

## EXCERPTS FROM LETTERS FROM SIERRA LEONE -- #18

(Letter 17 was not in the file. It would have covered life with my three Group VI roommates—Pat, Sharon and Meg—in Makeni.)

December 1, 1964

About my Maryland driver license, please check with the state police and see if people working overseas for the government have their license automatically renewed until they return. If not, I'll just have to take the driver's test over again when I get home. I'll probably fail it after two years of driving and parking on the wrong side of the road and shifting with my left hand.

On October 15, Meg, Sharon and I started out for Freetown. The 120-mile trip, which normally takes about 4 hours, took 9½ hours. The fuel pump gave its dying gasp 10 miles from the nearest civilization, and I do mean the nearest. It took Meg and then Sharon 3½ hours to get help after taking separate lorries to the nearest town. Meanwhile I had locked myself in the jeep and settled down to spend the night alone in the middle of the bush. We finally arrived in Freetown at midnight. We agreed that I would stay in Freetown for a few days to get the car fixed and its 8000-mile checkup since my job isn't on a rigid schedule.

It took me 12 days to get back to Makeni. I made a start on October 21 but only got 15 miles. I came around a sharp bend going up a hill, and there in the middle of my lane sat a one-foot high rock that some \*~#<@>#\* lorry driver had left. He obviously had stopped there, used the rock to block one of his tires, and then drove off leaving it there—a not uncommon occurrence. I didn't have time to stop and had to choose between hitting the rock, going over a 4-foot embankment or hitting the lorry coming toward me in the other lane. I opted for the rock as the safest bet. Damage to the jeep—broke the oil seal, dented the fan belt wheel, gave finishing blow to the already shot front springs, and put a 4" bend in the 2" by 2' steel bar that holds the front wheels in line. The jeep still ran, so I turned around and took it back to Freetown. The damage was fixed by Friday, but between a stolen battery, an uncooperative starter, and the fuel pump breaking down 3 more times before they decided it should be replaced instead of repaired, it was 10/28 before I made a successful leave taking.

While in Freetown I found a new boyfriend, a British fellow who works at Guma Dam. The major problem will be getting to Freetown to see him. There's no sense in his coming to Makeni since there is nothing to do here.

My roommates were going to have a surprise birthday party for me, but because of the accident I missed it. The party went on without me. But I had a cake anyway. The CARE director invited me to his house for dinner and had his cook bake me one.

About the election -- It was much more interesting following it from over here since we weren't supersaturated and were eager for all the sparse news we got. I hope they adopt Hubert Humphrey's suggestion about postponing the conventions and campaigning until September next time. Also I was very thankful I didn't have to listen to LBJ's speeches. They were schmaltzy enough reading them in the paper. One advantage of getting the Post by sea freight is that you can't get that upset about a crisis that occurred six weeks ago.

We now have a pet squirrel. I'm not worrying about losing Pounce, the kitten of my late cat, because the Temnes (the major tribe in this area of the country) don't eat cats. Pounce has just curled up in my lap which is her favorite resting spot whenever I'm trying to write. She likes to sleep in the top of my mosquito net which is now sagging precariously. We feed both animals tinned dog food.

For a while it looked like I'd be home for Christmas. There was no vehicle on the horizon for me to use. The PC rep was threatening to send me back to teaching in a girl's school. I would have considered a boy's school maybe, but girls again—never! Anyway the embassy has come through with the promise of a VW to arrive hopefully in the next two weeks.

NOTE: The VW did not materialize. I don't remember how or when I got the Land Rover I remember driving while delivering CARE food to the smaller schools in the northern third of the country, the hospital in Makeni, and the leper hospital near Magburaka. I was accompanied by a 'small boy' who unloaded the food at our various stops.

The regular delivery consisted of cartons of powdered milk, 5 gallon tins of cooking oil, and 100 lb. bags of bulghur wheat and rice. Occasionally there were specialty items, such as packages of lemon pie filling. These usually

occurred when a manufacturer had an item that was mislabeled, for example, and rather than tossing it they would donate it to CARE and take a tax write off.

I'm thoroughly enjoying my job—the travel, meeting new people, and the sense of finally doing something worthwhile, i.e., seeing that 2000 school kids get lunch and milk every day. I don't give demonstrations, but check to make sure that the supplies are available, records are being kept, there are proper store rooms and an adequate kitchen—generally 3 stones and a large iron kettle, and deal with any problems or complaints.

We've been invaded by driver (army) ants three times in the last three weeks. The first time I awoke at 4 a.m. to discover there was something in bed besides me. They had come in through the unscreened window and crawled up the inside of my mosquito net. I had stopped tucking the net under my mattress and had left it hanging down to the floor. They bite like hell. The generals and chiefs of staff have pincers as big as your little toenail. There were hundreds of thousands of them in the yard until 10 PM the following night. As a side line they drove a snake into the house. From the pictures and descriptions in our snake book, we couldn't decide if it was the harmless garden variety or the not so harmless hoodless cobra.

The second time we managed to turn them away at the door after they ate a couple pounds of potatoes by pouring kerosene on them. The third time we didn't feel like fighting. We took cat, squirrel, PJs, and our toothbrushes and moved out for the night. Supposedly they don't appear during the dry season.

The dry season is just about here. It now rains only once a week at night. The Harmattan winds from the Sahara are arriving. The temperature at 11 a.m. is 76, which is quite cool for here. The other day I put the thermometer in the direct sunlight and it shot up from 86 (normal daytime temp in the house) to 104. In the shade outside it was 96.

Last weekend some of the Makeni PCVs went up to Kabala, 76 miles north of here, to go mountain climbing. In the woods they kept hearing something grunting and woofing. When it charged the whole group climbed the nearest tree. A baboon appeared, viewed the spectacle, then turned and left.

