

NARCISSA DECEMBER 1836

by Crystal Calhoun



Rev. Mrs. H.K.W. Perkins,
Willamette.

WALLA WALLA, Dec. 5, 1836

My Dear Mother:

I have been thinking of my beloved parents this evening; of the parting scene, and of the probability that I shall never see those dear faces again while I live. Sweet as it used to be, when my heart was full, to sit down and pour into my mother's bosom all my feelings, both sad and rejoicing; now, when far away from the parental roof, and thirsting for the same precious privilege, I take my pen and find a sweet relief in giving her my history in the same familiar way. Perhaps no one else feels as I do. It would be, indeed, a great satisfaction to me to have my mother know how I do from day to day- what my employment and prospects are-but more especially the dealings, the kind dealings of my Heavenly Father towards us continually.

We left Vancouver Thursday noon, Nov. 3rd, in two boats-Mr. McLeod, myself and baggage in one, and Mr. S. in the other. We are well provided for in everything we could wish-good boats, with strong and faithful men to manage them; indeed, eight of them were Iroquois Indians, from Montreal-men accustomed to the water from their childhood, and well acquainted with the dangers of this river. Mr. McLeod's accompanying us was as unexpected as desirable. He only came into Vancouver two days previous to our leaving, from an expedition to the Umpqua, south of the Willamette. It rained some that afternoon, also on the 4th and 5th; the 6th it rained all day, nearly, and the wind was very strong, but in our favor, so that we kept our sail up most of the day. Our boat was well covered with an oilcloth. At night, when a great fire was made, our tents pitched and the cloth spread for tea, all was pleasant and comfortable. I rolled my bed and blankets in my India-rubber cloak, which preserved them quite well from the rain, so that nights I slept warm and comfortable as ever. My featherbed was of essential service to me in keeping my health this rainy voyage. Did not expect to get one when I wrote from Vancouver.

On the morning of the 7th we arrived at the Cascades, made the portage and breakfasted. Had considerable rain. The men towed the boats up the falls, on the opposite side of the river. The water was very low, and made it exceedingly difficult for them to drag the boats up, in the midst of the rocks and noise of the foaming waters. Sometimes they were obliged to lift the boats over the rocks, at others go around them, to the entire destruction of the gum upon them, which prevents them from leaking. It was nearly night before all were safely over the difficult passage, and our boats gummed, ready for launching.

8th. - Breakfasted just below The Dalles. Passed them without unloading the boats. This was done by attaching a strong rope of considerable length to the stern of the boat, two men only remaining in it to guide and keep it clear of the rocks, while the remainder, and as many Indians as can be obtained, draw it along with the rope, walking upon the edge of the rocks above the frightful precipice. At the Little Dalles, just above these, the current is exceedingly strong and rapid, and full

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of whirlpools. Not recollecting the place particularly, at the request of the bowsman I remained in the boat, being quite fatigued with my walk past the other Dalles. It is a terrific sight, and a frightful place to be in, to be drawn along in such a narrow channel between such high, craggy, perpendicular bluffs, the men with the rope clambering sometimes upon their hands and knees upon the very edge, so high above us as to appear small, like boys. Many times the rope would catch against the rocks and oblige someone to crawl carefully over the horrible precipice to unloosen it, much to the danger of his life. When my husband came up, in passing this place, the rope caught in a place so difficult of access that no one would venture his life to extricate it, for some time. At last, an Indian ventured. When he had ascended sufficiently to unfasten it, he was unable to return, and did not until he was drawn up by a rope. They had another accident which threatened both the lives of some of them, and the property, and but for the protecting hand of God would have been lost. While the men with the rope were climbing up a steep and difficult ascent, the rope lodged upon a rock, which held it fast, and had it remained there until all hands had gained their point and commenced hauling, all would have been well; but one of the men above prematurely shoved it off. The current took the boat down stream rapidly, in spite of every effort to save it, prostrating all hands upon the rocks, and some of them were nearly precipitated down the precipice by the rope. The boat received no injury, but was safely moored below The Dalles, on the opposite shore. Our husbands, with the men, obtained an Indian canoe and crossed to the boat. Thus they were preserved. It was just night as we succeeded in passing this difficult place in safety, for which we desired to be grateful. Many boats have been dashed to pieces at these places, and more than a hundred lives lost. The water was very low at this time, which makes the danger much less in passing them. No rain to-day. Thursday we made the portage of the chutes, and were all day about it. While on land, had several heavy showers. Friday, also, was another soaking-wet day; the night, too. This was dreary enough. Saturday was much more pleasant-no rain. We arrived at Walla Walla early Sabbath morning, in health, with all our effects preserved to us, mercifully. I felt that I had great cause to bless and praise God, for so seasonable a return, and under such favorable circumstances. Husband come from our location on the 18th. Had succeeded in making a comfortable place for me, but because of Mr. Pambrun's earnest solicitation for me to remain a few weeks with his family. I did not return with him. Mr. and Mrs. P. are exceeding kind-appear to feel that they cannot do too much to make us contented and happy here. In the meantime, I am cheerfully engaged in teaching the wife and daughter to read. We consider it a very kind providence to be situated near one family so interesting, and a native female that promises to be so much society for me. She is learning to speak the English language quite fast. Mr. and Mrs. S. left Walla Walla for their location, on the 22nd of November, Mr. Gray going with them to assist in building, etc. This dear sister goes very cheerfully to her location, expecting to live in a skin lodge until her house is built; and this, too, in the dead of winter; But she prefers it to remaining here, and so should I.

Heard from husband last week, and of the death of Hinds, a colored man who came with us from Rendezvous on account of his health, being far gone with the dropsy. Already death has entered our

house, and laid one low.

Dec. 8th. - Received intelligence that husband was coming tomorrow to remove our effects and myself to our new home. It is an agreeable thought to be so near a fixed location after journeying so long.

Dec. 26th. - Where are we now, and who are we that we should be thus blessed of the Lord? I can scarcely realize that we are thus comfortably fixed, and keeping house, so soon after our marriage, when considering what was then before us. We arrived here on the tenth-distance, twenty-five miles from Walla Walla. Found a house reared and the lean-to enclosed, a good chimney and fireplace, and the floor laid. No windows or door except blankets. My heart truly leaped for joy as I alighted from my horse, entered and seated myself before a pleasant fire (for it was now night). It occurred to me that my dear parents had made a similar beginning, and perhaps a more difficult one than ours. We had neither straw, bedstead or table, nor anything to make them of except green cottonwood. All our boards are sawed by hand. Here my husband and his laborers (two Owyhees from Vancouver and a man who crossed the mountains with us), and Mr. Gray, have been encamped in tents since the 19th of October, toiling excessively hard to accomplish this much for our comfortable residence during the remainder of the winter.

It is indeed, a lovely situation. We are on a beautiful level-a peninsula formed by the branches of the Walla Walla river, upon the base of which our house stands, on the southeast corner, near the shore of the main river. To run a fence across to the opposite river, on the north from our house-this, with the river, would enclose 300 acres of good land for cultivation, all directly under the eye. The rivers are barely skirted with timber. This is all the woodland we can see; beyond them, as far as the eye can reach, plains and mountains appear. On the east, a few rods from the house, is a range of small hills, covered with bunchgrass-a very excellent food for animals, and upon which they subsist during winter, even digging it from under the snow.