Manzanar,
Nov. 21, 1942.

My dear Dr. Barnum,

Thank you so much for such an original Christmas card. I don't know when I've felt the personal touch that yours gives. We, too, in our own little way up here at Manzanar are attempting to make our own Christmas cards and to make them as apropos of our location as possible. I've always wondered what the art teacher has that I haven't. Now I know; she's teaching all my pupils how to make their own presents and cards. May I take lessons from you?

I know you want to learn all about Manzanar and my teaching position here. May I first tell you that it's the windiest, dustiest, most desolate spot in California. Of course, I'll probably be challenged to a bet on that with some of our other relocation centers. But, despite all this, the desert gets under one's skin (that may be taken literally and figuratively), and I actually like Manzanar, weather and all, in some of its milder moments. When a bad dust storm comes along and you can't see the next barrack twenty feet away, when you think you're suffocating and the food on your plate all looks the same because of a nice, thick coat of black sand, then you pack up and swear you're leaving that night, never to return. Fortunately, for the pupils, shall we say, it calms down before leaving time, and your mind is restored to its former calm state of resignation.

But you mustn't think that it's always this way at Manzanar. Some days it's warm and clear and still, and you look to the Sierra Nevadas, snow-capped now, and declare you've never seen anything so breathtakingly beautiful as the desert running into the mountains. For, you see, Manzanar is on the desert hemmed in by mountains, the mountains on the west being much the higher and only seven miles away.

In reality, we're only 280 miles north of Los Angeles, but it seems like thousands we're so isolated and dependent upon ourselves for amusement. Our nearest town to the south is Lone Pine and to the north, Independence, a thriving town with one grocery store, one general store, and no theatre, but with the grandest people you'd ever want to know. Across the highway from camp and up and down the whole of Inyo County are airports where CPT (Civilian Pilot Training) boys are being trained. Almost every week army planes land, bringing officials to inspect and investigate conditions at camp. Then we all dash to the mess hall five minutes before schedule to assure ourselves of getting a place. It's strange how popular the mess hall is. Need I say our food is excellent!

When Manzanar was first set up, it was under seven different heads; now the authority is divided between the army and WRA (War Relocation Authority), of which Mr. Meier of Washington, D.C. is supreme head. Soon, however, as I understand it, the army will be turning it over entirely to the WRA.

The camp extends seven miles north and south and east to the foothills, but the camp proper or residence section is one mile square, and a Japanese must have a special permit to get beyond the mile square, as no Japanese are allowed outside the camp. Manzanar accomodates 10, 000 Japanese and several hundred Caucasians, many of whom live either in Lone Pine or Independence. The camp is mathematically laid out; we now have 36 blocks, each consisting of sixteen barracks, eight on a side and in the center clearing are the ladies' and men's rest rooms with showers and basins, a laundry room, and ironing room. Each block has its own mess hall and block leader, whose duty it is to supply the needs of the people in

his block. A barrack is divided into four apartments, about twenty-four feet long each, and in these apartments live an entire Japanese family, the average being four to five people, sometimes more, occasionally less; thus in every block there are about sixty people.

Some of the barracks are used as recreation centers, offices, and school buildings. We teachers live in block seven, which is nearest the highway and the sentry, and the high school classes are held in our block so we have only a few yards to walk to our class-rooms. You can imagine how convenient that is when you get up, say fifteen minutes before school begins! In the high school we have about 1600 pupils and thirty teachers; most of us are young, and if I do say so, we are one of the finest and most cooperative groups I've ever known. If we hadn't been, we couldn't have stuck it out as we have. I have six classes a day - 45 minutes each - three of tenth grade World Geography and History, one of American History - eleventh grade, and two classes in Latin, beginning and advance, but in my advanced Latin class, I have four classes, covering two years. And here I'd like to give a word of credit to my pupils; they are taking things with the finest spirit and are very cooperative. For the first month we had no chairs at all; I didn't even have one 'til I actually appropriated a collapsible chair from an unsuspecting neighbor. Nor did we have any stoves. On very cold mornings I'd have the pupils do warming up exerciese; once I even suggested they chase themselves around the barracks. Once we sat out in what we optimistically termed the sunlight; that was distinctly a mistake; too many irreverent people came along. You may be sure the pupils didn't get much studying done. Several days we held no classes, either because of the cold or a bad dust storm. Strange to say both pupils and teachers were pleased. But for the past month we've been running on a regular schedule and have been making out well. I now have 26 chairs in my room, a stove, and a blackboard! The surplus of the class, the boys you may be sure, sits on the floor. Some ballance their books on their knees, some bring apple crates to write on, and some huddle around my desk, not because they are so fond of me, but because they can sit on my waste paper basket and write on my desk. To this I have not objected; after all we 're all aiming toward the same thing -- education and democracy. I have no problem of discipline whatsoever, not that they're such angels, but they know when I mean they shall be quiet. At first, they were very shy and unresponsive, but not so now. We're all good friends and I flatter myself into believing they all like me. As I looked around the class the other day the thought suddenly struck me that I had completely forgotten they were Japanese. In a couple weeks a lot of us are going hiking, better say walking, on Saturday morning. I'll have to get a special permit to do so, and then we'll walk toward the mountains. I'm going to be very careful to warn the sentry first to say at least, "Halt; who goes there?, before shooting. Seriously, however, I feel very proud of my students and of myself. In all humbleness, it takes a good American like myself to endure the physical aspects of the camp and to make good Americans of these, for the most part, American born children, who know nothing but what they have read from our books. And I have no doubt but that most of them are Americans to the core, even to the names of their clubs - Sierra Sues, if you please! By the way, my beginning Latin class wants me to write Latin words for "Praise the Lord, and Pass the Ammunition." It's remarkable the ability they ascribe to their teacher!

But this letter is exceeding the bounds of an ordinary letter and going into an epistle. I have so much to tell about the layout of the camp, the hospital, newspaper, government, camouflage, amusing incidents; so more of this next time, and besides, I think the wind is wafting the odor of food toward me. So for now, goodbye,