

HURRICANE CARLA
1961

Palacios, Texas
September 30, 1961

Dear Erbe,

It is too bad we have to have a hurricane to make some folks write to us. We were glad to hear from you again anyway.

We came through with very little damage in comparison to what so many of our friends lost. We had a composition roof put on over our shingle roof about ten years ago. Most of that roof blew off, and the wall paper was damaged in two rooms where the water blew in around the windows. There was destruction on all sides of us and I don't see how it missed us but believe me we are grateful that it did. You would have to see the destruction to believe it. The harbor where we keep our boat was surrounded by a big boat house on south several summer homes on the north, a boat house down the center that was just finished July 1. A concrete office building on west and across ^{my island} the owner had built him a fifty thousand dollar home about three years ago. All that is gone as well as a tourist court on the south and one across the street. A row of summer homes up that street which goes along east bay were completely wiped out. In our newest addition there were five homes blown out into the middle of the highway and one out in the prairie half mile from where it belonged. The woman who owns it told me yesterday she had a clock on a glass shelf in the living room. It was setting on the shelf also some whatnots were on a glass shelf just as she had the. She had artificial flowers in a big vase on dining table, they were still there. You have never seen so many iceboxes deep freezers, washing machines and furniture scattered all over the prairies for miles. ^{Max House had # 4-50 of water in them which left water of me} We pulled our boat out on the trailer and stored it in a big old barny building that used to be a boatbuilding shop. It sat there without getting a scratch. We decided Friday we would leave if it still was headed this way on Saturday. We boarded up the house and packed some things to leave Sunday morning. About four A.M. the chief of police went around and told everyone over a loud speaker that "The hurricane is headed directly toward Palacios, and every one should evacuate." We left about seven Sunday morning. Garrett wanted to take a lot of clothing. I said "I will take one suit and several pair of slacks for you". I took three summer dresses and a file coat for me and our raincoats. I took some towels and soap, a box of food. Garrett said he was going to head for central Texas and drive untill he didn't see any windows boarded up. We started looking for a motel in Lagrange about ninety miles. No vacancies. The same in each town we passed through. We stopped at Information station in Austin. The Ranger said "You wont be able to rent a room nearer than Waco or Dallas". We were too tired to drive that far. We went to a park and ate our lunch, then went to the high school building with about 450, other evacuees. They had single mattresses in rows on the floor of the big Gym, and told us to pick out our mattresses and put our things on them. We did and I rested awhile but Garrett spent the afternoon sitting on the front "porch" with about fifty other people from Galveston, Texas City, Freeport and many other places up and down the coast. About 4:30 they moved us to the Coliseum. We slept in our station Wagon two nights and ate with the Red Cross along with 748 other evacuees. They did a wonderful job feeding that mob, and they had more than that in the Auditorium. We heard Palacios was wiped off the map. Garrett said "Well, babe we have lost more important things than houses and boats and lived through it, so we can live through this". It was with a feeling that everything was gone that we came home

Wednesday morning. About ten miles from Palacios there was a road block. The man told us we couldn't go into Palacios without a pass. Garrett asked him where we could get a pass. He said in Bay City, which was twenty miles back. We decided to come on and try. When we were a mile from town we saw all the houses in the street and were stopped again. A real nice Highway Patrolman asked if we lived in Palacios. We told him we did. He said "Go on it, but don't drink any water, and watch for rattle snakes". Pleasant thought. When we got within two blocks of our house we could see it still there. I said "The house is still standing". We drove into the yard some of our trees were broken down. There was limbs and trash all over the yard. We walked into the house and it was exactly as we had left it. Not a broken window. I could hardly believe it. We were so thankful, and the more we saw for the next few days the more we realized how much we had to be thankful for. Fifty foot shrimp boats were carried out of the harbor by the tidal wave. One is on the prairie almost a mile from the harbor. It went through a house because the folks found their breakfast table on the deck unharmed. Several others are over in the residential district on West side of town where mostly Mexican families who work on boats live. The only thing about this thing that is most astonishing is the fact that more people were not killed. Had they stayed in town as most of them have in the past there would have been a lot of deaths. I think the disaster at Cameron La. Had some effect. One of our friends said "I am not going to run. I've lived here fifty years and never have run from a hurricane". They had to leave their home before the storm hit and go to the hospital, as a lot of others did. He said after it was all over "I've never run, but the next time I hear a hurricane is headed this way I am going to call up from Missouri, and ask Is it gone before I come back." The spirit of the people is magnificent, but it is really going to hurt this town. The Govmt. sent engineers in here to help clean up. They have moved tons of all kinds of things from dead cows, to houses that were just smashed down like it was done with a hammer. Others were blown to the four winds. Our freezer was still frozen, but we knew it wouldn't stay frozen another day. There ~~are~~^{were} two young men working for Public Service Company who had boats in our harbor, and Eugene Kilmore, one of them married a girl who was fifteen when we came here. He came Wednesday afternoon at four P. M. and said "I came to save your freezer." he fixed the lights. The next morning at three he touched a live wire and was killed. That hurt everyone more than all their losses. Garrett and I both said we would have been glad to have had everything we had destroyed if it could have saved him. His only two brothers were killed in World War II.

I didn't intend to write a book. Garrett is watching a fight on T. V, and I hate them so I catch up on my letter writing. We had intended to drive up to Tulsa in Oct. and stop by to see you, but Carla changed our plans. Garrett is going to bring the boat home this week and paint it. Herbert and his wife are coming down about the middle of October for a few days fishing.

We are both well right now and as busy as "Cranberry Merchants". I worked ^{week before} last week at Red Cross Headquarters, taught school last week and will be busy doing things for the "HopeS" next week.

Do write us all about yourself, and don't wait until another hurricane takes a swipe at us. It really takes a lot of nerve for a "Ham typest" like me to write to an expert like you. Please excuse mistakes.

We both send our love,

Garrett + Mallie

*where are Ola + Olga?
Give all the folks our love.*