

January 21, 1944

My dear Homer:

As I wrote you Nelda and I were to be married, and as Becky has probably told you, we were. We drove out and spent Christmas with Butch and Bill and Tommy and Helen at Santa Barbara. Several days after Christmas Bill left and is now somewhere in the southwest Pacific fighting zone. I have had one letter and Ida Marie several, and his address is as follows:

Lt. W. H. Stark
VMTB - 143
MAG - 11
1st MAR Air Wing - FMP
Navy 140 (one four zero)
c/o Fleet Post Office
San Francisco, Calif.

Incidentally I had a letter from Tommy Hughes today and he asked me to send you his address and asked that you get in touch with them the next time you come in to San Diego. Tommy's address is:

Lt. T. F. Hughes
Armed Guard School
Naval Repair Base
San Diego, Calif.

We had a beautiful Christmas, and then it started to rain. After we got out on the road and began to hit elevations of 5,000 feet and up, the whole countryside throughout California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and part of Oklahoma was covered with snow. We came back by way of the Grand Canyon but were unable to go across to Colorado because the passes were practically snowed up the way we wanted to come in. It had been our intention to come by way of Salt Lake and Laramie down to the Ranch to see about the horses, et but failed to make it. I had a letter from Mr. Kerr, who says that everything is not there - with about 8 inches of snow and 20 degrees below zero temperature. He is not getting ready to put the ice up and because no one knows when the war will be over, is having him do this every year. He informs me that there are still 25 of the original up there and everything seems to be in fine shape.

When we arrived home we found everybody here sick with the flu or just recovering. Becky had gotten some new furniture and had moved your desk and your Mother's painted portrait into your house and had had Mr. Bishop hang the portrait where she desired. She is now getting more of the dishes, etc., which went through the original fire, was up and placed on the shelves. She seems to be perfectly happy and contented and has asked Ida Marie to stay with her. At the present moment Ida Marie is staying in Bill's room and whether the two girls will form a partnership I am unable to say at this time. At the annual meeting of the Bank, Becky was given a raise to \$100.00 per month. The most important part about this to me is that she is rated as one of the best and most able workers in the Bank; not only is she willing to do her job but is about to drive them nuts over there learning more about banking, bookkeeping, etc. I know that I am pleased with her progress and I am perfectly sure that you will be.

I discovered in all of the telephone ramifications that I could give up a number that I already owned and so I took one of the numbers out of the Jungle and transferred it to your house, so that you now have a telephone - No. 4178 - and the phone is placed at Becky's bedside. Clemmie has been over, helping her get the dishes washed up and house straightened. Becky has some nice clothes and looks as neat as a pin.

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Things at Shangri-La are at a stand-still because starting in the middle of December we had freezes and rains regularly until the past week, when we have been enjoying the sunshine and the dry weather. There are a lots of mallards on the lake that have migrated in, also worlds of coots. The cranes and egretts have narrowed down in number but a great many still make it their home. Probably I could give you a better description of this period in Orange by saying that there are less flowers and greenery now than possibly at any other season of the year. Betty moved over to Mrs. Reid's, across the street, but the rain and cold wrecked her sinus and she accepted her Mother's suggestion that she come home to Austin. Ida Marie arrived in Orange yesterday and is staying at the house in Bill's room. She has the little dog in the room with her and the big dog serves as assistant to Pate outside. I have not seen the Jimmie's since I got back, but Becky has, regularly, and I am sure she has given you all of the news. Jack takes care of Becky's car for her and has just repaired the heater, which burned out a starting unit. That heater is all of four years old and I think it is marvelous the way it has held up under the constant use that we have had to give it. I have not heard of any shortage of gas that Becky might have had, because she is using the station wagon and the Convertible tickets. At the same time we always have some gas that she can use in her car if she should get short, which as I said I have not heard of.

The town of Orange is still producing war equipment, both for open sea and landing; and more people seem to be moving into more houses as they are being built daily. The hurry and bustle seems to have slowed down somewhat, but we are now living in a large community. I am enclosing the front part of the "Orange Leader" which shows the great honor that was bestowed upon our family by action of the School Board in naming the new high school the "Lutcher Stark Senior High School". I was more than pleased and hope you will be likewise. I have not been fishing and have heard very little of anybody else doing so. Buster and Macom were supposed to go Sunday but I have not seen them as yet. I think it is a little bit too early. Doc Armstrong caught some white perch and brim at the Country Club, which we put into the lake at Shangri-La. While on the subject of fishing - before Christmas we sent you a box of fishing tackle which you acknowledged receipt of, also your short casting rod which you requested. The fishing rod has been returned to us. Because of its length, they will not take it to you. While on the road to Santa Barbara, we passed through San Diego and I called on our friend, Simmons, at the sporting goods store. He sent his regards to you and said to tell you that when you came back he wanted to open up a similar store in Orange in partnership with you.

The fur trapping season with us has been very fine. The catch of mink and coon and otter was down but we are taking and will, if the season permits, take more musk rats than any year, with the exception of 1929. The prices are, as you know, controlled by the OPA ceiling and we have no trouble in disposing of our furs right here without shipping them to New York.

The reports of the hunters this past season compels me to say that the large flight of game which supposedly came down out of the North never did arrive. We had a very warm season until the 16th of December and then it turned so cold and we had so much rain that if the game did come down, it did not stop with us. As I told you earlier, that with the gasoline shortage, tire shortage and shell shortage, you need not fear about the amount of game that was killed. I believe there is far more game in the world than when you left and I am equally sure that next year will have a tremendous roll-up. If civilians are not given more ammunition and more means of locomotion, and it doesn't look as if that will be, you need not worry about the scarcity of game when you come back.

I had the doctor check me over this past week because I had developed a moderate case of shingles and I wished to discover if there was anything wrong with my heart, blood pressure or anything else. I am happy to announce that none of them could find anything

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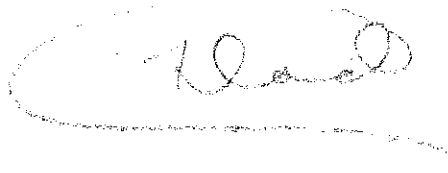
that time will not cure. I have also discovered, as well as being informed by them, that shingles are no laughing matter.

Young Doug Pruter is home for a short stay before moving from Illinois to another camp. Louis Ulm is home for two weeks before setting sail on a carrier, he being a second lieutenant, and flying a TBF similar to Bill's. Arthur Leedy was reported missing two weeks ago and has turned up in a German prison camp. Mrs. Jackson has had an acknowledgment from Bobby of some blankets and clothing she sent him. Corp. Pachar is still alive and writing voluminously.

This is to acknowledge your frank letter to me. My communications to you have never been in the sense of an explanation, an apology or a request. I do not believe that I have ever taken a step in my life or yours without giving due consideration to the future happiness of all concerned. After five weeks of a very happy life with Miss Nelda, I can only say that I am more sure than when I first wrote you that her presence in our family will bring happiness to all and as I have looked for and confessed to you the wisdom of your choice, knowing you as well as I do, I know that you will be as free to acknowledge any mistake that you have made through any misunderstanding.

We have no more way of knowing when this war will end than do you. Everyone in these United States is doing the best that they know how and are producing staggering amounts of materials. Ofcourse there isn't a family here that is not touched by the participation of some boy or girl. I do not believe either you or Bill care for the politics of this war. The staggering expense is something that has not been prevented. The loss of life and sacrifice, I know no way to prevent. We have to win. How or when, I know not. All I can say is that we think of you folks who are gone constantly. We wish that you had not had to go. We hope for your safe return, and that as soon as possible. We fervently hope when you come home, that you will love us as much as you did when you left. That we will all be changed goes without saying, but that we will be different is not necessarily true. That we can understand each other is possible if we will only try, and there can be no doubt that we can bear for one another all of the love, honor and respect that we each are due.

Love

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Nelda", enclosed within a large, hand-drawn oval.

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