

LETTER FROM ENGLAND 3

Dear Friends,

July first ushered in to “merry olde England” such a heat-wave as it has rarely seen (temperatures in the 80’s for a few hours) — and then back to the usual damp, windy, moments that drive one indoors to a roaring fire in a sputtering fireplace. But the sun comes in and out sometimes now (it is only our house that keeps us shivering, for it is colder indoors than outside), and suddenly we realize that in a few weeks’ time Josy and the children will be boarding the plane for home, with Joe following in October.

What mixed feelings we now have! We long for our friends, our home, our country (we are now firmly convinced that only after leaving the U.S. can one truly be aware of how wonderful and great it is) — but suddenly we also realize what roots we have sown here, what attachments we have made to places, customs, and people that we’ve come to respect and value.

We are going to miss and remember many things. The TV weather forecasts with such choice items as “possible thunder” and “intervals of brightness.” The notices posted in the Maidstone buses: “As of Monday, the fare for dogs will rise from one penny to thrupence,” “When all seats are occupied, 8 passengers only are permitted to stand in the lower saloon of the omnibus,” “Do not distract the driver WHILST the bus is in motion,” “Please tender your exact fare.”

The sign on the telephone box at the Moat Hotel near Wrotham (pronounced “rootum”) reading, “Operator, dial 100; Inquiries, dial 192; Emergency — it is easier to contact a member of the management staff, who will then act!”

The serious young man at the greengrocer’s who assured us that his mother used to have relations in America (and he thinks they still live there!). The hairdresser who chided, “What you want is a fringe, love — bangs are sausages!” The sweet young attendant at the cinema who advised us when we phoned for information on the starting time, “It’s a film with a surprise ending,” and then proceeded to tell us what the surprise ending was.

The information clerk at Victoria Station who, not wanting to be disturbed by queries during the railway “strike,” answered all questions in pig-Latin. The notices in the railway cars stating, “Please take your litter home with you.” The

trilingual reminders out of Dover and all the way inland as far as Maidstone:
“Keep to the left; links Bahrein; tenet les gauche!”

The car rally in which we all participated on Sunday (a treasure hunt race by auto through small, out-of-the-way hamlets following clues in verse) — When one villager whom we stopped seemed to know most of the answers of a local nature, Josy jokingly remarked, “We really ought to take him with us!” To which he replied, “Oh no, ma’am, I’ve made plans to go to the cinema today!”

Believe it or not, the occasional tea-rooms that actually don’t serve tea in England, only coffee. The outdoor evening performance of “Twelfth Night” on the Pantiles (mall) of the town of Royal Tunbridge Wells; canvas chairs at 2 shillings each (24 cents) for those elite who preferred not to stand free of charge; and when two passing inebriates attempted to interfere with the performance by orating more loudly than the actors, the director calmly appearing on stage with a sign reading “INTERVAL” which neatly put a stop to the whole thing.

The scandal in the Girls Grammar School when writing appeared on the bathroom walls announcing, “Miss Mellon wears her knickers backwards!!” The ensuing announcement, “Will all girls who used the south bathroom yesterday meet in the lounge,” with the result that three-quarters of the school appeared.

The PTA meeting at the Girls Grammar School called from 5:45 to 7:00 p.m. where mothers were permitted only tea, but fathers if they arrived were offered also a chocolate biscuit (cookie). Lois’ history project (“Foods and Eating in the Seventeenth Century”) requiring in addition to her library research and paper that she prepare and serve to the class a menu of pregnant prawns in orange sauce; orange, onion, and watercress salad; jellied cherries; and pralines. (She received house points for this accomplishment.)

The octogenarian professor of Classical Backgrounds in the Boys Grammar School who refused to retire lest the position fall to some seventy-year-old upstart. (Marty, by the way, came in first in his class in Classical Backgrounds.)

The continual cricket games played by grown men in white uniforms proceeding undaunted through the pouring rain. The time we were lost, stopped a couple of pedestrians to ask directions, and when he started to explain the way and she murmured, “But love, don’t you think—“ he turned to her and roared, “SHUT UP!!” before continuing, then ending by telling Joe, “Happy landing, governor!”

The starlings that nested in our attic scratching madly at the ceilings all night long, and the advice of the local Board of Public Health, “Oh well, madam, you’re just a city girl — you don’t appreciate birds.”

The snickering of some of the teen-agers our children brought home when we mentioned, “The Mona Lisa hangs in Paris in the Louvre” and they thought we had said “Loo,” which means bathroom here. The chemistry problem (worth 50%) in a college exam nobody at the laboratory could answer, until finally it was decided that only a computer could. The young applicant at teachers’ college who managed to achieve 100% for an examination, being called in and told, “Only teachers are permitted 100%, therefore you get 99%.”

The sonorous booming voice of the police-sponsored TV commercial, “Watch out; there’s a thief about!”

The evening we had at our home where everyone had to perform for a prize, and honors went to Brian Beechey (our mitochondria expert) and Fred Smith (in charge of engineering) both for standing on their heads for a five-minute period. The time we telephoned Mr. Tickle, in charge of housing, to inquire about a new pipe for our vacuum cleaner and heard him answer the phone by stating, “Tickle here.”

The rounders’ points (a game like baseball) won by Malva that caused more excitement in her class than her achieving honors in mathematics.

Outside of England we’ll long remember our wonderful Whitsun week holiday (June 1st to June 8th) when we took two cars and travelled with Wendy and Brian Beechey and their three children to Belgium and Holland. The day on the beach in Schvenigen, the magnificence of Rembrandts, Vermeers, Van Goghs in museum after museum, the search for the Spinoza House in The Hague, only to be told in broken English by the occupants, “But Spinoza doesn’t live here anymore!” The raw herrings we ate by the dozen in stands all over Holland. Crossing the eighteen-mile-long dike over the Ijsselmeer (formerly the Zuyder Zee). Exploring the inside of a working windmill. Being ordered by the boatman to get down on all fours on the floor of our sightseeing boat in Bruges so our heads would pass safely under the low-hanging bridges. And then having our passports checked on the Ostend-Dover ferry returning to England by the same customs inspector who had admitted Josy and the children at London airport on arrival in February, who still remembered our fifteen suitcases and the teddy bear Lois had been carrying, and who was so moved by this chance re-encounter that he took the

children up the captain's bridge before disembarking.

It has been all told a wonderful time in Europe. Joe feels that his research has been fruitful, and he says he has learned so many new techniques. And in Europe there's always the excitement of what tomorrow will bring.

Regards,

The Rabinowitz's