn’t, you won’t derive any benefit, meteorologically speaking, from the trip.

I’m still working hard, and often have to bring work home to do in the evening. I worked a while tonight, in fact, and it is now quite late, so it is nice that tomorrow is Sunday. The three-day weekends are wonderful.

Thank you once more for the business and pleasure shirts and candy. We all send all our love, though everyone else is (finally) asleep. Bubby wrote John a letter, by the way. We didn’t see it, but I believe he did mail it.

Love, Ram

[February 1961?]

Wednesday morning

Dear mother—the kids are off to school, and tho Danny was awake earlier he seems to have gone back to sleep so I will start this at least. I was determined to write you at least every Sunday but something always happens. This Sunday Ram worked all day and it rained, so all the kids and a couple of the Rubicams were here all day and I didn’t write any letters. He worked straight through and didn’t come home until two in the morning or so, and it takes me all evening to get them to bed. They don’t see any point in minding me. Then Monday night he goes to the University to class—I don’t know why he takes these courses because he never has time to study for them. He was home all evening last night but I had to do the grocery shopping early in the evening—Danny is now so awful in the grocery I can just do a little shopping with him and have to go in the evening to do a large staple s hopping every now and then—and by the time I got everything put away and the dishes done and the wash organized it seemed to be about time to go to bed. Time just gets away from me.

We’ve been alternating nice days with horrible ones. Yesterday was beautiful. It is so nice to have sun, though all sorts of things suddenly spring into view—like the dirt on the windows. Dan and I went for a walk. He rushes forward, saying “C’mon, mom, to corner, c’mon, mom, up hill.” Then he gets on the swing and swings on and on. It’s wonderful to have him outside but of course he won’t come in without my carrying him in, screaming and kicking, “Outside, mama, outside.” Well, today we have rain again so no problem. Annabelle walked over with the baby in the buggy yesterday afternoon. She weighs 150 and is very majestic looking. Bill, as so often seems to happen, is getting thinner and thinner. The baby is adorable but not pretty. In fact I must be getting old, I can now look at a little baby without especially wanting one myself.

I took the cushion covers off the davenport and the orange chair and washed them—thought they had shrunk but after breaking several fingernails I got them back on and they look fine except that the rest of the piece looks very dirty by comparison. I have cleaned and cleaned with various upholstery cleaners but it doesn’t get it all. Considering the color of the wash water I’m not surprised that a surface cleaner doesn’t work.

Alice and Bubby have had the worst weather for skiing—this has not been a good year, at least not on weekends. Even so they have loved it, even when it drizzles and they come home soaked. Alice looks much healthier this year—she is still pink and is quite plump. Anne can read quite well, Vicky having taught her. She polished her shoes last night. I asked her to wait until I could show her how but she said, “Oh, that’s all right. I just read the directions on the bottle.” Vicky is full of tricky questions about spelling, like, “what do you do when there are three vowels together?” Alice and I said, “there never are three vowels together.” “What about seeing?” she says.

Am shocked to hear that Junior Melby is getting married. She must be a remarkable woman. The MacCornacks seem to have a lot of malignancy with a very high rate of cures. I can see where Mrs. MacCornack put her grandchildren but not what she did with their parents—did they sell their big house? And if so, why? It surely was not so big as to be a trouble to them.

I don’t seem to have much news. Hope Daddy got my letter. I have a nasty feeling I put the wrong address on—1100 or something. Heavens, I am forgetting the birthday—your package arrived of course (and so did Iva’s check, I will write soon). The sweaters all fit and are very handsome. Bubby has worn his every day and the two little girls are wearing theirs over their twin navy blue dresses with the pleated skirts—they call it their uniform. Alice can’t wear hers to school, of course, but she wore it all weekend. The overalls for Dan are the best looking cords I have ever seen—they fit beautifully and look very dressed up. Vicky and I went shopping the night before Dan’s birthday and got him a punching bag—one of those figures you blow up that pops back when you hit it—a kiddy car (I decided to wait until summer for a trike) and a playskool or two. Vicky is so nice to take shopping now. She doesn’t ask for anything or complain about anything, and she is so interested and curious she hurries around silently looking everywhere without making any trouble. She doesn’t unscrew the models’ arms and legs like she used to, though. I am sending a valentine from Vicky by this same post.

The Cub Scout blue and gold dinner is this Friday, and B. becomes a Wolf Cub which is quite a thing. We will all go except Dan, as it is quite a bit like a church supper.

Dan is shaking his crib and the cat meowing so I must stop this and I think I will mail it, dull as it is, without trying to think of anything more. Do you ever think of coming out alone to visit us if Sarah would stay with Daddy? I always wish you could come in the spring—it is so pretty then and with the kids still in school we would have some time to talk. It is better, of course, if you both come but Daddy said last time he wouldn’t come again. I have tried to get Ram to talk about his vacation. I don’t see either how we could go east again but I think we should do something. I’m afraid he’ll just let it go and either not take one or just decide to stay home for a couple of weeks which is worse than nothing. Perhaps Daddy will change his mind and want to come.

Love to all, Betty

[Letter postmarked Jan 6 1962 from Anne, age 6, to Grandma]

Dear Grandma,

Thank you for the bracelet and the game “Go to the Head of the Class.”

Vickie got the book called “The Marvelous Land of Oz Grant got a electric train

Love Ann [sic]

[February 1962]

Monday evening

Dear mother and daddy, It is after eleven and I have finished a letter to Iva which leaves me feeling virtuous and wide awake. Ram has gone to bed since he was up until two last night. Alice is sick with a fever, sore throat and stomach ache—I am so sick of this endless virus but the rest of the city seems to have it too. Dan has a cold but the rest are all right. We are having spring weather just at the moment—fog in the morning, warm sun thereafter. Perfectly wonderful and too good to last. We spent the day outside fighting over tricycles. I have little Richard now (Ragnhild’s boy). He’s been here two weeks and will stay at least a week or two longer. I really enjoy him—he’s so good and quiet and small enough to pick up now and then. Unfortunately he is very affectionate and given to grabbing and saying “my mama!” which just drives Dan to distraction. In fact Dan is terribly jealous and Richard is now getting jealous of Dan too. What people do with twins I can’t imagine. They do play together part of the time and then it is wonderful but of course they get into things.

I realized after I sent the size of those chair seats that they sounded three-dimensional—they are narrower at the back than the front and curve a little both in front and behind. I gave the deepest depth, if you see what I mean, and the back and front width. Perhaps this was clear to you.

Thank you very much for the check for Dan. Will use it for something useful but haven’t decided what. Vicky is pleading for a big bed so if you think of sending cash when hers comes up it would be welcome. If you see something you would rather buy, however, please feel free. Anne still wets occasionally and will have to stay on her plastic mattress. However, she can have two beds in her room if V. gets a big one which should please her. I know that it is rude to suggest money but you always do say “what do they want?” Not too much, tho, just a contribution.

Anne has written a letter to daddy but I’ll bet I can’t find it to send. She is a great writer just now. Also reads continuously. Vicky does pages of arithmetic and likes you to think of words she can’t spell. Alice read How Green Was My Valley and The Fountain Overflows. She also reads things like Freddie and the Space Ship. Bubby is an absolute mine of knowledge but he makes so much noise we are continually telling him to be quiet and so really don’t know much about him.

Hope you have wonderful weather and lots of fish, also meet some amusing people. I imagine you miss Iva and I’m sure she misses you. Are any of you coming to Seattle to the Fair? The whole town is in a hubbub about it continually. The space needle is very spectacular now.

I don’t seem to have much to write. I cleaned my oven which was such a grim job it made me realize how long it’s been since it was done last. B. scrubbed the kitchen floor today and did a pretty good job. If this weather keeps up I must try to get Ram to do some outside windows. I’ve been shortening my dresses. Certainly is nice that legs don’t age like waistlines and faces. Much of the time I look 95 but not from the knees down. Write to me soon.

Love to you both,  
Betty

[February 1964?]

[at top] enclosed find letter from Danny [not present, at least I haven’t found it yet]

Wednesday afternoon

Dear Daddy,

We got a birthday card from Iva today (for Danny) saying that you were fishing so I trust you are feeling better. We have our usual cold weather (that is, chilly) with gray skies but today there is an occasional flash of sun—it goes so fast you can’t catch it and by the time I get Helen zipped up to go out it is gone. We had hopes of snow last week and did have snow one morning but it just lasted long enough for me to skid to work and then disappeared. I go to work two days a week. Business is not very brisk but I am breaking even. The worst is that Daniel expects a great deal of attention when I am at home. He hurries around building things, drawing things, writing and coloring and I am expected to admire it all and even to just sit and watch him. He talks all the time, like—“Did you know that a donkey made the world? He made some little donkeys and he liked them so well that he made the whole world” or “if you would hang the swings from the sky we could swing a great deal higher” or “if a fairy didn’t have a magic wand she wouldn’t be much better than an angel.” You will see by these remarks that it is about time I took him to Sunday School. He is so hard to handle that we seldom take him anywhere.

Bubby has finally gotten his paper route under control and we are no longer running out at all hours with forgotten papers. He has to go at four o’clock, though, and doesn’t get home till dinner time so there is no time after school to play. Sunday mornings are worse, of course, as he crawls out at 4:30 (of course someone has to wake him up and push him out the door). However for some reason he has been a lot easier to get along with lately and even washes his hands occasionally. If he would just stop busting out of his pants I would not worry much about him. He is always just at the bursting point in a size and the next size is impossibly big. Also the soles are always coming off his shoes. Last Friday he had to go to the dentist (they had the day off from school). I told him he had to polish his shoes first and he said to Dan, “C’mon, we’re going to play a wonderful new game called polishing shoes.” They played it all right but we had to scrub the bathroom afterward. The dentist pulled a baby tooth that hadn’t come out at the proper time and B. brought it home and pretended to pull it out of Dan’s mouth. Dan was thrilled and said, “I knew it, I knew if I didn’t take my fluorine my teeth would fall out and now they’re beginning to.” He wouldn’t give the tooth up although B. pointed to the hole in his jaw and tried to claim it. “It’s mine,” Dan said, “you pulled it yourself.”

Helen rushes around all day talking all the time in some language of her own. The louder everyone else talks the more Helen talks and when Ram says will everyone please be quiet Helen says ee-iet! She also reads books, smokes Ram's pipe, blows out matches, sweeps the floor, barks like the dog, etc. She has a little chair which she loves to sit in but she can't quite hit it when she backs up into it. She backs for quite a ways, looking over her shoulder, then sits very cautiously and often falls on the floor. She has Dorothy absolutely under her thumb and she screams and stamps her feet till Dorothy picks her up. In fact she is getting pretty spoiled.

Dan got a large new trike for Christmas which he rides around the house. He and Bubby use it when they clear the table—B. loads Dan up and he rides off to the kitchen with the dishes.

You will see by all this that nothing very exciting is happening around here. Ram is working very hard, partly on something to do with the supersonic plane and partly on some plan for the budget. They have this constant problem of work being asked for but no department being willing for it to come off their budget and of course it is very difficult to estimate how many hours each job will take when it is a job that’s never been done before. They will know in May whether they get the supersonic contract or a year’s study contract or nothing.

I still have not cashed B’s birthday check but I gave him the money. Also your lovely Christmas check I still have but have gotten solvent enough myself so I guess I will put it in the education fund. Thank you very very much for same.

I will stop writing now and take this to the mail-box as the sun is momentarily out. Give my love to all and good fishing—Love, Betty

[December 16, 1964]

Wednesday afternoon

Dear mother and daddy—I sent your Christmas package today and you can readily see that you will probably not get it. Actually I seem to be farther behind than usual this year and I think it is just my lack of enthusiasm. I have bought all the little brooms, dishes, dolls, looms, games, tinker-toys, etc. too many times. The older children of course are a real problem as there is nothing they need or want very badly but they expect to be surprised anyway. Of course I realize this is no reason for mailing packages late. You will not be missing much if it never gets there, actually. John and I agreed to give up the exchange of gifts except that we would send what we have already accumulated, which in my case means a book on Victorian furniture.

We are having UNPRECEDENTED cold weather—five above today. The furnace just runs all the time, like a motor boat. Luckily we have nothing of value in the yard except bicycles—the shrubs are all shriveled and that vine on the back porch is limp as a shroud. Yesterday I went to work and right after I got there we had a real middle-western blizzard—high winds, current out (tho not at the hospital) several inches of dry snow, etc. The entire town was paralyzed for a couple of hours. Surgery was an hour or so late. Then the sun came out, the snow disappeared, and here we are. Dan slept through the whole thing and doesn’t believe we had any snow—actually in town there was very little. Today we have icicles on the roof—something I’ve never seen in Seattle. Dan wore winter underwear and ear-muffs to school. Bubby took this opportunity to lose both his jacket and heavy sweater, so he set off in one of Ram’s jackets which, large as he is, he is not quite up to. Ram’s MG wouldn’t start which hurt him terribly. He had to take the Ford but luckily brought it back at noon or those packages wouldn’t be off yet.

Got your magnificent check and as usual thought perhaps you’d made a mistake on the zeros. I don’t know yet what we will do with it—I am waiting until I can get Ram to figure out these taxes. I haven’t the least idea what shape I am in but I think terrible. Financially, I mean. I do not intend to spend your gift on my taxes and if it looks as tho I will have to I will send it back. In the meantime it is thrilling to contemplate. Thank you many many times.

Alice had exams last week and did fairly well. She flubbed her German, which really upset her as she had an A before the exam. At least they are over and they are having nothing much this week—the Christmas program is tomorrow night, they don’t go to school on Friday, they spent most of yesterday at the museum and today are being taken to see “Ah, Wilderness” at the repertory. Ram and I saw it Saturday and it is very nicely done but it is a play I have always hated. Probably Alice will like it—she doesn’t see many plays. I see more than I like—for some reason the theatre bores the pants off me and of course everyone in Seattle is all agog over the Repertory and there doesn’t seem any way out of going.

The super-market meat-cutters are on strike so the only meat available is ham, fish, and chicken. Of course the small markets have meat but I find I am unable to go in and ask for a particular bit of meat from a butcher. I am so used to looking over a lot of wrapped packages that the presence of a live butcher paralyzes me. We are having ham tonight.

Ram and Grant went to the Dores’ farm Sunday with the Dores to cut a Christmas tree. They came home with a tree and a great many greens and I gather had a good time except that the adult Dores spent most of the day sitting around the fire drinking whiskey and Ram couldn’t get anyone moving—consequently it took all day and I of course thought someone was lost, hurt, etc. I will have to get going and make some wreaths.

I wish you could come out here for Christmas. It is pretty late to think of it this year—tho of course the holidays are two weeks long. I don’t suppose you could get train reservations in time for Christmas altho the more expensive accommodations are often empty. Our Christmas is not very interesting but Dan and Helen are lots of fun. Dan has been asking for a reindeer—points out that it would eat the moss off the front steps and fly him to school. He is getting quite skilled at repartee, and said to Anne, when she was teasing him, “Anne, please stop flapping your jaw, you are more trouble than a dinosaur.” When I refused to read to him the other night on the grounds that it was too late, he said, “Oh, oh, this is terrible, terrible. It’s just like an enemy. Think of not reading to a little boy. Terrible, terrible, like an enemy.” Helen now talks almost continuously but as she puts in a lot of extra syllables and leaves out others she is quite hard to understand. As it makes her furious to be misunderstood we have an awful time.

I am painting the woodwork in Alice’s room. She wants it papered and I would kind of like to try doing it myself. It would come in very handy if it turned out I could do it—everyone keeps telling me it’s easy. Of course I don’t believe that.

Got a very funny letter from John. Says all he wants for Christmas is a snow plough for the jeep—you may not have included this in your list.

My publisher is Little, Brown in Boston. I am not counting much on selling this second book since Bubby told me the first two chapters were no more than “C” work. However, Ram read it right straight through and said it was very exciting. Of course he is easier to please than the children.

I will sign off now. Have a very nice Christmas with the Bergs and the Bushes. Daddy and Dr. Bush can go for a walk (it reminds me of Peggy Nichols who always used to tell about her father and Mr. Mason going for a walk during the Anderson family reunions). Helen has come in and as she is not allowed in the library we will both go out.

We spent Iva’s check on a camera, our own being defunct, and there are a few snaps in the package. Will send some more soon and take some on Christmas. Much love to you both and thank you again— Betty

[August 1965]

Sunday afternoon

Dear mother—when you are silent for a long time as now I begin to wonder whether you are sick or whether I forgot to mail my last letter. Got letters from you and Iva for Alice but as she is still at camp I do not know what news if any they contain. Our weather is very hot—in the nineties for several days. Right now Ram and all the kids are swimming and I am alone, such heaven. Did you get my book? I am afraid you will be disappointed, expecting something altogether more imposing. Personally I was delighted. We hadn’t seen the illustrations and we all like them except Anne who said, “this doesn’t look a bit like me. Who is this Mr. Kennedy anyway?” The kids ran up and down the street saying, “Hey, here’s my mom’s book” and we had the whole neighborhood in.

Finally finished Bubby’s bed and varnished his floor. It is quite impressive. It’s been too hot to sleep on the third floor (the kids sleep out on the upstairs porch) but he goes up and lies in it for a while each day. Ram and I went out this morning in response to an ad and bought another Oriental from a lady who was breaking up house-keeping. It is 9 x 12 and quite a good buy we thought. I love to buy things and am feeling very euphoric.

It is Seafair again. I can hear the concert in the park now. Rather hot for parades but better than the usual rain.

Dan continues to have his life enriched with violin lessons and art lessons. He likes the violin but is bored by the art and only draws rockets and jets. Anne has started piano and is going at it grimly. Both Anne and Vicky are beginning to wish school would start but Bubby gets better at doing nothing every day. I can’t help worrying about Alice back-packing in the Olympics in this weather. Luckily we really worked at the sunning this year and I don’t think she will burn any more—her skin is a real problem.

I really don’t have any news at all. Ram has been coming home early every day and taking the kids swimming. The kids sleep late and eating and putting the dishes in the dishwasher and coping the [sic] Helen seems to take up our day. It has been [too] hot to sleep so we are up prowling around half the night.

I bought Alice her canopy bed as they were on sale at the end of July. It came the other day after she left. It is really very pretty. What she wants is one of those frilly spreads but since she uses her bed as a lounge chair I really think it would be better to have some good sturdy spread and put the frills on the dust ruffle and canopy. We were wondering if you have any quilts you would part with. Dan has a bed which Ram made from one of those Colonial furniture kits and it just asks for a quilt instead of a spread. Alice would love to have one too, especially if she could say it belonged to her great-grandmother—she is strong on pioneer history and likes anything early American, like quilt-making. Also I would really like to have that old desk of grandpa’s, that oak one you have in the basement that he used to have in the cupboard by the fireplace and do you remember you once said I could have that black bed John had as a boy? This is an awful begging letter and I am sure you realize I expect you to say as many no’s as you like. If you do not wish to part with anything or have already given them to John or just don’t want to bother that’s all right. I would naturally pay any freight or mail charges.

Hope your weather is pleasant and not oppressive and that you had a good time with Iva and Henry. I long to see you all. I sent Jeannette a little suit for the baby and a sun dress for herself. I liked the dress very much in the shop but when I tried it on at home, just to see how it looked before sending it on, I found it is very broad across the front of the bosom. I think it needs a clever tuck of some kind. Give my love to all and let us know when you’re coming—love, Betty

[September 1968]

Tuesday morning

Dear mother and daddy,

I don’t know why I seem to have given up writing letters. I have really quite a lot of time but don’t do much with it. Helen is still in bed. I have been trying to wake her up because the mother of one of her kindergarten friends just called and asked her to come and play and I was ashamed to admit she was still asleep. I woke Helen up and she says she doesn’t want to go anywhere. Most irritating as I know she will come down in an hour or so when it’s too late and want to go. We have a cold gray day today tho it is supposed to warm up. Our weather has been lovely, warm and sunny every day for a week or so. Before that we were dying of exposure in our own living room. We never turn the furnace on until October no matter what and even then we hold off as long as possible. There is a rule that if the children complain they have to bring up logs so they sit around here with their teeth chattering and saying nothing. No one is ever cold enough to carry wood and build a fire (except Ram or me, of course).

Things are kind of settling down and the school schedule seems set. Vicky walks, Anne rides, Grant has a car pool, etc. Helen has some little girls she walks with but I still have to go up and meet her. Grant has football practice every night and comes home so tired he doesn’t do much homework. He insists he’s doing all right but I expect to hear from the school any time. Helen says, “if a person has a loose tooth and that person can wiggle the tooth back and forth with her tongue is that person apt to lose her loose tooth?” She showed her tooth to Daniel who instantly pulled it out. He said he didn’t mean to; it just fell out in his hand.’

Got a letter from Alice last Friday telling about her courses. She said she had written you so no doubt she said about the same to you. I can’t make out whether she is having a good time or just getting along, whether she likes her roommates or not (she said she “thought they would be all right”). She hasn’t said anything about her clothes. I know I might as well stop worrying because I never will find out anything.

I got my accounting from Little, Brown yesterday and one of the items was “advance on Danish edition” for Aggie, Maggie, and Tish. I don’t know whether that means it is sold in Denmark in English or whether it has been translated but I think they would have told me if it was translated.

after school

Helen has actually gone home with a little girl to play. I would be so glad for her to have playmates. She is getting to be a very odd mixture of baby and adult. Anne has after school sports. It turns out that the only thing Anne can do is serve a volley ball so she plays volley ball one day a week, also bowls one day a week but she is not very good at that. She is so inactive anything is an improvement. Vicky walks to and from school which comes to quite a distance “to get more muscle in her legs.” As they are solid muscle now it hardly seems necessary but is no doubt good for her. Dan and his friends have been roller skating in our basement. A harmless amusement but the house reverberates like a bowling alley.

Vicky is carrying on a running battle with her math teacher, trying to get into an advanced class. He points out, quite correctly, that she has not had the prerequisites. Her sole reason for wanting to get into the other class is that some of her friends are in it. She has had a couple of placement tests for which she sat up most of the night with Alice (this was the first week of school [before Alice left for college]) or, later, Ram and Grant coaching her and passed with high grades but he is still not letting her out of his class. Alice and Ram have both told her that he’s right, that it’s silly to skip the basics, but Vicky is sure she can learn any math course in a couple of hours. Maybe she can.

We had another leak in our old lead pipe, with water coming into the dining room. I was very upset because not only would it involve expensive repairs to take out that lead pipe, which is what they always want to do, but to get at it would involve cutting our beautiful molding. However, one rainy Sunday Ram and I decided we would cut a hole in the bathroom wall just below the wash basin and see if we could see where the water was coming from. Ram sawed away a four-inch square of wall board and we came right down on the crack. I got some plastic lead and patched it and our ceiling was saved. For the time being, that is. We had to have new roofing put on the front of the house, over the porch (Dan’s and Helen’s rooms) and up into a couple of gables. During our last bad storm the roof leaked into Dan’s room. One of our chimneys has to be rebuilt as well. I always think a rash of things like this is the beginning of the end but then we totter on for a few more years. I understand more each year about how to keep water out of a house but it ain’t easy.

I haven’t heard from you for some time except for your phone call. This is understandable of course since I haven’t written you. Ram says Uncle Henry is better but that John was very concerned about Iva as I am sure you are too. I would think it would do her good to get away from Beloit even for a weekend (with all the help she has she should be able to leave) but maybe if she has constant pain in her neck to go anywhere would be just too difficult. I suppose she wouldn’t leave him anyway.

Just not much to write. My life is so dull although not of course unpleasant that I just haven’t anything to say. Ram teaches tonight and his classes start at six-thirty this year, very difficult as he ordinarily gets home at about 6:10. Tonight he is coming at 6:30 so I must go and throw something together. Much love to you both, Love, Betty

[November 1968]

Sunday morning

Dear mother and daddy,

I have been sitting here for ten minutes looking at this blank sheet of paper. It is a dull gray day which one shouldn’t complain about since we had a beautiful fall. Ram and the boys are out raking. This is just a sort of nit picking, because I raked up all the leaves myself two weeks ago, including all those from the chestnut and two oak trees in the back yard and carried them down the hill in a blanket and left them on the parking strip, whence the city came and vacuumed them up. Now they are out there picking up the strays, with Ram yelling “there’s one over there!” It will take them hours, everyone will be crabby, and then they’ll burn them in the fireplace, creating a smoggy pall over the whole area and scattering leaves all over the house. Anne is baking apple pies and Vicky has cleverly disappeared.

The girls and I went out to Northgate shopping yesterday while Ram and Dan went to the football game. All I wanted was some bright-colored denim or corduroy to cover some pillows, Anne was looking for a jumper, and Vicky was looking at ski stuff. The place was absolutely jammed with a crowd of sad-faced people grimly buying as fast as they could go. We didn’t find a thing we wanted and just as well as we would have had to wait twenty minutes to pay for a spool of thread. Helen came off the best. “All I want is a malted milk” she said. We got that. Malted milks are not what they used to be but she doesn’t know that.

Helen was sick all of Hallowe’en week and missed the trick-or-treating. We saved her some candy and she didn’t seem to mind much. Dan had his usual wonderful time. Vicky went out with some of her friends and stayed out so late Ram went out in the car and looked for her. Ordinarily [the] girls are not allowed out after dark by themselves so it is a great treat and the freedom went to their heads evidently.

This is the season when the house begins to look drabber and drabber. I will have to start perking it up for Thanksgiving and Christmas (the thought of the holidays depresses me beyond measure). The Christies will be here for Thanksgiving I suppose, as their new house has a very small dining room. They are very happy out there I think but we will surely see less of them as it is half an hour’s drive even with the freeway.

Alice gets through with this quarter Dec. 11 which seems almost too soon. She wants to come home student standby which means she could wait in Minneapolis for a couple of days. Luckily they cut off the standby quite early on account of Christmas so sooner or later she will have to get an ordinary ticket and come home. Since Vicky is in public school this year she gets hardly any vacation and I can imagine how she will be champing at the bit to be off and skiing with Alice. We are praying for a good snow year. Last year was so awful. There’s about twenty inches up there now and some of the tows are open.

This is the first year in some time I have not had a book on the Christmas list. This year, however, one will come out in the spring and one in the fall. I haven’t written anything since, though. My day is so chopped up with bits of nothing that I never have enough time to find a pencil (always a long job), think a little, and then get something on paper.

Monday afternoon

This is a pretty depressed letter so far but I feel better today. Weekends this time of year are fierce. Ram goes to bed early and he has reached the age where he can no longer sleep in the morning and he can’t stand for anyone else to. The kids have homework all week and Friday and Saturdays they go to various parties and dances and the girls often babysit until late. I sit up and wait until they’re all in. So all of us would like to sleep and to have Ram raging around ordering everyone up and accusing everyone of “not lifting a finger” and “lying in bed when there’s all this work to be done” makes us all very crabby.

Anyway, it is now after school and Helen has a little girl to play and Dan just came home with a little boy. Helen and Molly are up in her room coloring. Helen’s bed is broken again and this time beyond repair. The bottom is resting on a couple of apple boxes. She has had those two beds that were the bunk beds in the old red house (you remember that little porch with bunk beds and a crib in it?) They got too shaky to be bunks and have been down as twins and of course have often been smashed. One fell apart a few months ago and now this one is going. I would get her a new bed but she still wets occasionally. The other night she screamed loudly in the middle of the night and when I rushed in there she said (accusingly, everything is my fault) “I just wet my bed.” I said, “What did you do that for? Why didn’t you get up?” “Well,” she said, “I just somehow didn’t think of it.”

Grant actually wrote you a thank-you letter as soon as he got his birthday check. I told him I would mail it and of course forgot it. He found it in a pile of papers the other day and brought it to me saying how come, what will grandma think. I said again that as I was writing I would mail it and now I have mislaid it again but I may find it before I mail this. You can’t imagine what money does for him. He wants to work weekends at a restaurant and neither of us want him to on account of going up skiing and having to leave him alone. It seems unAmerican not to let the kids work if they want to but to leave him alone all weekend hardly seems safe either.

Ram has some friends who have left Boeing and started a company doing work for anyone who needs it. There are a lot of little new companies like this, some growing at great speed. They want Ram to come in with them but he is a little leery. They have a lot of business but he thinks they might be expanding too fast. He will probably do a little evening work for them when this teaching quarter is over. He has had to work harder at teaching than usual on account they changed the computing language taught at the University to one he didn’t know and he had to learn it. He gets awfully sick of Boeing which is a very cumbrous, slow-moving company but we are not really in any position to take risks right now.

Have talked to Vicky and Anne about Christmas and didn’t get much out of them as both said they wanted to be surprised. Anne wears a nine and Vicky an eight. They measure about 33 around the bust. Vicky likes sweaters very long and she has been asking for a sleeveless sweater and Anne has talked about a sweater vest. Both have navy blue sweaters but almost anything else is welcome. Blouses are always welcome but they are rather down on white just now. Helen can use anything and she wears a six I believe, at least the two fives she got at the beginning of school have already been let down. Grant wears a 42 coat if that means anything. Up until recently he was always needing ties and shirts but recently his school changed the rule and they no longer have to wear ties and jackets. This makes me very angry as he got a very handsome one this fall. Now he doesn’t need much of anything except ski stuff and I don’t see how you could buy that. What he always asks for is records but he has to give me a list as they all sound alike. Don’t shop unless you feel like it. You have too many grandchildren.

Must stop now and take this little Molly home and I will mail this on the way. Much love to you both,

Love, Betty

Tues. Nov. 5 [1968]

Dear Grandma,

First of all, I would like to thank you very much for your generous check. You really can’t imagine how useful $25.00 [about $175 in 2016 dollars] is to me, as there are so many fairly large things I would like to buy. For the time being, I’ve put twenty in the bank and used five for loose pocket money.

Say hello to Jim for me and tell him it feels wonderful to be 16. I hope things are going as well for him in school as they are for me. The first quarter is nearly over for me, and for the first time in quite a while I can hope for all A’s and B’s. As you probably know, I am playing football for my school this year, and while it is sometimes bruising and time-consuming, it is a lot of fun and builds muscles rapidly (I’ve gained 15 lbs. since Aug. 15 and weigh 204 now).

I have some very interesting courses this year, like computer programming, A.P. chemistry, and an English course taught by a young liberal intellectual. Our school has a teletype hookup to a GE computer down by Renton, and although the course isn’t taught very well, it’s easy, because Dad teaches it down at the U.W. My chemistry teacher is about three hundred and ten [Daniel Luzon Morris, then actually 61], and all he knows about is chemistry, but he’s one of the best science teachers in the U.S. (high school) and you don’t even have to study—just sit and listen to his lectures and let it soak in. As for my English teacher, he’s absolutely wonderful. The only homework we have is a theme once a week, and some reading.

The weather around here has been absolutely gorgeous, with those clear, nippy days with sunshine. I hope the weather around there is as good.

Love,

Grant W. Erwin III

Monday morning [April 21? 1969]

Dear mother and daddy,

I seem to be very short of paper, hence the picture on the back of this. Vicky tells me you called Wednesday [presumably her birthday, Wednesday, April 16, 1969], and here I am just writing now. Anne and I put in several terrible days hunting for a dress for her to wear to a dance on Friday and finally found one at the last minute. She has gotten very hippy and of course she has those big legs but she refuses to face this fact, and blames the dress manufacturers and of course me for not looking well in things. We had a gorgeous weekend. Vicky and a gang of kids went up to the cabin (there is still a lot of snow although it is rather slushy) and Ram went along to chaperone. Grant went water skiing and drag racing. Luckily I didn’t know about either of those things until they were over. Dan is building a tree house. Helen wanders quietly around digging holes, picking dandelions, gathering up stones, etc. I did some yard work and then Annabelle came over Sunday afternoon. Bill had gone skiing too. She has quit smoking and eats all the time. Lately she brings her own food when she comes and sits there eating one doughnut after another and mints in between. She hasn’t smoked for a month and has gained fifteen pounds or so. Of course she used to light one cigarette off the end of the other. It seems to me that anyone that compulsive must have something wrong but I am no psychiatrist.

I got a letter from Alice saying her hair is not red any more. I find this hard to believe. She said very little else except that the students are trying to get coed dorms and the president is putting them off. I don’t see why anyone would want them.

Only six more weeks of school, Anne tells me. I really dread the summer. I wish we could do something entirely different but with Ram so tied to Boeing the rest of us have to just sit here and look at each other.

later

It has started to rain. Rather nice, really, as it was getting pretty dry.

Ram had a very severe stiff neck, starting with doing the income tax and getting worse and worse until finally he went in to see his doctor. I was really worried. He didn’t have any muscle spasm, just this awful pain and he couldn’t move except in a slow swivel. He was so tired, not being able to sleep, that he acted kind of confused. I actually thought he might have had a subarachnoid hemorrhage or something, and evidently Dr. Crombie thought the same, because when Ram got home he asked me why all the reflexes and eye exam, etc. Anyhow, it was not that nor a disc either but he was on pills for some time and had to wear a turkish towel, folded and wrapped tightly around his neck, as a brace. Gave him a ghastly look but it worked and he is now pretty good. Lost a few days of work however. Of course Ram always thinks each thing is the beginning of arthritis, like his father. Did I write you all this before? It sounds familiar.

I must now thank you for the wonderful birthday present. I lost no time in banking the check and wearing the rest. I also bought a blouse, a jersey, and a cardigan for myself and a couple of blouses and a skirt for Alice. I need an entire summer wardrobe and keep feeling that I should sew (the clothes are so simple, why pay those prices?) but I don’t really want to. Vicky runs up an outfit in no time. She can make a dress out of the smallest remnant of cloth. She has finally learned to set in sleeves. A great boon to me as I used to have to do them for her and as she was usually planning to wear the garment that evening I had to hurry.

Anyhow, thank you very, very much. My present plan is to visit you if you want me when school is out, bringing Helen and possibly Dan (although they are much nicer when not together). The rest should be able to manage indefinitely without me, especially if Grant gets a job. Whether he should roam without anyone to nag him is a question. Maybe he’d be better without nagging.

Alice seemed very surprised that the grass is turning green on the campus. She’s never seen green turn brown and then come back again.

Dan has had his cast off for some time but his knee still bothers him. It was awfully stiff after seven weeks in that thing. He climbs well enough but limps a little when he tries to hurry and says he can’t run fast. Too bad, as it is the baseball season.

Can’t think of any more news and might as well rush up and mail this. Much love to you both, love, Betty

[September 1969]

Monday morning

Dear mother and daddy,

When I uncovered the typewriter I found a letter I started a month ago so it must be some time since I wrote. We had a long quiet period at the end of the summer during which I expected any minute to get on an airplane. All Vicky’s friends were out of town and Grant was a plumber’s assistant in Port Townsend. Unfortunately I got a horrible cold and earache and was deaf for two weeks and in bad shape and then Dan got hit with a baseball and broke his nose. Now, of course, school has begun. The weather is hot and dry. I drove an hour this morning distributing kids. Having only two cars is proving worse than I expected. The ride thing will smooth out of course as Alice will only be here another two weeks (I have been driving her to work) and Grant ordinarily goes with a car pool.

Vicky has had one of her fiendishly active moods. She decided she couldn’t stand her dull old room any longer and would make a bedroom out of the ballroom. She cleared out all the toys except the artistic looking things like the rocking horse and then she made a bed, using some of Ram’s most prized boards (he hasn’t discovered this yet). It is a sort of box with a mattress in it which swings from chains attached to the center beam. Of course the room is enormous and there is nothing much in it but a ping pong table and some jars of greens, artificial flowers, posters, etc. She intends to make a fake fur bedspread and strew pillows about. The night before school she rapidly threw together a new dress and came down to breakfast wearing it. Very pretty except for the hem. Vicky simply can’t make hems. Saturday she and Alice went down to the Goodwill to look for “something cool” and she came back with a pair of ladies’ hiking boots, something like those of Iva’s I used to wear only not pointed, which she had gotten for $2.

Helen has started in first grade and although she says it isn’t the way she expected she thinks she will get along all right. I made her a couple of jumpers and have some other things in mind but this week it is so warm she can wear summer clothes. She lost a tooth in her cereal this morning and although we strained the cereal we did not find it. I am just as glad as I am very poor at remembering to put a dime under the pillow. They never had a tooth fairy when I was a girl. She is developing the Erwin mathematical mind and knack for doing things the hard way. She told me the other day that she had measured her waist and it was 46 inches. It can’t be, I said. “That’s a joke,” she said. “I wrapped the tape around twice and you have to divide by two.” She got a little toy out of the cereal box. “What I like about it,” she said, “is that if you put it in your mouth your eyes cross and uncross.”

Dan has acquired a go-cart and I’m sure he’s going to kill himself. He and his friends have been playing a very tough game of tackle football and the fathers have all been trying to get them back to touch. Luckily on Saturday Tucker Dore broke his collarbone when they all piled on him and there won’t be any more football for a while. Just luck for us it was one of the neighbors’ kids that got hurt for a change and nice it was only a collarbone.

Ram is working very hard as usual and is depressed about everything, I suppose mostly the stock market and Boeing. Boeing is laying off a thousand a month and while there is not much chance of Ram’s being laid off there won’t be any raises either. The sewer up at the cabin is finally in and Ram and Grant have been digging the side sewer. As it is fifteen feet deep at the road and goes under the creek it is an awful mess and the ground is impossible, rocks and packed gravel, full of old stumps. Alice and Vicky have each spent a weekend up there and won’t go again but Grant is indispensable and has to suffer through it. Ram seems to enjoy it.

I have a new book out, the one about this house, which I will send. I don’t like it very well but the neighbors do. Still haven’t written anything else.

Iva wrote me about Pat Shager’s husband getting married. What happened to Pat? I think it is awfully funny that one of Carol’s boys is a militant or a hippy or whatever he is. We are surrounded by them and they add a nice touch of gaiety to the scene.

Haven’t anything more to write. I am so sorry about this summer and Dan and Helen feel worse. I am perfectly all right but very hemmed in but it can’t last forever. In fact, just being alone for the first time in several months is rather cheering. Write to me even if you don’t have much to say and I will try to do better from now on.

Much love to all,

Love, Betty

[November 11, 1969]

Tuesday morning

Dear mother and daddy,

I have just written to Alice and so will doubtless get mixed up as to what I have said where, and it has been so long since I wrote you that I don’t remember what news I last gave if any. As it is Veteran’s Day (I still prefer Armistice day and facing East) the kids are out of school except for Anne. Vicky went to Portland over the weekend to visit a friend and I expect her back today but I don’t know when. Grant went to a party with some Lakeside boys at someone’s lake cottage last night and is supposed to be back sometime today. These two make me so nervous that I am continually on edge wondering what they’re doing now. They’re more interesting than the other children and much funnier and better company but at this point I would settle for a little boredom.

Ram smashed up my Volvo the other night and while I am of course glad he wasn’t hurt it makes me kind of mad. The light changed to green just as he got to an intersection and he sailed through without looking. The other fellow speeded up to get through on the orange. We think Ram was legally right but Bill says if a car gets into the intersection on the orange it has the right of way but only if he did not speed up to get in. Anyway I am driving a rented Chevrolet which I like very much and one insurance company or the other is going to have to find $1100 to fix the Volvo.

The sewer is finally in up at the cabin and Ram has stayed home the last couple of weeks. I have material to make new draperies and I have to get up there and clean pretty soon. They tramped mud through it all summer. Grant works at Safeway (grocery store) as a bag boy most afternoons and all day Saturday so it makes it hard to get up there. Ram and the kids went to a big ski sale a couple of Sundays ago. It is one of those where they take over a warehouse and everything is half price. The sale opened at noon and some people had been standing in line since the night before. Anyway, they got some wonderful buys and I think even Vicky and Grant, who have very expensive tastes, are happy. They both broke their skis last year but insist that these can’t be broken. Of course when you get expensive equipment it is more apt to be stolen so there you are.

Did I tell you the Danish edition of Aggie, Maggie, and Tish came? It looks very odd to see it in another language. I am working quite hard at another book but I fear it is no good. It is hard to tell and until a few days ago I couldn’t type it so the children could judge it. The roll on the typewriter wouldn’t run right. However, with her customary cleverness Vicky fiddled around a little and found a penny stuck between the two surfaces so it is all right now.

I entirely forgot until this moment why it was so important for me to write today. It is to tell you that the honey came. I was gone, as you might expect, taking Anne somewhere. Ram and Grant were here and Ram says he was as welcoming as possible but whoever came was on his way somewhere with a car full of people waiting so didn’t stay. Incidentally, Ram paid him for it so don’t you pay too unless Mrs. Henry doesn’t know. Thank you very much. It is just the way the children remembered it. Helen is rather put out because she doesn’t remember. It was awfully nice of both you and them to go to so much trouble.

Otherwise, I am having quite a lot of trouble with my meal planning. Vicky has dieted until she is far too thin I think. Anne has lost eight pounds but she has quite a way to go. Grant has lost some large sum and his pants are all pleated up on his belt. Alice writes that she is taking a gym course where they run all the time and she has lost several pounds. All to the good, I suppose, but it is irritating to fix a good solid meal and have them one by one look at mashed potatoes and gravy, or baked beans, or spaghetti and say “I’m not eating tonight, mom, I’ll just have an apple.” Luckily, Dan and Helen continue to eat and of course Ram never stopped.

We have had some very hard rains but the weather is now just what one expects fall in Seattle to be, warm and misty with a lot of fog. Seattle now has so much smog that to see the mountains is a rarity even on the clearest day. That is, it looks clear until you get down to the horizon and then it is just sort of smoggy and you wouldn’t know there were any mountains there at all. Very sad but we are getting just like the rest of the country.

Grant got your birthday check and let us hope he writes to you. I came in and he was looking at your card. “Look here, mom,” he said, “Grandma has sent me this very tab card and a beautiful wad of money and what do you bet I’ll have to spend part of it joining the union?” He works five days a week or so but so far hasn’t gotten much out of it. Ram’s method as soon as the kids get a job is to start charging for things that they wouldn’t pay for if they didn’t have money. Right now he is making Grant pay for a dented fender last June. Of course I realize that this is the American way and just like life (if you have money you pay) but I would think it would take away some of the incentive. Consequently Grant hasn’t had money enough to join the union until now and of course he is required to join it, taking another chunk. Now, with your help he should be able to pay his union dues and I hope have something left over for himself. Seems hard to believe he’s seventeen. Vicky is close behind. She’s taking driver’s ed. I don’t think I can stand another driver.

I will be interested to hear how your club program comes out. I wouldn’t think Jeannette would want to bother with that now. The only stuff of Ayn Rand’s I have read is a couple of novels. I don’t care much for it but it certainly appeals strongly to some people.

This must be the end of my news. Please write soon.

Much love to you both, Betty

[30 November? 1969]

Sunday afternoon

Dear mother and daddy,

Should have written you two weeks ago to say that the Henry honey man sent me a check so now you will have to pay. We seem to have gummed everything up as usual. However, the honey is lovely and we are on our fifth jar.

Frederick’s came through with a gorgeous bathrobe and a large spirograph (have you seen this toy? we had one something like it last year but this is larger and better). Helen is writing to you. Both delightful and thank you very much.

Thanksgiving has come and gone and thank goodness. This is a lot of house to get clean all at once but it is hard to know which parts to leave out as the Christies range everywhere. Vicky is wonderful help and can clean a room faster than anyone I ever saw. It is sometimes a little hard to find things afterward but it is worth it. I had waxed all the floors beforehand and Vicky painted over a few walls which goes faster than washing. Also I made some new sofa cushion covers. The house did look nice although we did not wash the windows (it was a dark day). We got a new set of everyday dishes, Johnson Bros. mill stream, which are a sort of faded red and white with a scene on. Anne baked six pies and four dozen rolls. The poor little thing was sick. She was in a play Tuesday night and she had been studying hard and going to all these rehearsals and Wednesday she got a sore throat. She stayed in bed much of the weekend but got up to do the baking. Dan was roller skating in the basement TG evening, went under the ping pong table and banged the back of his neck. The next morning he woke me up to say that “the pain had spread to his jaw”. It took me a few minutes to realize that he had mumps. It is the third day now and he is still quite sick and has slept most of today.

In spite of all this we had a good Thanksgiving with the Christies but it is not much fun for the elder kids anymore. The adults and their two youngest and our two youngest have a good time.

Saturday Vicky and Ram took Helen out and bought her a bicycle with her birthday money. It is very cute with a flowered seat and a white wicker basket. Vicky is teaching her but she crashed on the basket so many times they took it off until she learns. Helen is growing very fast and has a muscular set of legs and braids. She looks like Vicky did but I think is a little fatter. She was very pleased with your birthday card. “It says ‘to a dear grand daughter,’” she said, “which, of course, I am.” Due to Dan having mumps, we couldn’t have a party so we had the usual cake and ice cream and some smaller presents for supper. Spaghetti, which is her favorite meal. She is sitting here making a design on the spirograph to send you.

Alice writes that she is not coming home for Christmas but is going to Connecticut with her room mate and then up to Montreal to visit Lynn who is her big friend from here (goes to McGill). It will be a long time not seeing her but it will be nice for her to go east with someone who knows the way.

To answer your question, I think either Grant or Vicky or both would make good doctors but they were both so chronically sick of school that they shudder at the thought. Grant has said a few more encouraging things lately but I am afraid to push it. If he took pre-med and did well it might keep him out of the draft. Of course he would have to go later but it is much better to go as a doctor than as an infantryman. His big talent seems to be in math and of course that is quite a good field right now. I just don’t see him working for a corporation or sitting alone doing research though. Too fond of his fellow man. Vicky is the same. From what I have seen of corporations I hope the children can stay out of them. Of course medicine is getting more organized all the time as is everything. I have tried to show them how easy it is to do various things. I practice medicine myself sometimes and that is really why I started writing books, to show them how (it would be a better lesson if I made more money). All they seem to get from it is that “if mama can do it anybody can.”

I was taking a nap the other day when Daniel woke me up to say there was someone at the door. I went snarling downstairs ready to tell someone off for waking me up and there were two little girls at the door who said, “Mrs. Erwin, we want to know whether Go to the Room of the Eyes is true.”

I went up to the local school to talk to the fifth grade about writing books. They all seemed ready to start right in. One little boy asked, “if you copy something by mistake will they know?”

Ed Meade turned up unexpectedly last night. We have new fog disbursing equipment here and his plane could get in here but not Vancouver. He travels a lot, being a mining engineer who does consulting, and we never know when he may turn up. Anyway he came out to the house in the evening and left early this morning. I was tired and went to bed but he and Ram stayed up until three or so. He has been such a hawk about the war and so generally hard-nosed about a lot of things he doesn’t know anything about, living in Canada, that I wasn’t so anxious to talk to him anyway. Ram says, however, that he’s done an about-face on the war and thinks we should get out. Ram and I don’t know any of the Silent Majority and thought it was a fable invented by the administration but Bill and Annabelle, who live in the suburbs now, say it is all around them. I have noticed that it is people who don’t have crime, hippies, or rebelling kids who are so afraid of them. People who live in the middle of it or them, like us, don’t feel especially menaced.

I am cooking a small turkey to use up the leftover cranberry, etc. (the Christies brought the TG one) and I must go in and do something to speed it up. Also, now that the long weekend is over, I will have to start looking for clean socks again. Our Volvo is fixed and seems as good as new.

I am really running out of things to say. Write soon. Hope you got to Beloit for TG but would think the roads might be chancy. I must write Iva. Much love to all

Love, Betty

am anxious to hear about Jim’s deer hunting.

Sunday evening [November 1970]

Dear Mother and Daddy,

I haven’t written for a long time and I’m sure a great many things have happened but I can’t remember what they were. We have had the most beautiful fall you can imagine, in fact I can’t remember another like this since the year Grant was born when mother and Iva came out for the first time. It is over, however; at least today was rainy, very gusty and dreary. I carried about twenty baskets of wet leaves. I had hoped to get Ram to do this as I really thought the kids had done their share, but he ran in a marathon today and hurt his foot so I had to do it myself. I can’t help thinking that all this physical fitness regime which makes the participant too weak to do manual labor is rather hard on the rest of us. Why not keep fit by doing something productive? A middle class idea I guess.

Just to keep you up on the girls’ Goodwill shopping: so far Anne has purchased, out of her baby sitting money, one loden cloth coat, olive green, for $2.00, one very handsome navy blue military style coat from a Thrift Shop for $7.99, one caracul jacket, also from a thrift shop, for 2.50, and one full length leather coat, fitted, from the Helen Bush Rummage sale for $2.50. She really swaggers around in these, especially the leather one, looking smug and saying to me, “And you wanted me to buy a coat in a store!” She is having a really good time this year and has lost a lot of weight. She and Vicky are both very pretty but Vicky is thin as a rail and much blacker around the eyes.

Alice seems happy although her letters are so brief one can’t really tell. She will be home early in December. They have a very long Christmas recess.

Grant is working and I don’t see much of him. He took his birthday money and went down the minute he turned eighteen [Nov. 3, 1970] and bought into the ship scalers’ union. They clean ships laid up in dry dock. He got on a job right away and now goes off at 7:15 every morning with his lunch in a paper sack and a blue knitted cap to hide his rather long hair (the laboring classes do not approve). Jeans and a T shirt and a navy surplus jacket. He looks exactly as though he had just come over, Jon Johnson or Big Swede or something. He comes home absolutely beat which is alright with me so no more late nights. Unfortunately this work is apt to be intermittent as they are hired to work on one s hip and when that is done they go and sit in the union hall until they are called again. This job should last until Dec. 6. With Seattle’s 10% jobless rate it is hard to believe that he will have steady work. I suggested that going to college with an allowance was an easier life but he said, as usual, that he has to do it his own way and when he goes to college he wants to pay for it. Says he won’t take money from Dad because he “can’t stand the hassle.” Dad is still feeding him however. I don’t know whether to be pleased or worried at this attitude and if it weren’t for the draft I wouldn’t care, work not being harmful as far as I know.

Monday morning

Ram went into the orthopedic clinic today and they x-rayed his foot and said it is not broken (he had a march fracture the last time this happened) but just a badly torn muscle which should heal in about three weeks so he is on crutches with an ace bandage.

Annabelle and Bill were here Saturday after the football game. We usually (always) have Thanksgiving with the Christies and we have it here. Every year the kids hope we can go there but they always say much as they would like to have us it is “so much easier to come to your house.” I don’t mind that but our older kids are so sick of this family party that we have just barely held together the past several years Alice won’t have any more to do with it so the last two years we got out of Christmas. This year Anne and Vicky have both said they want no part of it. “Just a drag,” they say. I hoped the Christie kids felt the same but Annabelle says they are very sentimental about it and look forward to it. I doubt that but I guess we are stuck with it for another year. I wouldn’t care as Ram, Dan and Helen enjoy it but if Vicky and Anne defect I have to do all the work. This must sound like a complaining letter. Anne finally said she would make all the pies the day before if she just didn’t have to sit around all day TG day. Vicky wants to take some kids and go up to the cabin.

I have finished my story but not done typing it yet. I have to type it before it can go to a professional typist. That’s a drag, if you like. It’s a lousy story too.

I really haven’t anything more to write. The sun is coming out so maybe more Indian summer. I am so glad Daddy is feeling better.

Much love to all, Betty

[October 1971]

Sunday morning

Dear mother and daddy,

We have turned the furnace on (we wait until Oct. 1 regardless) and I am mobile again. For several days I spent my time in the kitchen in front of the oven or out and about because this house was like a deep freeze. It always seems silly to heat it when I am alone most of the day and it is not really very cold outside. I tried getting back into bed with my notebook, thinking I could spend the time writing, but when I get into bed I go to sleep. We have a dark, drizzly day but it is not unpleasant. Very quiet here as Ram has gone up to the mountains to build steps for the porch (the old ones broke in our very heavy snow last winter) and as the kids say, “when Dad’s not here there’s no hassle.” He took Grant and Dan which makes things still quieter and we had only two people staying overnight last night. My children are so angelic at the moment that I am filled with foreboding. Vicky has acquired several pieces of old furniture and is refinishing, so aside from looking rather dirty all the time from the old paint and stain she is well occupied. She likes her courses very much, especially the economics, which amazes me. I am still afraid someone will find out she doesn’t belong in college and send her back to high school. Grant was all set to study hard and of course he doesn’t have enough to do. I have spent quite a bit of time trying to remember what I did all day at Beloit. After all, classes don’t take up much of the day in undergraduate school. When you go to school and live at home there is just a lot of free time. So far he is still interested which is all I can ask at this time.

I must not have written you for a long time because I can’t remember what I told you. Anne is back at Bush and seems very happy. She has an all day baby sitting job every Sunday (five children, one retarded and one a baby with a horrible diaper rash). She wants to quit but feels so sorry for the children she doesn’t think she should. They are a rather repulsive lot. Anne has also agreed to help organize the Brownie Scouts at Helen’s school and she wants to take a modern dance class. With her it is always doing too much or doing nothing.

Dan was pretty lonesome at his new school [eighth grade, Lakeside] but I think likes it better now. They were told to make a clock for outside work in science, any kind, water, sand, gears, etc. He came home very chagrined because everyone else had very complicated things involving weights, things built out of erector sets, pulleys, etc. whereas his was a tuna fish can with a hole in the bottom sinking in a coffee can full of water. The next day, however, he was very cheered. His was the only one that worked.

Poor Dan has never had a decent math course before and he was completely bogged at the beginning. Even when he knew how to do the problems he didn’t know any of the terms, as public school apparently thinks the vocabulary too difficult. Ram of course is a mine of information but he yells so when explaining anything that the kids seek him only as a last resort. As Grant says, “I have to admit that the Old Man has a brain,” but he is very impatient. Luckily Grant has taken to being a big brother. He has phases, sort of like Dr. MacCornack used to do. This is one of his better phases and he and Dan have gotten quite friendly, spending hours over the math book. If only these periods of friendliness and peace could last!

I haven’t heard much from Alice. It seems a very long time until Christmas when I will see her. She never does write very informative letters, just something like “I am all right so don’t worry.”

My only real piece of news is that I have won a prize! As far as I know, this is only honor, not money, but the publisher called last week from Boston (just before nine o’clock when I was trying to braid Helen’s hair and get her off to school) to say that I had won the Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children’s Book Award for 1971 for Go to the Room of the Eyes. It seems that the school children in Vermont vote on their favorite children’s book for any given year and mine was on the list for last year and I won. I am really delighted, especially as it is the only award I know of where the children vote. The others are all picked by adults and my own children are very scornful of them. “When you see that Newbery seal,” Alice and Anne used to say, “keep away from it. Those books are never any good.” Of course there must be exceptions. Anyway I was supposed to go to Vermont to accept the award at the state PTA meeting but the publisher said they were very sorry but they couldn’t supply plane fare and naturally I had no intention of going anyway. (Anne said, “isn’t that a gas, Mom, here you’re always getting out of PTA and now they want you to go to a state meeting.”) They have an editor who can go to the meeting for me.

Ram actually took a week’s vacation and went up to the cabin for most of it. He had work to do up there and I think he got some rest. He looks very tired and drawn. He runs five miles a day or something and of course his health is good but he looks quite haggard. He is teaching two evenings at the university and although that is time consuming he always enjoys it and I think just being on the campus cheers him up. Next week or maybe the week after he goes to Connecticut for a meeting and will see Ed Meade who now lives in Maine.

Later

I have now been wandering around here for some time, emptying the dishwasher and making beds and trying to think of some more news. I can’t seem to think of any.

Hope everything is well with you and that you are having a beautiful fall. Wish I were there to see it. I suppose the young Kochs visit on their way home from school and hope Jeannette has a breathing space in her day with them gone. What do they hear from Jimmy? I suppose those red curls are really waving now.

It must be some time since I have heard from you. What about Iva’s arm? Write soon

Much love, Betty

[December 1971]

Friday evening

Dear Mother and Daddy,

The reason I have not written to thank you for the check is because I have been spending it. It is still kind of fun to shop for toys although I have done it so many times but one has to ignore the prices or go mad. The other children are more complicated and so far I have bought books. I don’t think it is quite fair for you to expend your inheritance on my children but I was very glad to get it and I imagine you were glad to sell. [Presumably one of them had inherited some stock?]

We had a birthday party for Helen last Saturday [presumably November 27, 1971]. Luckily Anne was around and ran the games as I am getting too old for that sort of thing and anyway children seem to be growing more sinful. All these little girls cheated and accused each other of cheating. I sat in the kitchen with my feet up drinking coffee and I could hear Anne, starting in politely, “now, Linda [Marshall], are you sure you can’t see through that blindfold?” “be quiet, everyone, so you won’t give anything away” “are all those peanuts really yours, Jennifer [Cannon]?” and then getting less and less polite and finally shouting, “all right, you guys, shut up and stop cheating!” Anyway they all had a fine time. I gave Helen a pogo stick and a pair of stilts and we had one of those limbo legs things they jump over. She shocked me by asking for all those toys advertised on TV but I didn’t get any of them and she didn’t seem to mind.

Since the birthday party was on Saturday she figured that was her birthday and she got up early and opened your package. When I came down she was wearing the cap and scarf with her pajamas and eating her cereal. I think this is the first time since she was a baby that she has had two pairs of pajamas and it is almost too much, deciding whether to wear my new pajamas or my old pajamas or sometimes mixing them. She wears the pouch on a sash (Anne is taking weaving and we have a number of woven sashes around). Dan’s jersey fits and looks stunning. He wore it skiing Sunday and I think has worn it all week. I was glad to see those familiar belts.

Once we got rid of the party Ram and I took Dan and Helen and went up to the cabin. There is not much snow by mountain standards, only about three feet, but it was very cold and the snow was powdery. Dan went night skiing Saturday night and Sunday both Dan and Helen went. Dan actually gave Helen a skiing lesson. She is at that blissful stage where she goes up the tow and down again as fast as she can go all day without talking, getting tired, being cold or anything, just skiing. The bitter thing about the weekend is that we took Vicky’s skis up on the ski rack (I didn’t even know we had them, Dan and Ram put them on) but when we got up there we forgot them and unloaded the car and went into the cabin leaving them on the car. When Ram remembered some time later and went out to get them they were gone. It is very sad as they were her $150 Fischer Alus with $40 bindings on them [nearly $1200 in 2016 dollars]. I am so sick of things being stolen. It is a miracle to me that people keep on acquiring goods when they disappear this way.

An old friend of Ram’s who works for Controlled Data in Canada (Toronto) called a week ago and suggested he apply for a job. It would be very interesting work involving developing new computers. Boeing is so uncertain right now and especially the last two days since the SST was defeated [possibly refers to the Senate vote on December 3, 1971]. I would give anything to get the kids out of Seattle. I’m afraid, though, that Ram won’t even write them a letter which just makes me sick. We have often talked of moving to Canada but of course when it comes right down to it he won’t stir an inch. I think he could at least find out about it. There is always a chance that he could be laid off here although of course he’s sure this couldn’t happen. If he waits for that it would be too late and of course a company is always more interested in a man who has a job than one who is begging.

Saturday morning [still part of above letter; possibly December 5]

I am supposed to be getting ready to go to the cabin but Ram has a lot of errands. It is snowing up there and chains are required so we may change our minds.

Alice will be home in a week or so. I will be so glad to see her. She seems to have been gone a very long time.

We didn’t have the Christies for Thanksgiving after all. I just decided I couldn’t stand all that and called Annabelle. I have probably alienated my best friend but it can’t be helped.

Must stop now and do a little house work. Ram took my car and went on some errands. It is pouring rain and his [a convertible MG; he had probably left the top down] is rather damp. If we are going to the cabin I have to shop, but are we? Well, you warned me about having two houses, but the kids do have a good time up there.

Many thanks for the check. That picture of Timmy on Helen’s birthday card was adorable.

Much love to all,

Betty

[postscript] The mail just came (the postman was driving a truck as though this were the country so of course came later than usual) and with it your letter and anniversary check [Mom and Dad’s anniversary fell in December; not sure of date]. Of course I will be glad to shop. Please don’t worry about Christmas shopping at all. I am running out of thank yous but I am very grateful.

I too wish one or all of us could do something for Iva but I suppose she would rather be taking care of Uncle Henry than Joseph or Connie or any of those other people she almost married. I suppose it is impossible to hire help and then of course the help themselves are generally a problem.

I feel for David. Grant, too, puts on weight unless he plays football, does heavy work, goes camping, or goes without sleep entirely. Since they can’t play football all their lives they will just have to learn to eat less. I have been struggling with this problem all my life. I stopped drinking my daily dose of alcohol a month or two ago in the hope it would cut my calories but have seen no effect so far. I don’t seem to miss it and it makes me feel very self-righteous.

I am sorry to hear about Cal and also about Iva’s glaucoma.

Must stop again. Ram is driving in. Thank you again.

Love, Betty

[December 1971]

Friday morning

Dear mother and daddy,

This is a brief note to wish you a Merry Christmas and to say that you will apparently be getting New Years’ gifts from me. I’m sure I always mail everything pretty late but I took my things into the post office a couple of days ago and the man said it took twelve to fifteen days to get anything “back east” (that’s what we call Montana, the Dakotas, and Wisconsin). He decided, without consulting me and waving away all objections, that he would send the books book rate by rail and the other package airmail and that way “they will get the important things and they can get the books anytime.” I said that the books were the important things and he just waved his hand. I hate public servants. Anyway, that means if he is right you will get a package and daddy won’t. Considering that neither of them amount to all that much I don’t know why I am making such a fuss. I did start early with my shopping but I had a couple of crises in the middle and wound up late.

Helen is home sick today for almost the first time ever. She had real croup last night. I was in a quandary, recalling ipecac, steam, cold air and possible antibiotics but luckily in the middle of it she went to sleep and began to breathe normally. The girls are all terrible when they are sick, refuse all treatment, ask to be let alone, etc.

Alice is home. She came home without alerting us (this is mostly because she knows I worry about the flight and partly because she hates to be met) coming in from the airport on the limousine and home from downtown on the city bus. Ram and I were up in the mountains for the weekend with Dan and Helen. Vicky and Anne were here with a couple of house guests, a large dog belonging to someone who had dropped in, and a very tiny puppy left for them to baby sit by one of Grant’s friends. All the kids who set up housekeeping on their own, and there appear to be hundreds of them (“the old man threw me out” or “I just had to see if I could make it on my own”) instantly get dogs, partly for love and partly for protection. These kids are robbed all the time because they have records and stereos and don’t lock their doors and are afraid to call the police. Consequently, wherever they go a dog follows them, usually huge, always hungry since food stamps won’t buy dog food. The puppy was an innovation and it was kind of fun. It was one rejected by its mother and was too little to be alone. It could just barely eat and cried all the time. Finally we fixed a basket full of jars of hot water and stuffed toy animals and it climbed around and over and under and got wedged in between and went to sleep. By the time Jerry came back for it on Tuesday it was in pretty good shape.

I don’t know how I got off on the dogs.

Anyway, this is the last day of school, thank heaven. I have done toy shopping for Helen, which is the best part. I got a long cape for Alice, long skirts for all the girls (not Helen). I told Vicky and Anne I wouldn’t give them any clothes on account our tastes differ so and they said what they wanted were “interesting things for their rooms” and money. Daniel says he is exempt, “neither giving nor getting.” Grant gave me a list, starting “ten pairs of socks, 1,000 sets of underwear.”

We’ll win through some way.

Ram and I went to a dinner at the Free Lance Writers which was kind of fun. Mostly old women. I met two other doctors who are hiding from the profession by writing books. One started by writing a children’s book called “So You Want to Be a Doctor” and eventually writing a series on occupations. He now does science fiction and his wife has a job. [Alan E. Nourse] Another one was trained as a chest surgeon but now writes books about caves and has a medical job counseling industrial rehabilitation cases. I don’t suppose he was ever much of a surgeon. [unidentified] They seemed shocked when I said I’d rather be a doctor than a writer.

Ram did finally write to Toronto, mostly because I more or less threw a tantrum. We haven’t heard from them yet and he says those letters kick around for weeks. It was just a gesture, though. He won’t leave here if he can help it.

I must stir around a little. The house is a wreck.

I do hope you have a nice Christmas and think of me being with you in spirit in spite of no presents. It must be nice to be able to visit John’s large brood and leave when the going gets rough.

Much love to all,

Love, Betty

Your package came. Many, many thanks for the check.

[January 1972]

Wednesday morning

Dear mother and daddy,

The holidays being finally at an end, I can sit down at this typewriter again. Alice left Sunday morning early to catch the 7:40 plane. She and Vicky had been up skiing with Ram and Dan but they came home on the bus Saturday. We were without a car (Ram having the Volvo in the mountains) so she took a cab down to the Olympic [Hotel] and the bus to the airport. She goes student half fare (that is, standby). I got up to see her off and then went back to bed. I had my post-holiday flu and felt rotten and I thought I would sleep until noon and by that time she would be in Minneapolis and I would have slept through my worry period. However, she called about ten from Spokane and said she had been bumped (if you go student standby you have to get off if they get a passenger paying full fare). There were a lot of other students, five from Carleton, so it wasn’t too bad. She called that evening from Missoula saying the airline advised them to take a bus as there was nothing open for days. Anyhow she finally got to Carleton yesterday having missed a day of classes. She has had such wonderful luck flying it was about time something happened. At least she was out of the blizzard country. The kids coming from the east coast had a much worse time.

I got Alice a long brown cape for Christmas (like a monk’s robe with a huge hood and a tie). After years of wearing jeans and ski parkas the Carleton girls are evidently taking to long clothes very readily. So warm, Alice says. Anyway she looked stunning in this and swirled it around as though accustomed to it. She says the girls wear full length wool skirts to class with boots, long coats or capes and long scarves wrapped around their heads and necks and flying behind. I got myself a long cape at the beginning of the winter but so far have only worn it to evening parties. Alice said “what’s the matter with you? You’re supposed to wear them all the time. Just put it on and wear it to the A&P, for heaven’s sake.” We have had freezing weather lately and I’ve been wearing my old fur coat. In fact, the girls and I take turns with it but I won’t let them wear it to school, theft being the hobby of all kids, rich and poor, these days.

We really had a very nice Christmas. I did my wrapping ahead of time, for a change, so there wasn’t much on Christmas Eve. The girls and I went to the midnight service at St. Mark’s (which is of course Episcopalian). It was very stagy, being televised, but the organ is wonderful. Grant went to midnight mass “where you meet your friends” he said. Helen and Dan got the bulk of the presents as you’d expect, and we spent the rest of Christmas Day doing puzzles, baking turkey, and playing Helen’s games. Vicky went camping for the weekend, somewhere on the shore with a batch of kids, and Alice, Dan, Helen and I went skiing. (Naturally I didn’t ski. I lay on my back and read several Christmas books and watched the snow come down.) Grant came home for the weekend (he has an apartment with some boys now, I hope this doesn’t last long as he keeps coming home and gathering up brooms, pans, soap, etc. and the drain is confusing) to guard the house and Anne was here. The second week of vacation was not remarkable. We didn’t do anything New Year’s. We were asked to a party but Vicky and Anne were going out and I really hated to leave Alice baby sitting and anyway I am past New Year’s Eve parties.

I don’t remember whether I thanked Daddy for his checks in my last letter. Anyway it is hard to thank anyone properly. I just put them in the bank. I suppose the kids’ money should be invested but I’m not sure this is the time. Personally I think the market is going back down. Your box was delightful. I have finally and I guess forever lost my old pigskins so was very glad to get the gloves. I wear them driving as the steering wheel is now very cold. I also wore Dan’s in the mountains when he was wearing his ski gloves. The girls’ pajamas are adorable and don’t worry about the washing. Things always wash better than the directions say. Helen seems to be treating her pajama bag like a doll but she does keep her pajamas in it.

Thank you both so much for the checks, a staggering amount, really, when added up.

I am sorry to hear about Iva but am glad she is having treatment. I don’t think she should worry about Tot. I never noticed that the bathrooms at Tot’s own house were dirty and I’m sure she’ll look after Uncle Henry. Anyway she can sit comfortably and talk forever without getting nervous and it may be a nice change. I don’t see how you can possibly feel guilty. You can’t leave Daddy and he would go mad down there. I think Iva could get day help if she wants to pay enough but of course help is a headache. Chances are Uncle Henry wouldn’t mind living in a home if it were one of the good ones. He once told me that he really enjoyed those years he lived in a rooming house and a hotel. He liked all the people around. Of course I can understand how Iva feels and now that he doesn’t feel good he would probably hate being moved but if Iva is crippled then where will they be? If anyone should feel guilty it’s me sitting out here in the rain doing nothing.

For the first time since I’ve been married, I think, I am having to contend with leftovers. With Alice and Grant gone and Vicky and Anne on diets (Anne has recently become a vegetarian as well) I am always cooking too much food. Even Ram, although he eats steadily for forty-five minutes or so every night, eating helping after helping, can’t take care of it. Food prices are coming down a little too, although one hates to say it out loud.

I don’t seem to have much news. I got Vicky a new pair of skis just like her old ones, pretending I didn’t see the price tag. Then I discovered that Dan’s bindings are the kind that don’t release and considering that he’s had one broken leg already I got him some new ones. He says he still had his birthday money from last year and that I was holding it for him and so claims he paid for them. I think he has spent that birthday money several times but I can’t prove it. Vicky came home late the other night and started rearranging furniture on the third floor. Right over my head. Grant was no sooner out of the house than she swooped down on all his possessions. She has his big four-poster bed in the little room off the ballroom where it looks very impressive. That room has a sloping ceiling (sloping all around, like a cave, and she has painted it white. There’s nothing in it but the bed and some bits of rag rug and an old chest and some Indian baskets. There’s no heat in that room and she slept there a couple of weeks, getting colder, and then decided to take over Grant’s old room on the front of the house. She moved one of the birds’-eye maple beds in there and has some more basket, bits of tapestry on the walls, Indian cotton hung at the windows, etc. She can really make a room look like something out of a magazine and she gets a big kick out of all those second-hand purchases of hers. Anything she doesn’t want at the moment (like all Grant’s old clothes) go out in the hall for someone else to cope with. Vicky is a lot like Grandma Chester (charm, temperament, and wild bursts of energy) and if you try to imagine how it would be to cope with Grandma as a girl in the age of permissiveness and hippies, and with Grandpa nowhere in sight, you can see what I am up against.

Enough of this rambling. Thank you again very, very much, both of you, and let’s hope we all have a better year next year.

Love, Betty

[February 1972]

Saturday afternoon

Dear mother and daddy,

It has been a long time since I’ve written but I’ve been having my post holiday virus. I always get sick in January and this year I’ve just felt rotten for no reason. I think I’m getting over it, however, but Ram told me yesterday that he had decided not to go to Toronto for that interview. I knew there wasn’t much chance of his taking the job but I was glad that he was willing to go and find out about it. Now he says it would be a waste of time because he will never leave Seattle. This is so discouraging that I may just go on being sick.

We are having nice sunny weather, rather springy, following days of rain. I have spent the last few days poking about on the roof. We have a couple of leaks I will have to fix myself as the roofer says they are beyond him and Ram says he doesn’t have time to worry about the roof. I have a couple of spots sealed with plastic and waterproof tape and if I can isolate the spots I think I can tar them. Of course water has a nasty way of coming from somewhere else.

The girls were impressed with your college clothes and wanted me to write and ask if you had kept any of them.

If the weather is as bad as it sounds in the newspapers I hope you will stay in. Couldn’t someone get your groceries?

Ram and Dan have gone to the mountains and Vicky and Anne are shopping. Helen has a friend here and as they are both very self-willed it is not very peaceful. They have just drunk large malted milks and I have hopes of their going out and climbing a tree or something.

Grant stopped in yesterday and told me several lurid stories about the job he is on now, which is cleaning an old tanker. They’ve had some fires and he almost got hit by a crane. He seemed in good spirits and is still talking about going to school spring quarter but I don’t dare count on it.

We didn’t have a birthday party for Dan after all. We had sort of planned to take some friends up skiing but the weather has been bad for a couple of weeks. It turned very warm and large quantities of snow fell (thirty inches one weekend) and there were slides all over. At Stevens Pass an avalanche knocked over three cabins. Anyway, the skiing was no good. We had a family cake and ice cream thing with supper and presents. This weekend it has turned cold again and the snow banks have tightened up.

I am having quite a time thinking of things to write. You’d think with this long period to cover I could think of some news.

Daniel’s hair is now quite long. He told me that what he really wants is a long mustache. Looking at that pink and white face it seems impossible but I suppose some day he really will have a mustache. He is getting awfully sick of hair hanging in his face but is too stubborn to cut it. Of course one of the problems is that none of the boys can afford those handsome long cuts like actors and people have. It’s either wear it long and straggly or get it cut at a men’s barber shop, very short and conventional. If they could get it cut and shaped for a reasonable price like the women can I think they would prefer that.

We have a stray cat who seems to have come to stay. It’s the most strong-willed creature I’ve ever seen and stands outside the door making such a racket you have to let it in. The first day or so it was starving and ate everything in sight but now it has become very particular. It won’t eat cat food or ordinary milk. It likes raw meat and eggs and it stands there making this terrible noise until it gets it. Once fed, it is forcefully affectionate and curls up on your lap whether you want it or not. If you stand up it sets up this terrible noise again. Helen kept calling it “she” and I tried to tell her it was a male cat. “I think you are deceived,” she said, “by her tom boyish ways.”

That was quite a Christmas letter of Pat Torsen’s [Torson’s? John Torson, mentioned above, had a sister Patricia; their father was Archie and their mother Caroline]. She said her folks were past eighty. I had no idea Archie was that old. I always thought he was a lot younger than Cal.

Anne is getting harder to handle than Vicky. It was probably a mistake to encourage her to lose that weight. Of course she is still pretty plump compared to Vicky. The house is full of kids, mostly boys, and I’m ashamed to say that I have trouble telling them apart. I used to get so mad at Ram because he couldn’t keep Grant’s friends straight. I never had any trouble with them, but the girls’ friends all look alike. Several of the boys live in apartments and don’t cook much. They buy food and bring it over here and the girls cook it. It is very irritating to Ram to have Vicky and Anne running around with platters of steak and baked potatoes for these weaselly looking boys when we are having bean soup or macaroni and cheese. Of course last year at this time when Anne spent all her time following me around I had visions of her never having any life of her own and never letting me have one either and I am glad she is more normal but she seems to have swung all the way the other way.

I got a book on facial exercises which are supposed to tighten up one’s skin. I think this is pretty silly. After all people who play horns or chew gum all the time or hang by their teeth from high wires age just as fast as the rest of us, but I thought it couldn’t hurt to try. I must have overdone it because my face feels bruised all over. I wouldn’t think a muscular face would be very attractive anyway.

Really nothing else to write. Do take good care of yourselves and no more broken bones. Much love, Betty

March 7, 1972

Dear Grandma,

I hope all is well with you. Things are pretty good here, with the exception of Daniel’s arm. [Daniel had broken his arm.] The weather is very rainy and windy and rather dismal. Last Sunday it rained two inches. The quarter is almost over at school and I am busy trying to write 3 term papers.

Thank-you very much for the money. I am going to use it to help pay my tuition in the fall.

I hope Grandpa is feeling better, and I hope you are in good health.

I wish I could be there to see you and Uncle John’s kids and everyone. I had a great time last summer and was sorry to leave.

I hope your bad weather clears up and spring comes. I don’t think it’s coming here at all. I hope it does.

Love, Victoria

[September 1972]

Sunday evening

Dear mother and daddy,

I’m having my usual Sunday putting in washes and taking them out again. Ram spent a couple of hours trying to replace a washer on Anne’s bath tub and had the water turned off during that time so I am a little behind. As so often happens, he spent the time cursing and shouting for help and finally decided it was impossible, so it is let the water run or get a plumber. We have fall weather but not rain, so it is cool in the morning and generally rather foggy, clearing and warming late in the day, too late to warm the house and too late for the kids to wear cool clothes at school.

Got my royalty statement and there is an advance for a German edition of Summer Sleigh Ride and a small payment for use of an illustration from Behind the Magic Line in a book called Children and Books.

Anne and Dan started back to school last week and I think they were both glad to go. Bush is really reorganized, having gone coed and rebuilt much of the school. They have a new headmaster as well. She has been doing some prints and she took them in to the new art teacher who fortunately praised them. She is taking a course in graphics which is just what she does at home for fun so it should be all right. Her academic courses she always likes except that s he says she’s forgotten all her German. Dan seems to like the upper school but has trouble getting his lunch and of course there was that day he missed the bus home. I think he would be better off in a one room school.

After not even going up to the cabin all summer, Ram has now decided to take this week and do some work on it. Irritating to me as one reason we hurried home from Berlin was that he said he had to have the car to go up and work on the cabin. Now, when I really need the car to get Anne back and forth to school, he proposes to be gone all week and of course he wants Grant to go with him. This is a reasonable idea as Grant is not working, but it is his last week before school and he is much more reluctant to go now than he would have been previously.

Monday I decided I better get my clothes in shape if I might be going to Berlin and spent the day with hems and piddling pressing, etc. Then we got this call from Spokane saying that Ram’s cousin Jack and his wife (they are from Arizona, they’d been touring around) were coming over. All the sheets, towels, pillows and blankets had disappeared over the summer, as usual; I don’t know where they go, camping or sunbathing, and Dan had been sleeping in that corner room we use for a guest room. He’d ripped both spreads and everything was piled with Boys Lifes, catalogues, old jeans, keys, little cars, computer printouts, air mattresses, inner tubes, etc. The tie backs for the curtains had disappeared and he had a rope tied to the radiator and going out the window in case he needed a fire escape. The rest of the house was in much the same shape. These people have two sons, grown up and away from home for several years. They both work (and always have) and have a housekeeper. Well, naturally they are very nice people and we had a good time but it was a race getting ready. Ram took a day off and the children were friendly. Vicky came home once all covered with grease and carrying some little parts from her car. She wanted to borrow my car to go out and get a part for hers. At the same time Helen and her friend Molly McKillop were fixing Helen’s bike. I think Jack was a little shaken. He hadn’t realized girls behaved that way. “There goes Helen with a great big wrench!” he said, and then, later, “my God, Molly McKillop is riding her bike down the front steps!”

It was so nice to have Alice home. I had almost forgotten how nice it is to have someone around who doesn’t nag me, like Anne, or require my anxious attention, like the rest of them. Of course, in some ways she is unsatisfactory. She wouldn’t let me buy her any clothes, pointing out, very sensibly, that there was no sense buying any till she found out where she’d be working and anyway everything is much cheaper in New York. I hated to see her leave but she was anxious to get back so I guess she knows what she wants.

What I would really like would be to push a button and be in Berlin about three hours a day. I told this to Anne and she said, “oh, more, I think, four or five hours.” Actually, if you can keep from walking around in circles and getting headaches, it may be better for you to be alone. I would probably make you as nervous as Kristin, especially as I can’t help stewing about my children. The fact is there’s nothing we can do to make Daddy get better faster. You can’t plan when you don’t know what is going to happen. You might as well take your free time to watch television. It beats worrying. I hope you are eating properly.

According to my book, when loss of speech is combined with arm and leg paralysis speech usually returns spontaneously as the lesion is not in the speech center itself. That’s the only helpful information I could find. It just says “when the patient is able to do such and so” then he should “be encouraged to do such and so” but it doesn’t say when “when” usually comes.

It is nice to hear you on the phone and to know that you will let me know any change.

Much love to you both, Betty

Tuesday morning [October 1972]

Dear mother,

We turned the heat on October 1 and are now sort of normal around here. Before that we were immobilized by the cold. Ram holds off until Oct. 1 so he can brag to the boys at the office. I don’t think it saves us any money as we burn at least a cord of firewood and that costs more than a week’s oil. Also I shop quite a bit so that I can walk through those nice warm stores and when I shop I spend money. The house got incredibly dirty because when we are at home we huddle in the library and ignore the rest of the house. We got quite dirty ourselves, because, although we have plenty of hot water, the bathroom is so icy that one hesitates to go through that period when the part in the water is boiling and the part out of the water is freezing. Anyway, all is now well and I have begun to dust and vacuum again.

Vicky moved back a week ago, just before school started. It is supposed to be only temporary as they are looking for another house. She rented a trailer and several sets of kids moved the same day with Vicky driving all. They had several boys helping them but after two days of carrying furniture they were all so tired they were dropping things, including a huge plant on Vicky’s foot. Vicky is like me and likes baskets. She brought home two large hampers (clothes), three of those tall baskets with covers, several clothes baskets and a lot of very pretty Indian baskets, all packed solid with goods. The hampers I couldn’t even lift. Vicky goes to school all morning and works all afternoon, so she is not much help. Grant carried the hampers up and put them on the landing. They look quite nice there. We have a refrigerator and a dishwasher on the back porch and another dishwasher in the breakfast room. No one knows just who these things belong to and Ram is already using the one in the breakfast room to pile papers on. She is living in Alice’s room which is already quite full of things Alice left. It is much fuller now. I don’t see much of Vicky but her goods are much in evidence and that dog, who is bigger and more enthusiastic than ever, is here, standing in front of me and sometimes raising up and putting his paws on my shoulders.

Actually, I was so cold last week that what I did was spend the day with blankets over me and I wrote another book. It is not really a whole book but it is enough of it to outline the story. Unfortunately, Little Brown seems to be still reorganizing and whether I am going to have to wind up with another publisher or not I don’t know.

Sunday, due to the unprecedented warmth, Anne and I spent the day sewing. Anne made a very pretty long corduroy skirt out of a kind of plum-colored piece but unfortunately she cut the two sides with the nap going the opposite way. She’s been wearing it, however. I sewed more leather patches on elbows and knees. What we would do without our Berlin leather I don’t know. Grant learned how to use the sewing machine while we were in Berlin last summer, patching his clothes. He said “it was pretty easy except for getting the thread from the bobbin up through that little hole in the bottom of the machine.”

Must tell you, while I remember, how great the nylon dishcloth you gave me is. I have almost given up scrubbers and steel wool.

Helen has glasses. (Have I written you this before?) We finally got them before school starts [sic]. I was afraid she would lose them all the time but actually she never takes them off. Even sleeps in them occasionally. They are kind of cute, silver rims but generally slip down. Very granny.

Alice called last week to say that she had found an apartment but she wasn’t sure of it so didn’t give me the address. [She was on leave from Carleton and living in New York.] I don’t know whether she has moved or is still at the Y. I should hear any minute. Gives one an odd feeling to not even know where she is but she seems so levelheaded it doesn’t bother me much.

Dan is on the junior varsity soccer team and they play other schools. The field is solid mud so we are once again trying to keep uniforms clean. It is not nearly so bad as a football uniform, though, and as he is goalie he doesn’t seem to spend as much time rolling on the ground as Grant did in football.

Got a letter from John yesterday. I can’t imagine what this time must be like for you and I am so glad John is there. You must spend many weary hours at the hospital but if Daddy knows you I am sure it is worth it.

This is a dumb letter. Nothing much is happening right now and won’t for some time, so my letters are not very entertaining. Wish I were with you.

Love, Betty

[June? 1973]

Tuesday morning

Dear mother,

We are having our first sunny day in several weeks. The house is still cold as a cave but Helen and I have opened a lot of windows and hope some warmth blows in. It’s not only been cold but so dark it’s like an eclipse with pouring rain. Last weekend Dan went on an overnight canoeing trip and Ram climbed Snoqualmie mountain, both in frigid rain. Grant went to Portland and Anne was gone here and there. Helen and I shut ourselves in the library with a big fire in the fireplace and a stack of library books. Now if this unprecedented sun will just continue we can wake up and get some things done. The back porch is still piled up with all those boxes Ram leaves on it over the winter. I would like to get it swept and some geraniums out and the porch furniture out but it is so discouraging when you have one nice day and then December again. We have painting I would like to get done as well.

Anne has a job at Baskin Robbins which is the local ice cream place. It is six hours or so in the evening. A lot of scooping. She went in last Saturday morning and the manager gave the new girls a course in making banana splits, malts, etc. As he finished making each item he offered it to them, and when they refused he ate it himself. Anne said they were just agog, watching him eat one huge thing after another. Anyway, she plans to start Wednesday night and she expects to quit about the first of August. She will have the money she needs then and can start getting ready for school which begins very early, Sept. 2. We originally thought we would all go to Wisconsin (that is, Dan, Helen, Anne and I) about the first of August. Anne could do her shopping and sewing there (this would be really up to you) and we would be there about a month. The last couple of bone-chilling weeks have made us think we would like to get out of here sooner. Every day Dan and Helen come shivering into the kitchen saying, “when are we going to Wisconsin?”

The trouble with going out now is that we could hardly stay the whole summer and would be ready to come back about the time Anne was ready to come out. Also of course we still don’t know how we would get there. Also I just can’t leave Grant and Vicky for the whole summer. I am aware that they are grown up and if they were away at school I wouldn’t worry about them at all but when I am the one to go away it worries me.

Vicky finally got the new set of carburetors in her car. We spent yesterday driving around looking for some very elusive bolt which was missing and which nobody seemed to have in stock. Finally found it and I suppose they finished it last night. She has been in such a tizzy over that car I certainly hope it runs a little better now. She is torn between wanting to keep her job which she really likes and going back to school full time. IT is really hard for her to take a full course and work this hard unless she takes rather lightweight courses. If she takes more math and science which she would like to do she almost has to quit her job.

Grant got all A’s which was very gratifying to all. Of course his grades were good anyway but one feels that the university is the real thing. He is working for the park department. Last week he rode the garbage truck and had to go to work at five in the morning. He really liked that because he had put in a full day by one o’clock. This week he is back on general labor and starts at 7 a.m.

I do hope by this time you have a new light bulb on your landing. I’d love to see Iva’s face if you handed her a flashlight to get upstairs with. I thought of calling John and asking him to send one of the boys over but thought better of it. I know you hate to ask anyone for any help but surely David and Johnny could get your air conditioner up in five minutes and do anything else that needs doing. Think what you have done for all of them over the years and do not be reluctant about asking. I think if you live alone it is natural to eat your meals in front of the TV. I am almost never alone, of course, but I would certainly sit and watch the news and I always have my morning coffee in bed. Anyway, that breakfast table where Daddy used to drink his beer must seem pretty empty when you don’t have company.

It does seem silly for you and Iva to maintain two separate houses but you have each run your own show for a long time and it won’t be easy to share a kitchen. What you need are two small houses side by side.

This is all my news. Write soon.

Love, Betty

[July 1973]

[added at top] I hope Jeannette can spare us the cabin part of the time. The children love to stay there and really look forward to it and being continuously in town gives you no breathing space.

Tuesday afternoon

Dear mother,

I should have written long before this but I have been in such a state of irritation, frustration, etc. that there didn’t seem much point in it. Now at last we have made some plans and barring any of several hundred things that could happen we will be on our way to visit you shortly and I hope you still want us. I couldn’t get Ram to make up his mind how we should go. His method of solving things is to listen to all sides of the question and then walk out of the room and when subsequently asked to act very vague. Anyway, we again trotted out all the figures. Vicky and Grant assured him that the Volvo wouldn’t make it again. Dan argued in favor of the bus and Anne said she wouldn’t ride on a bus. This all dragged on for a long time. I said I was going somehow the first week in August and Anne gave notice at her job. Finally Ram took the car in and had it tuned [up] and the mechanic said it was in fine shape and would get us there (“although you’ve been pretty hard on the body,” he said). I had a book I expected to finish, or almost, and then Barbara, Ram’s sister, called and said they would be visiting us the last week in July so I had to stop writing and start cleaning. She didn’t say when they would get here or know how many there would be so Anne and I got three bedrooms ready, Helen and I painted the kitchen and patched some ceilings, Dan scraped a lot of old paint and did the front porch ceiling, we cleaned the basement and third floor (Barbara always has to see everything), and in the middle of this the toilet in Dan’s bathroom, which is the guest bathroom, cracked under mysterious circumstances and water ran all over and down into the dining room so now we have a new toilet and a very patched-looking dining room ceiling. Sunday Ram called Barbara to find out when they would get here and she said the company had changed Joe’s vacation time and they wouldn’t be able to make it. I have seldom been so relieved. They are very nice but a whole week of cooking and visiting just before we set off ourselves seemed like too much. Anyhow, it now appears that we will go up to the cabin next Sunday evening and try to get an early start Monday morning. We all dread it as it will surely be hot all the way but it will be wonderful to be on the road, any road. I haven’t seen any country since last fall.

Anne and I have done some shopping but not much. She is at Lake Chelan this week staying with Patty [Jones?] who has (her folks have) a cabin there. We have had so little warm weather I have hardly looked at my summer clothes and Dan is still wearing his winter corduroys. Actually we had some warm weather but not enough to warm the house through and the last week or so it has been cold until the middle of the afternoon so there is hardly time to change before we are putting on sweaters again. Anne’s school starts the second of September but Dan, Helen and I will have to start back before that in order to get Helen in school on the third. She goes to a different school this year [fifth grade at Madrona]; otherwise it wouldn’t matter.

Got the letter from Mr. McMonigal about the office. It seems terrible not to buy anything priced that low. If I had some money I would live in it during the summer and try to get it in shape for winter rental, only I suppose there is no winter rental and perhaps the heating system is really shot. No bathtub, of course, but as Dan says, “we’d have clean hands.” However, I simply cannot afford to buy it and it must be in pretty bad shape structurally to sell that low. I think what I should get is five acres somewhere near town as it looks as though we will be forced to grow our own potatoes. I wish that I did not have this lifelong aversion to chickens.

As things will probably be crowded in August we will have to stop early whether we want to or not and anyway I don’t think I could ever again do that trip in three days so expect us Thursday or Friday, the second or third, and if something happens to the car we will naturally call.

If it is not convenient to have us or if you do not feel good say so and we will put the whole thing off and I’ll come by myself later.

Love, Betty

[February 1974]

Friday morning

Dear mother,

Dan got your card yesterday and when he came in and said he had a card from grandma I said, “oh dear, I haven’t written to her for so long,” and Daniel said, “Why is it two smart women like you and grandma always communicate in code? Dear mother, It hardly seems possible that Dan can be x number of years old, translated: please don’t forget Dan’s birthday check, or Dear Betty, the light is out on the landing and I don’t see how I’m going to get it fixed, translated: please come home for the summer as I am lonely, or Dear Dan, translated: your mother hasn’t written to me for a long time.” Well, this is one of Dan’s human nature insights prompted by my horrible performance as a correspondent.

Things are much as usual here except that the weather has taken a turn for the better. We have just little dribbles of rain, the weather is much warmer and once in a while there is a brief period of rather sick sunshine. The crocuses and bluebells are coming up but the grass is non-existent. Never has our yard looked so horrible and I think it is due partly to my not putting any fertilizer on it for two years and partly to thousands of dogs playing on it and digging holes.

Friday afternoon

The mail came with your letter and that beautiful check. How clever of you to let it grow a while. As Vicky says, “I think if I were already rich I could easily become a lot richer.” I have her a lecture on saving no matter how little she made but she just said that she needed every penny. I will try to save this for a while at least as I still have enough from last year to cover Anne’s bill I hope. But when you think how far we have to go, college wise, you can imagine how grateful I am. Thank you very much but please do not deprive yourself, and if you need to borrow some of it back to buy gas for your homeward trip I can arrange a loan. Really, it takes the load off my back not to have to worry about next year.

I got a letter from an agent asking if I wanted to be represented. I’ve never especially wanted to bother with a literary agent, but as I really would like to make a little more money I may try it. She represents a lot of children’s book authors including one here in town who is a friend of mine. I wrote back and said if she could only do what I can do myself then I couldn’t afford her commission but if she could get me better contracts I was certainly interested. Of course I may never hear from her again.

Am glad you found out who “cat dancing” was. I think that title [*The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing*, by Marilyn Durham, 1972] sold a lot of books.

Alice seems to like her job. That long training period is over, finally, and she is settling in but she says she thinks she gets far more tired than she ought to. Maybe she had too long a vacation. She is certainly yawning in the evening. She wants to get an apartment of her own when she has another pay check or two. I can understand that she wants to be on her own but I will miss her awfully. Grant moved out for a month and it was absolute heaven. I finished my book and answered all my back fan letters. He just fills up the house, somehow or other. All those phone calls and people coming and going. Unfortunately he got hungry or something and came home. Vicky is no great trouble, in fact I don’t see much of her. She gets up just in time to make her morning classes and then doesn’t finish work until after five. She has a couple of evening classes, goes out a lot, and sleeps the rest of the time. This cat of hers is more trouble than she is. It’s an adorable little gray Persian, still a kitten really. She leaps at me out of dark corners and she and the dog are still chasing each other.

We are not having much personal trouble with the gas shortage as we drive very little right now. Ram goes in a car pool and I don’t have to drive everyone to school as I did last year. However, the lines are very long even though we are supposedly on the Oregon plan, with people able to buy gas on alternate days, even or odd depending on the last digit of their license plates. It always takes half an hour and often longer. I saw an article about that Yankee Go Home business in Florida, but I don’t see how they can want to do without their tourist business. According to the Wall Street Journal, there is plenty of gas in the Middle West and Texas, and everyone says cross country is not so bad. It’s the cities that are so badly hit. Anyway I am sure that once they get the price up where they want it there will turn out to be plenty of gas.

This is a three-day weekend. Everyone ought to be up skiing but the weather hasn’t been so great. There’s a lot of snow but it’s quite warm and there have been avalanche warnings out everywhere. Two little girls were killed in an avalanche a couple of weeks ago. Several families took their children and went snow-shoeing in an area posted with huge signs saying Danger: Avalanche area. There has been so much thawing and freezing and wet snow that they haven’t even been able to get in there and get the bodies out. Puts a damper. Of course there’s no danger in the regular ski areas but alternate rain and snow don’t make good skiing. [“On January 27, 1974, six members of two Seattle families embarked on a snowshoe tour to Source Lake, Washington. Avalanche hazard was posted as high. The party was caught by an avalanche falling from the slopes of Chair Peak. Two young girls, ages 10 and 13, were buried under 30 feet of snow. Their bodies were recovered seven months later.” <http://www.alpenglow.org/ski-history/notes/book/armstrong-1986.html>]

Dan is going to a party tonight where the host says there will be a keg of beer. Due to Dan’s having skipped a grade the kids in his class are all sixteen and just getting their driver’s licenses. Dan of course won’t be able to drive for a year, thank god, but he is afraid to ride home with the kids if they are full of beer. Luckily, Ram will be able to pick him up on the way home from his poker game. It is beyond me why sixteen-year-olds have to have a keg. The fact is that with all the drug scare parents are so worried they want to get their kids safely hooked on alcohol before they start on something else.

Ram bought another bicycle, his last one having been stolen despite the heavy chain. Personally, I can’t believe it is worth it. The bicycles are nice and light but the chains people carry to fasten them to lamp posts and things are very cumbersome. Also even with all those gears the hills are bad. He only rides it up to Broadway which is about four blocks and it seems to me his own legs are cheaper, don’t need to be chained, and are safer too, but Ram loves to be in the swing of things. Bicycles are in so he has one.

Helen is having a good year. She has two good friends this year, both of whom live in large houses. They spend a lot of time looking around and measuring all three houses trying to find secret rooms.

Anne seems pretty happy. She probably writes to you as often as she does to me, so you know, but her grades are good and so far she isn’t studying quite as much as just before Christmas. It will get worse I suppose as the semester goes on. I think she likes the winter.

How long are you staying in Florida? I suppose until the worst of winter is over at home. Make the most of it; it looks as though no one will ever travel again, except by jet to some far off place of course. The children are beginning to ask me how we will manage next summer but I really can’t worry about that yet.

I do hope you are both having a good time. You are used to being busier, I suppose, but there are worse ways to spend winter than sitting in the sun reading gothic novels. I think of you when I am sitting on my bed with three sweaters on and a blanket over me reading a gothic novel.

And you don’t have to always be saying to yourself that you should be writing one instead of reading it.

Thank you very, very much for the check and much love to you both,

Love, Betty

[November 1980]

Tuesday morning

Dear mother,

It is now a week and a half since I last said I was writing to you and I don’t know how the time has flown except that I seem to have been very taken up with this play Helen is in—unnecessarily because I have nothing to do with the play at all myself. We just seemed to spend a lot of time getting her to and from rehearsals. I made her costume which didn’t amount to much. In the middle of this they had a dance at school which she decided to go to at the last minute, when she had rehearsals every day after school and two papers to write and the usual homework and couldn’t shop and she really had to have a new dress, so I spent two days shopping and finally bought her a dress which really looked adorable on her and which she actually liked. [It was dark red with a purple iris on the skirt.) How these things can take up so much time I don’t know. Then Anne is still here and while I love having her—she jazzes the place up considerably—still I seem to sit and talk to her just when I should be doing something else and then when she does her own work, finally, I am left with just time to shop and cook and walk the dogs and run the vacuum and rake leaves (still coming down with most of the chestnut yet to go) and prune bushes and pot geraniums and hem curtains, etc. Vicky is around too, of course, and feeling miserable these days as she and Jamie finally broke up (I think I told you this) and she can’t seem to get used to it. The electrician is still piddling about with the wiring and it is the kind of firm that works two days and then does another job for two days so heaven knows when we will be done. Anyway, Helen’s play finally came off, two performances Monday and Tuesday. Ram and I went the first night. It was a musical, The Boys from Syracuse, very elaborate with many characters, many songs and dances, quite a production for a small high school and certainly representing a lot of work. I think the teachers were prouder of it than the students. Most of the kids would really prefer a non-musical, something with really good dramatic parts. Of course this way they get the orchestra and the dance people into it too.

As to what is happening here, well, really, nothing. I am shocked to find that next week is Thanksgiving. Vicky says she is not in a celebrating mood and is going up to the cabin. Anne said if someone else wants to cook she’ll come but she won’t cook anything. She has an idea that she always cooks these meals; in fact, I do the turkey and the roles, Helen does part of the pies, Alice and Vicky turn up at the end and help with the table and do the potatoes, gravy, cranberries, etc. with me, and Anne does all the fancy pies. Personally I would be delighted to forget the whole thing but Ram and Grant love it. Naturally, says Alice, they don’t do anything but eat.

Saturday morning

Yesterday we had what the newspapers have been calling a storm but which was just a very heavy rain coming straight down—five inches in a few hours. We had water in the basement (came through a window, not flooding up from a drain), and I spent the day rushing around sweeping leaves away from downspout openings and away from porch drains. One corner of our new roof leaked, coming down into Helen’s porch. I called the roofer and he came out and almost cried. That is the roof that we had done over from the bottom—they replaced some of the wood underneath and put on all new tar-paper. He said he would have to come back on a dry day and that the hole was probably about as big as a pin-prick but that he had some expensive stuff that would flow over everything. I just hope it comes under the guarantee and doesn’t turn out to be the gutter which of course is the next job. The weather cleared later and is very nice now but the forecast is for another storm this afternoon.

Our weather so far has been so mild that we have hardly needed the heat and are still going around inside and out with the same sweaters. Something will break pretty soon as it is always nasty from Thanksgiving thru Christmas. If it goes on this way we will have no snow in the mountains and as that is what Dan comes home for I hope there is plenty. Grant and Debbie are still fighting which keeps them both depressed. Luckily I don’t see much of them. Nobody sees Alice as she just works all the time. Vicky is doing a chair and has a davenport coming next week. She has just enough work so it gets her by but she is chafing at being short of money. Never having had those student days when everyone is poor together it is hard for her to take. Anne types away every morning and then runs around to libraries all afternoon. She just bought a purple angora cardigan and came down this morning wearing it over a bluish green sweater in one of those combinations that only works for her. Her other acquisition is a black blazer in which she looks spectacular. Ram is working today, as he does every other weekend.

I haven’t written to Iva and must do so. I assume by this time she is feeling much better or I would have heard. Wish I could think of something entertaining to say. Keep wondering if she can read or what that business of not being able to use her arms properly was (or is). Also how you are and whether David and Mary are happy, etc.

I am going to stop writing this and mail it because I’m not saying much anyway and I must go shop. Otherwise I will leave this in the typewriter and just tell you what the weather is like tomorrow.

Much love, Betty

[6 September 1982]

Dear mother, I am writing on this wonderful typewriter Anne rented to type the first one hundred pages of the romance that Mary Morgan and I are writing. We are going to send in that much to the agent although frankly I don’t think we have hit the proper vulgar note. Anyway, Anne insisted s he could type this for us but she is having a lot of trouble with her back and as it turned out she couldn’t do it. A friend of hers typed it for us, for a fee, naturally. Of course both Mary and I can type but not without errors and in fact I don’t even see my errors when I make them. This is a selectric that erases very easily. Even so, I bung it up all the time.

I see that I have neglected to put the date at the top of the letter and if I try to turn back something awful will happen. This is Monday, Labor day, and a very beautiful day. A relief because it looked for a while as though summer had departed forever and it never was much. The Bumbershoot Festival is on this weekend down at the Center, and Helen is there today with a friend from Lakeside. It’s a festival of the arts with art and craft displays of all kinds, but has become more of a festival of entertainment, with plays, mime, bands, street musicians, magic acts, etc. Anyway, a nice way to spend the last day of summer and cheap as admission is $3 and everything is free after that.

Anne’s back has been kicking up since last March when she did some sort of kick wrong in karate. She has been going to the sports clinic at the University all summer but they haven’t helped her much and have now referred her to an orthopedic surgeon who sent her for a CAT scan. She has an appointment tomorrow to find out the results if any. She works every day, of course; no one dares give up a job as they are very hard to get right now. She cannot lift anything and has to ask someone to lift for her all the time but luckily the people s he works with are very nice and she is able to do things in return. What upsets her so, in addition to the constant pain, is that she cannot train and she feels that she has to keep up her karate or she will sink into sloth. I hope to heaven they can do something for her. She is so miserable she’s crabby all the time.

Vicky goes back to school tomorrow. I will be glad for her to be on a regular schedule again. Now she works all night, sleeps half the morning, gets behind, goes on a work binge, etc. She is up at the cabin this weekend which should be nice. At this point the rented selectric came to the end of its cartridge and I had to switch back to the regular typewriter.

Alice hurries through here once in a while but I see very little of her. Her work is going reasonably well, she can get by on fewer hours at the Clinic, and she will start school this week I think. I haven’t seen Grant and Debbie either. Grant is working a lot of double shifts right now so he calls once in a while, very tired, but hasn’t been around. Ram goes over there quite often, retrieving tools which they have borrowed.

We have a student renting two rooms again this fall—a different student, a man who is a senior at Cornish. He scraped, painted, put up wall board, etc. in that room and porch which had all the water damage so the rooms look much better, but he has his own furniture which means I have two rooms of furniture crowded all over the rest of the house. It is worth it I think to have the work done but as he is poor (or says he is) we charge very little and will have to charge him more just to cover the rise in electric rates which they are proposing to cover the cost of those nuclear plants which we didn’t need.

Ram is fine. He went to Atlanta on an overnight trip last week, but has been at home pretty much otherwise. Dan’s visit was lots of fun. Dan looks marvelous and I liked his girl very much. She has no style whatsoever, but is smart and nice to talk to and obviously suits him.

What I am really writing this letter for is to tell you that I got the bonds on Saturday. All in order and I am very grateful as I hope you know.

Shall stop writing now and start supper, so simple this time of year on account of watermelon, cheap tomatoes, etc. I may call you tonight as our mail is so late being picked up you will not get this letter for some time.

Love, Betty

Wednesday morning

After worrying about getting this letter off in time to go Tuesday morning I entirely forgot to mail it at all so it is now Wednesday. I just saw Ram and Helen drive off down the street on the way to the airport. Apparently it is cool in the cities but I could see that Helen could hardly believe it could be cool the week school starts. She wore a dress and sweater and I hope is warm enough.

Our weather here has been nothing to brag on. As so often happens our summer has been doled out, four or five hours at a time, so if you happen to be vacuuming or baking or something you can miss the summer for that week. Cool and cloudy today but not unpleasant. We have had a fair amount of rain so everything is green (except our front lawn) and overgrown. Ram has been hacking away at the maples, and I am going to have to hire someone to get some of the ivy off the house.

I got a letter from Iva yesterday, making me feel guiltier than usual because I haven’t written her. Please tell her that I will write very soon.

I have thought and thought about when I can come to Wisconsin and after Christmas seems the best time. The only thing is, it’s such an awful time to travel. This is assuming that I could come for a while in the summer as well. Of course if I let it go until February I could stay on for Helen’s spring vacation and leave just afterward. I would much rather come now, in the fall when it would be nicer for you and we could get around more, but it depends on several things, like Anne's back and what the agent says about this ridiculous novel. Also will want to find out how Vicky’s school goes and how much time she has—after all, someone has to look after Ram and Anne at the moment comes home from work and goes to bed. Anyway, will work out something.

Thank you again many times,

Much love, Betty

[January 1983? page 2 and 3 only of what was probably a four-page letter]

...as she was determined to do it right and has virtually no time there was still work to do. She had torched off most of the old paint but there was still plaster patching and sanding to do and then all the plaster dust which took forever to clean up and finally painting. Anyway, Helen did most of that and Anne finished painting on her free weekend. Vicky and Anne have since moved into those rooms themselves but they had a big push to get them done before Christmas so Dan and Pam could have them. They do look very nice and both girls used part of their Christmas money to buy new sheets and covers for their down quilts so everything is coordinated.

Anyway, we had our usual peaceful Christmas Eve. Alice came for dinner but Grant and Debbie had company. We had both clam chowder and oyster stew, your cheese, and Christmas cookies. My kind of meal. Easy. I had to spend all evening wrapping presents and of course Helen and I raced upstairs and down all evening checking on the candles in the windows as usual. Helen went to church all by herself at midnight. Ram said he was too tired to go. I hate to have her out alone at night but on Christmas Eve, with the Cathedral and the Lutheran Church on the corner both having services, there is so much to-ing and fro-ing that it is fairly safe. Anyway, she got home all right. It is hard to convince Helen that the city still is dangerous. They walk all over the campus and town at school without anything happening, but Minnesota is much more law-abiding than Seattle.

Daniel and Pam got into the airport at nine o’clock the next morning and Ram went out to meet them. Everyone else except me just stayed in bed until they arrived. I got up and hastily scrubbed the kitchen floor and cleaned up the dining room. Alice, Grant and Debbie came over and the girls fixed breakfast which was our usual, coffee, cocoa, scrambled eggs, sausage, and those commercial cinnamon buns you buy in the cardboard tin. After that we had what seemed to be a great many presents.

Alice and Anne gave me silk long underwear which is really wonderful to wear, very slippery and luxurious feeling. Vicky and Anne gave me a pair of black pumps which could be exchanged. They were just exactly what I wanted but did pinch just a little in the toes, but when I subsequently went down to Nordstrom’s and tried on some others I came back with the ones they had picked. They pinch less all the time. I may have made a mistake but I didn’t see any others I liked as well.

Thursday morning

I lost a day in there somehow. We have had a big mess of rain with a lot of flooding. No flooding here, of course, except on our landing where the water has taken to coming in apparently from that porch off the ballroom. Plaster down and puddles. Ram was an hour late getting home last night because some of the roads in Bellevue are deep in water. I just came in from patching some rather obvious places on that roof with my bucket of rain patch but the roof is in pretty bad shape and I doubt that it will be the answer. The rain slackened off yesterday afternoon so I was able to do my big grocery shopping in nothing more than a drizzle—good thing as I was about out of dry pants. It is showering again now but a new storm is expected today. Still warm. You must be fascinated with this weather news which must seem so mild and comfortable compared to the middle-west.

I must have about finished Christmas. We had a big roast beef dinner with tangerines and a box of chocolates for dessert so that was another easy one. The kids went up skiing on Monday and stayed until… [last page missing]

[October? 1984]

Thursday afternoon

Dear mother—I’ve been home two months and haven’t written you in all that time. I find this hard to believe but it is true. However, now that my middle-aged children are all back in school, I feel that I have no more excuse for not writing letters. That is silly in itself, because of course they are not trouble to me. Anne continues to go to work at three in the morning and work until ten or so, baking (some days she will list what she has baked—ten dozen scones, five dozen cinnamon buns, six cakes, etc., it goes on and on) and then on to the University for classes, home for a nap and then karate around supper time. Actually, she doesn’t go to her karate class every day and she doesn’t have quite a full schedule at the U. but she has plenty. She had a run of bad luck—first, she was scheduled to take the M-Cat exam in September, paid for it months ago and studied much of the summer, and then on the weekend involved her back did whatever her back does and she couldn’t stand, sit, or walk, and spent three days on the davenport with ice packs, then, she had a wisdom tooth out and it unexpectedly caused her a lot of trouble, swelling and a lot of pain for over a week. This did not upset her as much as I had expected. She said she actually hadn’t studied as much as she’d planned for the M-Cat and just tried to do too much at the end and this was the logical result. I hope the student in your house is managing her time better. Anyway, Anne works about as hard as she can.

Grant is beginning to look like a slug under a stone, never being out in the sunshine. He has been working quite long hours at that job in Bellevue, anticipating working shorter hours w hen school starts. He is now in school and was here last night relaying horror stories about his ghastly physics professor. It is strange that Grant is so good at math and hates physics so much while Dan is sort of a natural at physics and not so much at math. No getting out of either of course. Anyway, he is in electrical engineering and working at computing which is something I never expected to see and if he just doesn’t kill himself first all should be well.

Vicky has a job and apparently is having the time of her life. It is a typical entry-level job, working for a designer who has only been in business a year or so so he has a lot of relatively small jobs, that is medium sized houses and offices, not price no option [sic; no object?]. She does the drawings, answers the phone, goes with him to see new clients, measures rooms and cabinets, scouts around for fabrics and furniture, etc. In the course of looking for work, she discovered that her experience with fabric, from her upholstery work, can be very useful, and one fabric importer asked her to come back in March when they are opening a new department and will need someone to run it. Anyway, Vicky has a couple of design jobs of her own (her employer doesn’t care if she moonlights) and also some upholstery so she will get along. Of course she has debts, but it will do her good to have an income and live inside it. She has been on grants and loans long enough.

Alice has called a couple of times. She says Dallas is a very strange place, having grown so fast that there aren’t very many proper neighborhoods. She lives with a woman who is getting a PhD in something or other, a divorcee who bought a house there and wanted someone to share. In spite of what the magazines say, the only women who have any money seem to be divorcees. Anyway, it is out a fair way and Alice has a pretty long commute. She thinks she will have to move closer to the hospital eventually, but the area around there is not very inviting either, not like the Univ. District here, for instance. Anyway, her work is going very well, people are friendly, she is teaching a micro class to medical students, there are a lot of parties, and the department has so much money she still can’t get used to it. She plans on coming home for Christmas which will be nice.

Helen seems settled back in Carleton and I think was glad to return. Some current boyfriend, I don’t know this one, met her plane and drove her out to Northfield. A lot of people were back the first week who will be working or studying elsewhere this term just to visit, so there were a lot of parties for them. Does sound nice.

We haven’t heard from Dan but I am reasonably sure he’s all right.

We are having gorgeous weather, sunny and in the mid-sixties by the middle of the day, cool and foggy in the morning, coolish at night. The house is pretty cold, of course, but it is nice out. We had a little rain last night for the first time in weeks—to be expected, I suppose, because we have workmen here ripping out some of our rotten wood and one whole section was pretty well exposed. It is the northeast corner. They have found rot from dampness, dry rot, and carpenter ants—much of that corner of the house is just powder. All this was concealed by the cedar shingles which apparently are impervious to everything. For several years I have been capturing these winged ants and showing them to Ram, and Vicky and I have dragged him out and made him put his hand in deep holes in the house, but that is the sort of thing that makes Ram not only much deafer than usual, but blind as well. Anyway, last spring a board over the windows on the porch off the corner bedroom began to bulge strangely, and we finally found someone with courage enough to pull it off. I can’t imagine what this will cost, but it had to be done. We have a lot of other rotten fascia boards but I certainly hope that is just due to leaky gutters and is superficial. Of course we could just tear down these rotten corners and wind up with a house more suitable in size for our smaller family.

Vicky re-tied the springs and got new cushions for two of my broken down chairs, and one of us is going to make slip covers. Vicky wants to slip-cover the whole living-room, but when she thinks we can find the time I don’t know. I am feeling unusually comfortable, myself, because after suffering with tight pants for several months I finally cleverly cut myself a pattern with a long crotch (to accommodate my stomach) and made a pair of pants. It is marvelous to have pants that fit from side to side and do not bag behind and yet do not slice me in two. It does a lot for my disposition. I have brown corduroy for another pair and am looking for something washable in black, not too stiff as these are pull-on, with an elastic waist.

As you will have gathered, I have not succeeded in losing my vast weight gain. It is hard enough for me to keep from smoking, what with the cigarettes lying around this house. I didn’t find it very hard at your house but there is a lot more temptation here. When I left Berlin you remember that John drove me to Oshkosh? The girl at the airport asked me whether I wanted a seat in the smoking or non-smoking section. Do you smoke? She asked. No, I said. John was standing there and he said, “Oh, we smoke all right, we just don’t have any cigarettes.” I guess that’s the state I’m still in.

Ram is all right except that this skin of his is still driving him crazy. It looks much better but continues to itch badly. His dermatologist wants to take him to a conference of dermatologists and medical students. I never thought I would be married to one of those poor souls who stand up in front of class exhibiting their problem. At least it’s just skin.

Am so glad that Iva is feeling better and able to read again. It must make things easier all around. I hope you continue in good health and spirits—ain’t easy I know, but there should be a lot of exciting things going on around you, all those pregnancies and everything and I hope no more sad things. Give my love to Iva, John, Kris, etc, I am thinking of you all the time even when not writing—

Much love, Betty

[in envelope postmarked 13 Jan 1987]

Sunday evening

Dear mother, we had spring today and very nice too. The stores are selling cut daffodils and primroses in pots. The instant we have an hour or so of warm sun the whole town transforms itself. The park is jammed with people and dogs, Broadway is thronged (at least three quarters of the populace appear to be in costume), beggars are out in force. I didn’t buy any daffodils or primroses because we have a front hall full of poinsettias which appear to be immortal. I did take down the Christmas wreath but I hung it in the back of the hall. It is still in fine shape and very pretty and it seemed too bad to throw it out. No doubt tomorrow it will be cold and foggy again and we may not see spring until June.

I’m so glad Sue and Johnny have a healthy and I’m sure beautiful baby, and I’ll bet Sue is really happy. Nothing like getting rid of that stomach and having something nice to show for it. The snack stuff, dips that is, was fine and came in very handy when I had unexpected people and needed something to extend the meal. We have a couple left and Ram will finish those with his evening wine. Since he got his television and Vicky painted the library and talked Daniel and Ram into contributing two floor lamps he has spent pre- and post dinner in there, munching and sipping and watching the business report and the news. He has less time than formerly, however, because his job with H&R Block has started and he works five days a week but not a full day. Seems to like it and he certainly likes setting off with a briefcase again. I like it too.

Vicky gave a sit-down dinner party for eighteen people (I probably wrote you this) on the 23rd. We put two tables together and they stretched the length of the dining room—really looked like one table. Anne cooked and it seemed very successful. Grant and Mary gave a huge New Year’s Eve party here, with dancing in the ballroom, food in the dining room, conversation and games in the other rooms, fireworks at midnight. Apparently it was a howling success but they both said they wouldn’t do it again. They had one last year, too, but this year they decided it was just a lot of work for them and not worth giving other people a good time. Well, last year they didn’t have a baby eating into their energy. Grant has one more quarter to go and then presumably they can afford a bigger place to live. They are really bulging out of their present one. Mary’s parents gave them a crib but they have no space for it. The baby has outgrown her cradle so they will have to find space somehow.

Anne has applied to a great many (thirteen or so) graduate schools. That involves a lot of money and time and getting together all those references and writing essays tailored to each school. She told me today that she “hadn’t written to grandma but I have finally finished my applications.” I said that grandma would accept the importance of applications.

Vicky is up at the cabin this weekend and should be home any minute. She seems to be running two businesses and is very anxious to get some legal agreement set up between herself and David (partners) with the wife of her old boss (I wrote you about that—he died suddenly and his wife wants Vicky and David to take over his business but doesn’t seem able to be clear about what she thinks that entails). Anyway, she has been so jittery I will be glad when something is settled.

Tuesday afternoon

Someday I am going to sit down and write a whole letter at one sitting. I wrote you at some length as to what I bought each person from you and mailed it a day or two before Christmas—I hope you got that letter because I could never write it again. Anyway, needless to say you contributed greatly to our Christmas and I also paid off the last carpenter bill.

Our Christmas was a prolonged affair as Anne worked until after eight in the evening and we had dinner after that. After that the presents. Roast beef followed by packages was sort of nice for a change—no running around fixing breakfast.

Helen spent Christmas in California with Bob’s family and they came home in time for New Year’s. I missed her a lot, mostly in practical ways. I’m used to having Helen around to do odd jobs for me and generally run errands—polish silver, go to the store, iron napkins, put leaves in the table, help me wrap presents, etc. Even Vicky, setting the table Christmas evening, said, “why am I doing this? This is Helen’s job!” Anyway, they went into San Francisco twice, went to several concerts, toured around northern California, and generally had a good time.

I don’t seem to have much more news. Our weather today is gray and rainy and the weatherman suggests snow, but it has been so mild so far this year that I just don’t believe it. I don’t think we’ve been more than a degree or two below freezing all season, and then just in the middle of the night.

Thank you again many times for the very large check, snack stuff, and my unsalted nuts (which I basely ate all of myself). I will be anxious to hear from you—what happened with Iva’s leg? I trust nothing. Please do not cross the river on the ice.

Much love, Betty

[annotated by Dad at top “postmarked 10-8-87”]

Thursday afternoon

Dear Ram—here it is Thursday and I thought when I talked to you Sunday that I would write immediately. Of course it is hard to feel that there is any hurry when there is so little news. I am hard put to say what I do with my time that makes it difficult to write letters. Of course the weather takes up a lot of time. It is either so beautiful (like today) that one feels he must be out in it, just looking, or so ghastly that we batten down all hatches and sit listening to weather reports. I had forgotten, in these long years in Seattle, what real proper fall is like. For several weeks we appear to have been living in a kaleidoscope made out of Scots tartans and Indian paisleys. The sky is so brilliantly blue and everything else so brilliantly bright that one expects something to catch on fire. And that is enough about “one.”

We also have had high winds, heavy rain, and extraordinary cloud formations—they have a lot of sky here. Looking at it takes quite a little time.

Johnny’s wife, Sue, was here this morning with the children, Jennie, 2½, and Greta, 8 mo. or so. She has been with Luanne and Jimmy, taking care of their children while they spend most of the time with Katie. I suppose Helen has told you that Jimmy’s little girl, Katie, the one with the brain tumor, is very sick and has been in intensive care for several weeks. She is comatose now, and they are giving her chemotherapy in a last ditch effort to reverse the tumor’s growth. This whole process may go on indefinitely, but I can’t believe there is any real chance of recovery.

Kristin seems to be really enjoying Virginia but she says the work is very hard. Tommy is in law school this year and evidently studies all the time. Timmy should be finishing up this year and the twins are in their second year at the university, so while John still has four children in college the end is more or less in sight.

John and Jeannette have vanished into the country and we see very little of them. Their new house is in a lovely setting, on a hill with a trout stream (called Crystal River) rushing back and forth below them. There is a settlement of Norwegians there to keep Jeannette happy, and it is close enough to a town to be convenient. Thirty commuting miles from here, though, so John stays at the hospital when he is on call. He could stay here, in Kristin’s water bed, but I think he would prefer to have as little family about as possible. He’d stay at the warehouse if he could. Anyway, he turns up once in a while and we last saw him, with Jeannette, one Sunday out at the lake. We were out for a drive and John was draining the water and putting antifreeze in the traps, etc.

David, with his wife Mary and their two boys, Christopher, almost three, and Nicholas, seven months or so, visit us about once every three weeks. Christopher is so exhausting that that is enough really. David works at Theta Clark Medical Center, Mary has a secretarial job, and the children are in day care. All are thriving, however, and they look very groomed and prosperous, more so than Sue and Johnny, who insist on being rustic, a country lawyer living in a Victorian house. I do like John’s children and grandchildren but oh my I miss my own much more interesting set.

Mother’s foot is just about well. Her ankle stays sort of swollen, as does her foot, and she finally gave in and got a wider pair of dress shoes. She had had to wear her rough and ready brown oxfords everywhere before. Her hearing fluctuates a good deal or at least my perception of it. She has trouble with TV and can’t listen to music at all—says there’s a sort of roar when it’s turned up high enough to hear. I don’t suppose the infra-red device Helen mentioned (can that be right? infra-red?) will be perfected soon enough for mother.

My cousin Ivan, the one from Pennsylvania who is a vice president of what used to be called Alleghenie, was here visiting with his wife and brother. He says their Boeing planes arrive in poor condition and they have to service them, in fact partly build them, before they can go in the air. Too many new supervisors, he thinks (supervisors in the old-fashioned sense, not the Boeing sense).

In the settlement of Iva’s estate, I got eighty something [thousand] dollars. I took two CDs for 20,000 each. They have a few years to run; one is ten percent and the other eleven, I think. Those are in John’s safety deposit box. The other $43,000 I just put in the bank here. I suppose it should be invested but I felt so impoverished after Vicky got through plundering my Seattle account that I haven’t been in any hurry.

Your Grand Canyon trip sounds wonderful. It seems clear that you should take more trips. You have several retired friends who would like to go. Too bad your dermatitis didn’t disappear. I would have thought that the heat and the friendship between them would have done something.

You are apparently having a year like the one when Grant was born—still beautiful and sunny when mother and Iva arrived for the birth [Nov. 3, 1952]. I don’t remember that that was especially dry, however. They never did have any water in Lake City.

There’s no use pretending I have any news. Hope your Boeing job and also the H&R Block thing are working out.

Aspirin may do Panhead’s leg some good but not much, I suppose.

My present plan is to return to Seattle the first week in December—at least, that’s what my return ticket says. It is one of those tickets which can’t be changed but which is cheaper round trip than one way ordinarily. It might be more sensible to go home now and return for the cold weather. The thing is that I like being here now and I want to be in Seattle for the holidays. Also Gretchen has a long Christmas vacation and may be able to stay with mother. I suppose I will have to come back here later. Mother could stay alone—the grocery will deliver and she has more relatives and friends than most people. It just seems awfully lonely.

This is a newsless letter but I can’t help it.

Love, Betty

[December? 1987]

Dear mother—I’ve been home two weeks and haven’t written yet. My flight home was so uneventful—I just rode quietly across the country eight miles up in the air and then descended through eight miles of mist to rain. It kept right on raining for ten days or so and is still muddy and damp. Chilly today, in the thirties. Every day they forecast rain and say to look out for black ice but each day we are a degree or so above freezing. I finally took my geraniums in. I hated to because they were still beautiful, leafy and blossoming, but I grew tired of wondering every evening whether they would survive the night.

As usual, the house looked unnecessarily large, very dark and gloomy, the furniture unpolished and the rugs covered with dog hair. Someone had vacuumed and Ram had washed the kitchen floor, so it could have been worse. Since then I have done a lot of cleaning and waxing and shopping and still haven’t gotten very far. We have an undecorated Christmas tree and I got a wreath for the door, otherwise we are undecorated. Vicky and I found a rug for the guest room, which was looking bare and cold, and she is hanging curtains today before Dan comes. Not that Dan cares about rugs or curtains—he even hates top sheets.

Ram has two jobs, one volunteer and one paying [Northwest Chamber Orchestra and H.M. Block?], and they seem to take up all his time. He is very full of business and bustles around. Helen has finished her finals [first term of library school] but she has a part-time job too so isn’t around much. Anne came on Tuesday, full of beans as usual. Alexandra [15 months] remembered her, at least clung to her as though she did. Mary and Alex met Anne at the airport and came back here and sat around Vicky’s living room (now much more livable as she has finished covering her two couches—she bought two couches at the Goodwill or somewhere like that and reupholstered them in black cotton; when we were out rug shopping the other day she pointed out furniture and it is true that her reupholstered secondhands look exactly like the new modern sofas. She also made a glass dining room table with metal legs, total cost $80, and the ones she showed me in the store, almost identical, are $600). My sentences are getting a little strange here.

Alex has grown so much that it is a good thing I didn’t bring her any clothes—they would have been too small. She has grown a lot taller without gaining much so she is not so plump. Her hair has grown too, and is curly. In fact she is beautiful but she does have awfully big hands and feet.

Panhead [the dog, 15] has gotten to be a very old man but when we go up in the park he still trots around happily enough. He has times when he can’t get up and just lies there making a big fuss until someone lifts up his rear end and sets him on his feet. He’s deaf, too, of course, so if he wanders away from me I have to run after him.

One of the Christie boys got married last week and we went to the reception. It was fine to see them and also to see all their old friends, people who used to turn up at their parties but whom we seldom saw otherwise. Bill’s mother was there. She is in a wheelchair now and her memory is pretty well shot. She has an apartment on Whidbey Island near Donny’s (Bill’s brother) place, and has a housekeeper. Annabelle worries about her a lot and has her to stay with her for three or four weeks at a time. She says the housekeeper leaves Mrs. Christie alone and that Don and Bill don’t take enough care of their mother. Bill told me, “she’s right, we don’t, but we do the best we can.” Even so, Mrs. Christie looked awfully tired by the time Donny got around to taking her home. Bill and Annabelle went to Hawaii for Christmas, leaving soon after the wedding. They were positively skipping around, so relieved to get out of having the usual family Christmas.

Going to the Christie wedding gave me a chance to wear both of Iva’s rings. I don’t think I ever thanked you properly for giving them to me. I still feel silly wearing a diamond but I suppose I will get used to it.

I got a nice letter from Edith James—you probably did too. She had her gall bladder out, but seems to be recovering rapidly. Is going to Texas for Christmas to be with her son. Also a card and note from Barbara Fydle, enclosing some pictures from that lunch (she could have left that out, I looked much worse than Marion Marquardt and she looked pretty bad) and written mostly about one of my books which she had gotten for her grandchild).

Thursday morning

Dan is coming in today about noon. Vicky is going out to get him. At the last minute he had to speak at a faculty meeting yesterday and so couldn’t come with Anne. I do hope the skiing is good; otherwise he will get restless pretty soon and go back to California.

I feel as though you have seen most of us so recently that there isn’t any news about them or me. I can hardly believe I was away from here for so long and look back at four months of laziness and marvel at how fast it went. It seems you will have hardly any time to relish your solitude. I worry about your having to run a large household again but it is your house and your decision and I suppose you feel that the pleasure of the company is worth the work. I am so glad that John is around; I think he still means more to you than all the rest of us put together.

I am glad that Simba [cousin Kristin Koch’s dog] returned from his adventure in time to come home for Christmas. I suppose they’ll manage their trip home somehow.

We wondered if Jimmy and his family could stay on in Berlin for Christmas, but I suppose Jim has to work. It will be a sad time for them. I don’t look forward to writing to them but of course will very soon. [Jim and Luanne’s little daughter Katy had just died.]

At this point I called you to find out when the funeral was going to be, and went out and ordered some flowers. The florist said it would probably be gladiolas. Some people hate them; I hope Luanne is not one who does. I guess there isn’t much choice this time of year.

I sent you two packages which I take it you got. They are a pathetic collection of nothing but when you are giving your possessions away it seems silly to send anything but one wishes to celebrate the season somehow. I didn’t send anything to Kristin this year because she wrote last year and asked me why I sent her Christmas presents. I realized that it was just sort of embarrassing to her. I had been sending some small thing because I was glad that she was there with you and I thought of you and Iva and Kris opening your presents together. Anyway, I hope she understands.

I must write to Kristin anyway. After a lot of thought I decided I would ask her to bring the cradle back. I can’t believe that you meant to give it to her when we have had so many conversations about it. I am sorry that she went to the trouble of refinishing it but if she can approximate her time I would be glad to pay her for it. I feel pretty cheap and petty about this, of course—wrangling over your things is very strange behavior. On the other hand, there are just so many things that we had with us in Whitehall and with which I have sentimental associations. Kris doesn’t remember Whitehall or Sharon. If, however, you have decided that you did give it to her or want to do so, then naturally that is different—it’s your cradle. I know that it is irritating to you to have me say I want things and then not take them but when Alice was a baby and I could have taken it you quite understandably didn’t want me to. I continue to hope that we can take a load next summer. I kind of think we might need a cradle pretty soon. Of course at the moment you are not worrying about any of this.

End of the page. By the time you get this the funeral will be over. I am thinking of all of you (much good that does) and especially you. Miss you a lot. Have a good holiday and I will try to write again soon.

Love, Betty

WEDNESDAY, April 19, 1989

Dear mother—you’d think anyone who has absolutely nothing else to do could write a letter at the proper time, but I seem to put things off even when I’m not busy. Monday was a gorgeous day and I took a couple of walks, sat on the deck off my room, and then got hung up on a murder story. Tuesday was much the same except that when I finally started down the hall to my typewriter Anne called and between her and Daniel we had one of those hour long conversations that seem even longer and I just went in and went to bed.

Sunday we opened your box. Ram put the sweater right on and has worn it a lot since. It’s the first cotton one he’s had. The dress is lovely, so bright and spring like and yet warm enough for Seattle. The only thing is that it is very large. I like loose clothes because I can’t really wear a bra right now, but this is too big and it comes down to my ankles. Also I am a little wary of elastic waists although this one seems fine. I keep trying it on, trying to decide whether I can wear it or whether I had better send it back, and still am not sure.

Alice left on Sunday morning, and oh my how I miss her! A week isn’t very long. Fortunately the weather was good most of the time. We took several drives around town and actually went clothes shopping one day. I didn’t buy anything but it was fun to look and I tried on a couple of possibles. Alice drove out to La Connor to see the tulips. I have never been out there but the pictures look just like Holland. Vicky and David planned a house for some clients who live out there—the houses are built several feet off the ground.

I don’t have enough hair to tell whether it is curly or even what color it is for sure. Seems a sort of mousy neutral. I’m sure it will be gray really.

Anne, Dan, Dan’s girlfriend Celia, and Anne’s old housemate Gillia have rented a house together which they like very much. Anne says the landlady asked Celia who would be “chief woman.” Dan says it is an ordinary, comfortable four bedroom house with a yard that would sell for $400,000 if it were for sale. California prices!

Vicky and Mary went to the greenhouse so now we have geraniums and begonias. A lot of things are frozen. We didn’t lose much but it looks as though the hedge between our house and the Perrys is gone. It was nice and high and kept us from looking in their windows.

Vicky made me a new mattress for the chaise longue on the porch off my room, so now I sit out there and watch the leaves grow bigger. It is chilly so I put a blanket over me and feel as though I am on a steamship. It is like that summer when you and I sat on the porch every morning while it was still so cold.

Hope your snow has stopped!

Only three weeks before the baby comes [Grant and Mary’s son Nicholas]. Anne is coming too. Grant and Mary are still discussing names—none they have mentioned appeal to me but I do realize it’s not my choice.

Thank you very much for the birthday box. I will try the dress again tomorrow.

Much love, Betty