

My Piece of the Helen Burton Puzzle – A Progressive Revelation

By Donald Menzi

- 1943 -

My interest in Helen Burton started with a watercolor sketch by my grandmother, Gertrude Wilder, depicting a small shed next to the Weihsien concentration camp's wall, with the caption, "The White Elephant, where sugar was exchanged for shoes, sheets for shirts, etc."



There was also a reference in my grandfather's Weihsien diary dated Sept. 8, 1943: "We had another meeting and picnic supper under the awning at Helen Burton's exchange, where we discussed indemnities."

In September 1943 Helen was repatriated on the Gripsholm, as were my grandparents. She was mentioned in an October 23, 1943 news story from Murmagao, Goa, where the actual prisoner-exchange took place: "In the camp was an exchange shop started for barter purposes called 'The White Elephant's Bell' after Helen Burton's Camel's Bell Shop in Peking. Here a fur coat was exchanged for a can of jam, for instance, which shows the change of values one undergoes in a prison camp. After months of almost no sugar, the craving for something sweet becomes so great that almost anything would be given to attain some."

A Life magazine feature on the prisoner exchange contains a very

poignant photograph of Helen reading the letter in which she learned for the first time that her brother had died.

LETTERS FROM HOME were handed out in bundles on the *Gripsholm's* first day at sea, giving the repatriates their first news in many long months of friends and families. As they sat in rows along the deck, greedily reading their mail,

they learned that husbands were still alive, that sons were war heroes, that new nephews and nieces had been born. But some learned of friends missing in combat and Helen Burton (*below*) has just read in her letter that her brother has died.



I had posted these documents along with my grandparents' other Weih sien memorabilia on the web site "Weih sien-Paintings.org" generously maintained by former internee Leopold Pander, which has evolved into a home for anything and everything related to the Weih sien concentration camp.

- 2008 -

For a long time that is all I knew about Helen Burton. Then in 2008, I received the following email from Mitch Krayton:

"Several years ago, while attending an antiquarian book fair, we came upon the most incredible book that was the guest book of a The Camel Bell shop in Peiping (Peking, Pekin, Beijing). We purchased this tome, which is a leather bound volume (apx 12"x18"x6"), with corners of woven silk, brass hinge fittings (missing the locking pin) and is encrusted with many semi-precious stones. The shop had

been in the Grand Hotel de Peking, which was the largest and most modern hotel in the area and served as the major hotel for visitors of every rank and distinction.

“The Camel Bell (aka The Camel Bells, The Camel's Bell) was owned by Miss Helen Burton. My wife and I are researching the life of this incredible person and hope to put our findings into a book. The more we research, the more fantastic things we find out about the time, the place and the people she knew. Here is a bit of what we know...

“Born in 1891 in North Dakota, her father and brother both rose in state politics. She wanted to venture off to exotic places. She wound up in Peiping looking for secretarial work and it turns out she was a bit of an artist and entrepreneur. It was not long before she started her shop with candy, clothing, art and gifts of her design that she arranged to be made by locals. People from all over the world stopped by and signed her guest book. Others did a lot more: drawing, painting and writing poetry. There are photos and holiday cards, too. Hundreds of visitors are here (we are trying to catalog them all).

“She was very much the socialite and people would often stay with her in the city or at her summer home in the hills outside the city. She never married, but did adopt 4 Chinese girls who helped her run the shop.”¹

That same year Terri Stewart, whose great-aunt, Ruth Kunkel, was a close friend of Helen Burton's, sent me a copy of a wonderful letter that Helen had written to “Everybody” after she returned to Peiping in September 1948, which I have included at the end of my part of her story. In it she describes in detail a lavish party and other details of post-war Peiping that were reminiscent of the luxurious life that some people had lived there before the war. She also touches on the suffering that she saw on the faces of the ordinary Chinese around her.

- 2011 -

That's where the Helen Burton story stood for me until a few weeks ago, when Terri and I both received the following email:

“Hello, Terri and Donald:

¹ Zi Tan (see below) offers the following correction: “Mitch's email states that Helen adopted 4 Chinese girls to help her to run the Camel's Bell Shop. In fact, only the oldest one (Ma Yu Kwei) helped her to run the shop, others – the sisters Chang Tzu Ju and Chang Yu Tzu Yi (Zi's mother) and Mei Li – were too young at that time. She either sent them to school, kept them in her home, or brought them with her traveling around the world.”

"In the past few days, I am searching the web trying to find information about Helen Burton, who used to run the Camel's Bell shop at the Grand Peking Hotel in China, and also stayed in the Wei'Hsien Concentration Camp.

"From your email exchanges found at weihsien-paintings.org, it seems you may be related or know something about her. I know she passed away in 1971 in Honolulu so I am trying to find where she was buried. If you know anything about her life after she left the camp, please kindly let me know.

"Best Regards, Zi Tan"

In my reply, I asked Zi Tan what caused him to ask about Helen Burton. This was his response:

"Hi, Donald:

"I am actually the son of one of Helen's adopted daughters.

"When I was young, I was aware that my mother was adopted by an American woman. Because of the political environment in those years, my mother seldom talked about her past life with Helen because it might bring her troubles. In addition, she had completely lost connection with Helen since she left China in 1943 due to the cold war separation between US and China. For these reasons, I knew almost nothing about Helen except that she was a business woman.

"After the relationship between US and China was unfrozen, Helen's nephew, Cecil Burton, found my mother through General Stilwell's daughter (a long long story) so the connection was established, but unfortunately, Helen already passed away.

"In 1986, with Cecil's help, I came to US and went to Cal Poly Pomona to study for my master degree. After I graduated, I stayed in the LA area until now.

"Cecil passed away in 1987, and his wife, Betty Burton passed away a few years ago, but I still have contact with their son's family. However, during these years, I still didn't hear much about Helen.

"The visit of Cecil's son and his wife (who live in Cleveland) last week completely changed this. They brought us many things that used to belong to Helen. So far, I have not gone through all the stuff that they left me so I really can't tell what I have. The most valuable things include Helen's photo albums and her scrap book with tons of cut newspapers from those years. By scanning these materials, I am walking into Helen's life. My wife and I plan to gather this information, and introduce her remarkable life to people who love her.

“The reason I'm searching for Helen's cemetery info is that my mother is still alive (Helen's two older daughters passed away, and the youngest one, Mei Li, lost connection about 25 years ago). If I can find where Helen was buried, I would bring my mother over to see the place and pay a respect. If you have any clue, please kindly let me know.”

I immediately put Zi Tan and Terri in touch with Mitch Krayton, and the three of them are now sharing the information that each of them has about Helen Burton. I also emailed Catherine Mackenzie, who had posted an inquiry about Helen on Ancestry.com's message board way back in 2000, asking her if she was still interested in Helen Burton and suggesting that she get in touch with Zi Tan. He, however, had already contacted her, as she notes in the following response:

“Hello:

“I have recently jumped back very seriously into my China research, having been away from it for awhile as I got very involved in a time-dated Nazi art looting project. And, lo and behold, last week I got contacted by the individual you are talking about. It was incredible to find out that one of the daughters is still alive and that there are papers that have survived all these years. Since seeing a photograph of the four girls, in Manchu costume, which was used for a Christmas card in 1940, I have so often wondered what happened to them.

“I'm not sure why the person contacted me, but I offered to help if he wants to write about his adoptive grandmother. That is a woman about whom more should be known by the world!

“Cheers, Catherine”

Catherine's posting in 2000 had produced the following response from one of Helen's relatives by marriage, Edna Burton, which included Helen's 1971 obituary from The Sunday Star-Bulletin, Honolulu, July 11, 1971. :

“Hi Catherine

“I hope this info is a help to you. Helen was my husband's cousin.

** * * **

“During the 1920's and 1930's, Miss Burton was like the friend of Oriental royalty and outstanding Western figures of the age. Her Peking curio shop, The Camel Bell, was known around the world.

“She was born in Bismarck, ND, and set out on her career in her late 20's. She

first came to Honolulu in 1919 where she was employed in clerical work for the Chamber of Commerce. Among her duties, she had to send form answers discouraging young girls who wanted to come here to work, She liked to tell how on the back of these letters she would write, "I came and it worked out fine" or similar encouraging words.

"A year later, she began working for a titled Japanese family, whose daughter was marrying into the royal family. Her job was to tutor the bride-to-be in Western ways.

"After this six-month's assignment, Miss Burton moved to China where she worked a short time for news correspondent Upton Close and also for the China Electric Co.

"Her First business venture in Peking was for a candy factory in the Christmas season of 1921 to sell to the 10,000 stranded in Peking by the civil war. It met with little success, however, and when she heard tourists often asking where they could obtain the prized camel's bells as souvenir items, she decided to buy these in quantity, and to open a shop by that name.

"For 22 years she operated her Camel Bell Shop, and her guest list at the shop and at her home near the Forbidden City grew with treasures she acquired. She became well known to such personages as George Bernard Shaw, Alexander Woollcott, Pearl Buck, William Allen White, Will Durant, Lily Pons, and many others.

"In an interview at the height of her fame in China she said, 'Anyone could do what I have done. I like to work with these people. I feel I've just begun. There is so much yet that I haven't touched, so many languishing crafts that need to be stimulated, so many able workman who need only a market for their products to give them courage to continue.'

"During these years, Miss Burton raised four Chinese girls whom she often took on travels to the U.S. and throughout the Pacific. Usually they were passengers on the Empress of Britain, which contained a branch of the Camel Bell shop on board.

"Miss Burton served as a model for the principal character in the novel, Lady with Jade, by Margaret Mackay, in 1940.²

² The novel's dedication reads: "To Helen Burton with affectionate admiration." An author's note states, "The creative brilliance of Moira Chisholm [the main character] has been suggested by that of the well-known and much-beloved person to whom this book is dedicated – whom,

"Her career ended abruptly with the Japanese occupation of Peking. Herded off in a concentration camp on March 23, 1943, she became ill with pneumonia.

"In an interview 10 years later, she described the camp: Prisoners were allowed a little meat, soup and vegetables, she said, "We became quite accustomed to finding weevils in our food. We just pushed them aside and went on eating. We were hungry.

"I don't know why I was so lucky,' she said, 'but at the end of 1943 I was among those prisoners exchanged. The little money that I had hidden had been found by the Japanese, who searched us thoroughly. But I never believe in keeping all my eggs in one basket and some time before internment I had sent some of my stock to Honolulu and some to Rhode Island. How I wish I had sent more!"

"The possessions she sent formed the nucleus of her collection of Oriental treasures for which she became known here.

"She moved to her Black Point home here in 1944. After the war, she again visited Peking briefly and was temporarily reunited with the four girls. She never had the opportunity to reopen the Camel Bell, however, and after her return to Honolulu, she never saw the girls again.

"After the Communist forces assumed power in the country, Miss Burton learned one of the girls, Ma Yu Kwei, then a housewife with two children, was killed during a wave of political executions. She never again heard from the other three.

"Miss Burton lived relatively quietly in her final 25 years in Honolulu. and was known for a few exhibitions of Oriental textiles, jewelry, furniture and antiques. She occasionally traveled the world for as long as a year at a time, always with tasteful objects that dazzled her friends.

"In 1953, she said, 'I have a lighthouse mind. It revolves.'

"She is survived by two nephews, Cecil Loomis Burton of Cleveland, and Wayne M. Burton of Phoenix, NY."

. Unfortunately, it turns out that Helen's ashes were scattered over the sea near Honolulu, so there is no grave site at which Zi's mother can pay her respects to her own

however, she resembles in no other way. The character and the personal story of Moira are purely fictitious."

adopted mother.

Zi's wife Connie Li, is now planning to translate the material that Zi is collecting into Chinese and also to write Helen's biography so that more people in China will come to know and appreciate Helen Burton's love for and contribution to her adopted homeland, China.

None of this would have been possible without the existence of the Weihsien web site and email communication. Zi and his mother, Mitch, Terri, Catherine and I would have simply continued to live with our own individual pieces of the puzzle that are now being assembled to form a portrait of the remarkable woman named Helen Burton.

In the mean time, Helen speaks to us in her own distinctive voice in the following letter, which she wrote to her friends describing her return to Peiping in 1948



Helen Burton with two of her four adopted daughters, the sisters Chang Tzu Ju and Chang Tzu Yi, who is Zi Tan's mother

Peiping, China
September, 1948

Hello, Everybody!

By this time most of you know that I have been spending the summer in Woollcott's "Last Citadel of Leisure" -- Peking. It's an experience I shall always treasure but I find it hard to tell you the half that has made it the most thrilling of holidays. I can only hope that at times in telling of the mundane details some of the unpaintable joy will shimmer through and you will feel with me a bit of the mountain top excitement.

I'll begin with April, 1948, in Honolulu where I had been living since the end of 1944. At this time I began to book and cancel and book again to overtake the mirage of my private "I Shall Return" campaign - to Peking, I might add. The political situation at that time was a bit worse than usual and I had no desire to join my American friends in the salt mines of Siberia. Cleaning latrines in Weihsien for the citizens of the Land of the Rising Sun was enough for me of the non-American way of life. However, desire finally triumphed over the warning of friends and I found myself booked on the President Polk, sharing a beautiful cabin with Catherine Forbes, who was the owner of a round-the-world ticket on this deluxe floating hotel. En route we lingered a day or two at Yokohama and Shanghai but my destination was Hongkong where my third daughter, Chang Tsu Yi, married to Raymond Tan, was living. Raymond is a rising, I hope, young journalist on the Ta Kung Pao, one of the larger and more liberal Chinese dailies. Tsu Yi had met and captured the hapless Raymond the year before and they had spent their first months of wedded life in Peking. After a few months, Raymond's paper had transferred them to Hongkong and I was fortunate enough to be headed that way. There had been five long years of separation from my family - three husbands and two grandchildren had widened the family circle - unanswered questions had been hanging fire, and the interval had not been long enough to cool them.

Arriving in Hongkong the middle of May I found Tzu Yi blossomed into a full blown peony; pearly teeth - real pearls - which gave her a delightful smile, and sparkling eyes, her happiness made her so radiant that even a less lovely girl might have seemed glamorous. Her quite new husband Raymond soon endeared himself to his mother-in-law. At first he seemed extremely shy and let Tzu Yi chatter running away with the conversational ball, but his occasional dry and cryptic remarks

showed that he had a nice sense of humor with ability to meet the world half way. He is a graduate of Yenching University, Peking, and dreams by day and night of going to the School of Journalism in Columbia, Missouri, to work for his M.A. As he does not wish to leave Tzu Yi behind he does indeed have a knotty problem.

In Hongkong I found my old friends Alex and Maurine Grantham had become Sir and Lady and that Alex was Governor General. Maurine's brilliant little sister June Scott was living with them, and when they asked me to exchange my hotel room for the grandeur of Government House my acceptance was instantaneous. Maurine with the skill of a professional had turned the barnlike quarters left by the Japanese into a home of striking beauty, an oasis of delight for the hundreds of strangers who pass through its portals.

Living at Government House after being maid of all work in Honolulu was a luxurious contrast and filled my horizon with millions of pink clouds. My constant slave was a demure little Chinese amah uniformed in white with the smart coat of arms of Government House embroidered in red on her coat. When at the end of my stay she shyly peeped around the corner of the door as she was leaving and said, "Me have big heart for you," I felt at that moment that I had big heart for all the world.

One day at Government House, Lady Grantham had invited Tzu Yi and Raymond for tea. That, I might remark, was an exceedingly kindly gesture on the part of nobility, but Raymond squirmed under the honor. He finally blurted out - due probably to the British atmosphere - that his uncle was Consul General in London and had been for twenty years. There you get a sidelight on Raymond, If he had not been on a spot to contribute his bit to the conversation, he would never have considered this fact of enough importance for my ears.

Government House had been built, a large part of it, by the Japanese during the war, and the bathtubs in true Japanese style were lined with fine grained wood. One bon voyage gift of mine was a beautiful bottle of Mary Chess bath oil and each day as amah sprinkled this in my bath I noticed that the wood retained a bit of the elusive fragrance. The day I left, Cardinal Spellman and his party arrived as guests, and the good Cardinal was assigned my former bed and tub. I often wondered if while relaxing in his mysteriously scented bath he might not feel as if he were experiencing the subtle call of the East.

Highlights in retrospect of Government House: the stairway's white balustrade and crimson carpet, a stunning

portrait in the dining room of Lord Chief Justice Grantham, Alex's uncle, in scarlet robes of state - chairs and draperies chosen to match these robes; my first night when due to excitement I could not sleep but paced the terrace outside my window looking down on town and harbor lights glimmering like fireflies far below me; rising to drink the king's health in port at the end of a formal dinner; the little amah saying "Me have big heart from you."

The Bob Gordons were another big Hongkong event which I must pause before. He is Far Eastern manager for Eastman Kodak Company and you may do some hunting before you find a neater, trimmer, sweeter, a la Kipling family than Millie, Bob and three swell American kids. They smoothed my path with skill and kindness, and I shall always bless them. In Shanghai, Colonel Jimmie and Helen Jacobs were highlighters of my stay. We all had MY first Chinese feast after years of famine and that alone is enough to give one's stomach goose pimples (if it had been Peking duck I should say duck pimples).

After Hongkong the Butterfield Swire steamer Han Yang harbored me for ten quiet but satisfying days. We gave pause at Amoy and Foochow, the home of China's finest lacquer wares, some of which I took over in passing. Ten days and then Tientsin. The first exciting sight was that of C. S. Lo, the most faithful retainer the Lord ever created for any mortal. Next, Minnie Plath, a dear friend of those earlier days of my China story. Never sights more welcome! With sheer magic customs' formalities disappeared, and Lo, Minnie and I were on our way ready to book passage for Peking. However, when I reached the hotel I was met with a letter from my close friend Pearl Eastham informing me that she had braved the Communist area to go to Peitaiho and prepare a welcome for me in this summer resort where I often holidayed in the past. Having centered mind and heart on Peking for the past five years, it was a bit of a struggle to turn my back on this charmed town of Marco Polo. However, this I did and the next morning found me with Barry, Pearl's attractive husband, as guide and Lo as bodyguard headed for Peitaiho. All day we travelled packed tightly in with Nationalist soldiers, some gay, all curious and all hungry. Never a dull moment for one so long an exile from her well-loved China. The effort seemed nothing when at the day's end there was Pearl, her attractive seaside home, and more than adequately rewarding libations with food.

Three long sun soaked days by the sea, lingering at times by the billowing waves waiting for the fishermen to drag in their fruits; tramping over greening hills, recapturing memories of not

so long ago. Then an uneventful return to Tientsin. This territory is out-of-bounds for us so luckily it was uneventful, and another of my many but rather abbreviated prayers of gratitude was hastily sent on high just to let the Lord know that I was still aware that my bread had butter.

On the morning of June the tenth I rolled out of bed with the feeling that events of great moment were to break, where or how I could not sense at once but enough that they were on their way. Some part of me which had remained frozen to all the sounds, sights and even the smells of China now began to thaw, and deep currents of excitement stepped up my slow tempo almost to the bursting point. Within a few hours I would again pass through the crenellated walls of the ancient city of Kubla Khan and meet again the friends and family that had given such a deep meaning to many Peking years. Long had I dreamed of this day; first as a prisoner perched on the gatehouse roof of my Weishien prison as I gazed out over the grain fields of Shantung; then beside the violet green waters of Hawaii; always one dream of reunion in Peking. This moment would soon be mine. No wonder the little red blood corpuscles sang and the clamor of the song was almost more than I could bear. No wonder that the emotional wave bore me right through the ancient city walls and landed me still in one piece behind the palace gates of Ruth Kunkel's stately home. I found her complete with palace, courtyards, rooms raftered and pillared in the elegant style of old Cathay. My devoted friend Dorothy St. Clair was right on the spot and in her more modest Consulate home had gathered my three girls, two husbands, and two grandchildren for dinner in her courtyard.

I might stop here to record that the grandchildren would have none of me. They screamed with terror at my approach and no amount of whispered admonition could make them aught but entirely hostile. They thoroughly disapproved of this strange addition to their family circle and said they'd tell the World. However, everyone but grandma thought it a huge joke, so mirth was unconfined.

The day I came the Chinese students in huge processions were rioting against American imperialism. I accused my sons-in-law of instigating them. Not being as familiar as I with the hordes of jokes on the subject of mothers-in-law they were apparently a bit shocked at such a disrespectful idea.

I must go no further in this round-robin without more news of the years between. Both Ma and Tzu Ju had married. Ma had married a very pleasant young man by name Tsung Chow Chang, who

now has a little shop called the Jade Horse. They have one little son Chien Chung and expect another visit from Grandpa Stork in October. Ma herself is employed in the Marco Polo Shop, belonging to Arthur Porter, and is happy because of course she is entirely at home in this atmosphere. Tzu Ju married one James Liu, university graduate and a tutor of English. They have one little daughter, Mei Hung Liu, and here I pause again to tell you how Mei Hung received her name.

When attractive Keitha Aldrich stopped over in Honolulu en route to join her husband, Col. Harry Aldrich, in Peking, I told her that Tzu Ju had recently written me her big event was soon due. I asked Keitha to mother the child through this. When all had come to pass Tzu Ju behaved not in the usual manner of smart mothers but decided that without ostentation, fuss or feathers, she would seize this chance to sample the highly vaunted joys of a Home on High. A great loss of blood with no available replacement was her way out. Keitha was too smart for my young madame and getting her husband on the phone in less time than it takes to tell, two fine young American officers had volunteered the blood necessary to save Tzu Ju's life. In gratitude the daddy named his daughter Mei Hung, which is a play on words, meaning beautiful, red, American blood, so that she will never forget that it was fine American blood which saved her mama's life.

During my absence Tzu Ju seemed to have changed most of all the four girls. Her tongue, which was always clever but a bit too sharp for comfort, is of course still clever but greatly gentled. Sometimes I want to cry thinking that life won where I entirely failed. She is lovelier than ever with so much poise; always rebellious when the world offered her much, now that her path is thorny and her comforts few, she produces an understanding heart. Ma Yu Kwei, the eldest, in the eyes of my friends was always near perfection, and she has changed little. She adores her son, is devoted to husband Joe (Chow), and is ambitious to keep her slippery place in the sun. Never a friend of olden days comes to town without a royal welcome from Ma Yu Kwei. For me it's a flower, a bit of fruit, an old embroidery, a call - always a different way to say I love you. She is quite a girl and I am more than proud. Lo and Tzu Ju report each day. Lo is my "Dollar a Year" man and this invested dollar has brought me a gold mine of devotion. He is my oldest remaining employee and now with his brothers has a corner shop in the Grand Hotel de Peking. Lo and Tzu Ju run errands, mail parcels, shop, go sightseeing with me and on picnics - they are indeed a devoted pair of aides de camp. To have at my disposal all the service in

the world as free as the sun, moon and stars, when for three years my aid had been chiefly measured in hours and dollars, is something which has caused me gloatings of awe and gratitude. For years I had not been able to bawl out a single soul; now I scold and admonish to my heart's desire. I little realized how I had missed freedom of speech. I had been surrounded by friends - grand ones too - but if you did not like the things they did it was a better world for you if you held your tongue. Now I suffer no such restraint. This is my family, these my girls, and if they do not like a scolding mother, the Lord is indeed cruel. I'm afraid too often I make up for lost time, but their unfailing good humor makes me realize that life must have been more of a hellion than I.

The baby of the family, the fabulous Pu Mei Li (Mary Burton), is now a slender young woman of thirteen. During her vacation days she lived with me in Palace of Ruth [Kunkel], and for her diversion she had tutors, both morning and afternoon. The war had upset her school and home life to such an extent that now in the Methodist Mission School she must buckle down to a bit of rear-hand study. We added parties, movies, and picnics, so life was not all work for little Mary Burton. A bicycle has been promised if she makes her grades next year, so I'm really expecting a showing from this pert miss. Her teachers report great latent strength - a born leader, as they say - and the children about her submit to her commands as readily as the masses are swayed by any dictator. Let us pray that hers will be a benevolent dictatorship at least.

This summer the lotus as usual filled the lakes and canals of Peking although it did seem that this year they were a bit bigger and better than before. After walking hand in hand with a dream, as the demoded song warbles, a dream of returning to see the lotus once more in palace lakes, no eloquence of mine could recapture the thrill of our reunion. Their beauty stunned me; their lush color and simplicity of form exceeded memories cultivated by those passing years. Wait until you lean over a marble balustrade and look long and silently into their deep rose hearts. This fall in revisiting the Summer Palace with June Scott we discovered that after the lotus fade, their beautiful green leaves in great masses produce an aroma literally fit for the gods. Strange, when the lovely flowers have none.

I'll go back once more to Mr. Lo, who is one of the reasons why so many of us admire the Chinese race. With his help I've had the fun of doing a bit of creative work. One day he brought me hundreds of old white jade Manchu earrings and I made

chokers of distinction, hanging them on a woven silver chain and producing a bit of jewelry of which some of you would heartily approve. Another day he found a collection of old blue enamel plaques - all sizes and shapes. I made belts, buttons and pins which should appeal to those who love the touch of blue in unusual jewelry. The first day I arrived, Lo greeted me with a pair of tortoise shell and ivory bird cages, Chien Lung³ as to age, breathless as to beauty. Much too grand for even a golden oriole, but it's fun to feel that once upon a time there were tenants worthy of such glamour. I accused Lo of hoarding these for me through the weary years as I had never seen before cages of such interest. He never denied it, and so my case rests. Today a silver obi brocaded in carnelian and blue fish arrived. Before noon it had become place mats for a tiffin party for friend June. A month ago Lo found a collection of cheap and exotic little embroidered bags. These became jewel boxes for future homes for beads and bracelets. It's so thrilling always to be meeting on every hand specimens of the golden age of Chinese art. Nice to live close enough to this age so one can still grab a few samples.

The first day of my arrival merchant friends of the past filled to overflowing our courtyards with lacquer, silk, jade, and jewelry. They wanted to let me know that beauty had survived the ravages of both time and war. The old mimosa tree in the courtyard was my constant joy, flowering with feathery pink blossoms. I breakfasted each morning under the pink showering veil above us. Started so auspiciously, no day could fail to please. While the courtyards were havens of peace and beauty, the dusty hutongs or streets contained many people with faces etched deep with suffering. At times this seemed so overpowering that in sheer frustration I was tempted to turn my back on China and her heartbreak; but on other days the sun shone and the people were gay - they are a joyous race by nature and ills that would flatten the morale of us and co-like tissue are borne by them with amazing stoicism. Their dignity under suffering is unbelievable.

Another old retainer who has added much to my pleasure and poundage is my old cook, Wang. He had a job when I arrived but felt it one not worthy of his skill, so he dropped it quickly and appeared on my doorstep. Eleven or twelve long years he had been kept by me in a glass case, as it were. Other servants might come and go but my cook, never! Recipes collected from the four

³ Qianlong, (1711-1799) sixth emperor of the Manchu dynasty.

corners and seven seas were handed over to his skilful administrations. He contained too much knowledge for me to allow any personal temper spasm to endanger my hold. He was badly in need of a holiday so I kept him as part-time assistant to Ruth's big clever cook, Tu. The dishes that those two devils sent to our table through the summer months have left a permanent record of pounds and future penance.

The time has come, the Walrus said, to talk of Chinese food. I promise not to be too cruel. I'll pass lightly over the glaced quality of sugary sweet-sour pork tid-bits, the duck livers, dipped before you eat them in a special ground salt-pepper arrangement found only in China, won ton soup, the most of the most of any chicken soup, with bits of meat dumplings wrapped in a delicate paste that dissolved on your tongue, chicken velvet, breast beaten to a pulp, whipped with egg whites, and fried in deep fat, fish superbly broiled in a syrup of ginger, brown sugar, garlic and vinegar, young walnuts peeled and fried in sugar, miniature ears of corn cooked with ham and chicken broth. As I write I know your withers are wrung, as a friend of mine would say. Please forgive. I won't even tell you of Peking duck. There are tears in my eyes as I write. Come on over and try it all first hand.

As my Peking holiday nears an end, the days grow cooler and sparkle with autumn sunshine, while the beauty is so poignant that the article passing for the soul of Helen B., grows lighter, crescendoing in frog-like jumps. Right now we have a stimulating guest in the person of Evelyn Mott-Smith of Tai Wan. Husband Bob was given a fine post with the Tai Wan Sugar Corporation so Evelyn joined him complete with children two. My gay hostess Ruth Kunkel met Evelyn on a recent holiday in Tai Wan and lured her to Peking. We wish all guests could bring with them the intelligent and eager interest found in Evelyn. Of course she is simply on tiptoe with delight. As we were riding along the streets today in our three-wheeled rickshas she called back, "Wish you could feel the way I do now," and I replied "I was sitting back in my ricksha envying you with all my heart." You remember your first impressions of Peking with as great nostalgia as you do your first love. Nothing ever quite erases either.

The occasion of our trip today was a picnic visit to the Forbidden City with Dorothy and Ruth and our guest Evelyn. One does not usually picnic in the sacred garden of the Empress Dowager but six years ago Dorothy and I had stolen in when the forsythia, lilac, and mei hua were rioting in colored orchestration in these sacred grounds. We had stolen up complete

with sandwiches to the marble table set at the pinnacle of a glorious rock garden overlooking the yellow roofs of the Imperial City. We had never forgotten, and had never returned. Today the fall colors were almost as stimulating as the more violent bloom of spring. While I'd like to carry on I feel now I might well fold away these pictures to be saved for those dull intervals that arrive to heighten our appreciation of past delights.

With Evelyn's arrival the Peking merchants again swarm. Our courtyards are full of fabulous silks, jades and jewelry. These men will hang on until they have siphoned all of her gold and then, like Arabs, they will silently steal away. It's a curious thing about them: long before you have come out of your golden buying glow, they sense the state of your finances and don't care to be caught holding the sack. The hordes that have clamored like bloodhounds for the first end last of your gold have vanished and your courtyards, once full of treasures, are murmuring pools of silence, this murmuring being done by your good selves when you realize what all this adds up to. Yes, give me a Peking merchant every time rather than a banker to let me know that the bottom of the flour bin has been scraped.

Since I was at last on the ground I decided it best to take a few household treasures to Honolulu. All summer Lo has been busy with packers, and twenty-three cases have been turned over to the shipper. That, I might add, caused tremendous sighs of relief from all as it seemed an endless chore. Jumping around a bit with information, I have just bought a small corner of an old palace. Two or three roofs of fine old wood, with great supporting columns, and a spot for two courtyards were included in this purchase made from the Dominican Fathers. To seal the bargain they came over to the house with deeds and I served them coffee and glasses of fine old peach brandy, which the Duke of Windsor long ago had discovered in Budapest. It was so publicized that I bought a few bottles -- long, long ago -- and one bottle has survived the Japanese visitation. Someday I'll use this land to build a modest dwelling with palace roofs and live happily ever after.

I was much relieved to return and although I do not sigh again for those "good old days," I find that glamour can still be plucked out of the blue. Tomorrow night we are planning a moonlight courtyard dinner for the Granthams, who are holidaying here. Maurine thought that since they must partake of our hospitality this would be the least painful form. The gold lacquer furniture will be carried into the courtyard and Evelyn is going to mass shaded crimson coxcomb in the center of the

table - she is a flower arranger who merits attention and certainly we are not going to overlook this convenient talent. The iced Cointreau grape cocktails will be served in antique Russian enamel cups. The vichyssoise has Chien Lung bowls with jade Jensen cactus patterned silver soup spoons to heighten the charm of its cool smoothness. Smoked fish with Hollandaise will be served on seafood plates from Japan. The de-boned squab in a nest of shredded potatoes has Ming feast plates for its temporary home, while the sherry pudding - an ultra ultra dessert - will have to worry along in celadon green glass bowls. After that we take our rickshas and travel to Walter Bosshard's courtyard where cafe diable will be served in alabaster cups with silver Russian enamel trays. Most of this service is for sale in the shops of our various merchant friends, chiefly that of Mr. Lo and Brothers, Inc. However, they seem more beautiful borrowed for the occasion, because they represent the affection and confidence of our Chinese dealers.

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This is the morning after the party and I am still a bit dazed. I guess it's a beauty hangover. Our courtyard, always alluring, reminded me of an attractive woman you have seen only in sports clothes who suddenly appears in a dazzling evening gown and sables. Ruth had colored lights hidden among the rocks; red silk lanterns with gold characters, white silk lanterns with red characters lighted dimly but effectively every nook of the courtyard. The gold lacquer table was magnificent with the massed flower arrangement of Evelyn Mott-Smith. The flowers looked like an exotic brocade. The place mats were cleverly painted in butterflies and flowers, the work of a Chinese artist. A full moon and a tinkling fountain gave the last touch. Everyone moved as if bewitched, pro tem at least, as no one wanted to leave either the table or courtyard. Maurine politely claimed that this was THE highlight of a perfect holiday, and I felt extremely smug over the combined success of our efforts: Evelyn's, Ruth's, the moon's, and mine.

Now that it is time to think of bringing this letter to a close I am beginning to like my job. It took me all summer and many little reproachful notes from my friend Gertrude Fusfeld of Honolulu to get me under way. She is really the sufferer thereby because it returns to her to be duplicated as she sees fit and sent out. As much as the beauty of the courtyard bemused me, I am even more dazzled by the amazingly efficient handling of my small but annoying business problems in Honolulu by this same hapless Gertrude, feeling that whatever happens she is much more adequate

to meet the situation that has caused me to cancel for the moment my return to Honolulu. Evelyn paints Tai Wan (Formosa) as an island of great beauty and economical living. No horde of Peking merchants around to tear the lining out of one's purse; quiet beauty, magnificent fruit - but of all this I will report in my next. Bless you all for your letters which I fear have gone unanswered perhaps in a meager measure this will compensate. My plans are now to leave Peiping October 1st, linger a few days in Shanghai and then on to Formosa (Tai Wan) when further words should come from me. If ever a letter winged away burdened with understatement, this is IT. I have purposely skirted situations which seem unsolvable to the point of heartbreak. To me the answers are hidden with the fifth dimension. I've touched very lightly on my own personal activities for a few slippery months - I've tried to hug them tight but they all by-passed me rapidly. I can only pray that many of you may savor the joy of a Peking Holiday. It's worth waiting for.



Addendum - Honolulu, December, 1948.

I did leave Peking by plane October 1st, winging slowly over those fabulous golden roofs of the Forbidden City. However, arriving in Shanghai I parked with lovely Helen Jacobs while I waited for a freighter - the Kyska of the Waterman Line. Then by slow way of Hongkong, Manila, Kobe and Yokohama, I arrived in Honolulu thirty days later. No sooner had I arrived than the Far Eastern situation took a turn for the worse and hell seemed literally a-poppin'. Never was a holiday in better timing than mine. When I left Peking I had no feeling of the immediate closing in of the Communists and was hardly prepared for the sudden evacuation of so many friends. It seems very wise to postpone my winter in Tai Wan until another day. In Honolulu matters seem brighter than in the Far East. Anna of Vienna, a very talented designer, is featuring my antique Chinese brocades and embroideries, and Don the Beachcomber's luncheons are sold out weeks in advance when she gives her style showing. The shipping strike is over and friends from the mainland and Far East are planning holidays here, so the present moment is full of promise for delightful reunions. I know a circular letter of this manner does not deserve anything but a like reply, but that will suit me fine just as long as some of you break prolonged silences

and others forgive similarly prolonged silences on my part. A very happy holiday season and blessings on each and every head.



Helen Burton with Chang Tzu Yi