



Transcript

Correspondence from Edna Nelson, 1915-1916,
A994.058.011

A994.058.011 (1) letter

Box 146, Sta. D.
West Toronto, June 21, [1915]

Dear Edith,

Was so pleased to receive your and your mother's letters Saturday eve, and to know all was well up there. Am enclosing George's letters excepting his last one last week because it has personal references that I know he would like no other eyes but mine to see. Will keep any such letters as these to read to you when I go up. As you see his letters are all cheery and hopeful. The dear boy is brave right through to the core. He must have his lonesome longings as we do but never discloses the fact. If ever a woman had a husband to be more than proud of it is I. These letters are sufficient proof of that. And if ever a mother and father could be excused for love and pride of their boy, it is your mother and father.

Oh Edith, I wish your mother and all of you in fact could share in the comfortable assurance God has given me in last few months. The struggle within me was terrific, no one knows, until it gradually came upon me. I can now leave George to God and know that He will either safely send him home to us or give us the strength to bear what otherwise He has in store for us. It is wrong, sinful for us to worry about things that are in God's control, and I know if we doubt Him and His good judgements, He will take means to punish us as we would our children when they are unduly naughty. So, Edith, learn to leave George's care to Him and give over worry. Work will never kill anyone but worry will in short time.

Wrote Tosey last night about making things right in time to send George word of it for he worries about it more than you think. Will write your mother again soon. Georgie is walking all over and beginning to talk. Geraldine is fine but gets very lonesome for Daddy. George is still in Hythe, Edith, and knows nothing of when they leave. That was a misunderstanding about them being in France. Hughes meant that they were all across the Ocean. Now, Edith, am sending you these letters and of course I want you all up there to read them. I want you, however, to see that they are kept intact and return to me as early as possible, as I read and reread them. Am

enclosing large envelope to return in.

Loads of love to all,
Lovingly yours, Edna

A994.058.011 (2) postcard

Postmarked Orillia, Ontario, July 28, 1915

Hello, Edith

Will this do instead of a letter for a few days? Am having a real nice time. Orillia is a pretty place and Mrs. D. and I have much in common, so that my visit has been a big help. The kiddies are splendid. Geraldine is in bathing every other day and Babe makes herself at home everywhere. George is touring England Scotland for a week. It is his first holiday. He seems well, but very tired.

Loads of love, Edna

A994.058.011 (3) letter

Box 146, Sta. D
West Toronto
Aug. 15, [1915]

Dear Edith:

Received your card and was very, very sorry to know you have been sick. Whatever you do now, take good care of yourself. Keep Ethel Carson till end of season and take things easier as that is a trouble that is almost sure to return on some people. I have heard of cases that never have any further trouble though. Do not under any consideration allow the doctors to talk operation. Down here in city if they know they can get their money without trouble, they are advising operations in every shape and form. They are doing so much for soldiers' families free of charge, and besides, with worry of war, people are forgetting to feel around themselves for ailments that the medical profession are nearly starved out, and to better themselves they work in operations where money is sure. Why, we had an operation in the house here a week ago yesterday, that really I could not see any need for. Mrs. Stone was operated on for womb trouble and here they are, not finished paying last winter's bills and face to face with another hard winter with this added weight of a doctor's bill. I call it a shame. I had told her what to take "Pierce's Favorite Prescription" but she thought it too expensive to buy and submitted to the doctor's way, which in the long run will be much, very much more so. She had no one to

nurse her but what I could do for her, and he was home a couple of days with her. However she is up and around now.

Have just got my wee girl to sleep. I hardly know what I am writing when she is up and about. Really, Edith, you would be surprised at the difference in her now. She is big and strong and so active, yet she is the cutest, most winsome wee dear one could wish for. I wish George could see her now. At times I can see him in her as plainly as can be. My big girl is just about same as ever, on the "go" all day long. Still, she is a good girlie too, and a big comfort to her mamma. If it were not for my two girls I do not know where I would be, Edith. They are all in all. Am sending you a couple of George's last letters and also photographs. Will send photos to your mother – one for each of you. They are not as good as I expected but was glad to get them anyway. Am also getting some more films developed for all of you of Premier Borden's review of Second Division. Are any of you coming down for Exhibition? If you could come for last week I would go home with you for a month. If there is a ticket issued from there here cheaper than single fare, get me one from there and I can return on it. I will settle with you here as it might save a dollar or so anyway to me. I want to take the bird to grandma, as he has got to be more than I can stand in the house, and the puppie George promised Tosey. So you see with my two girls I have a wee bit more than I can manage alone. However I want you to come down anyway. Could you not take turns, and some come first week and some second. Talk it over amongst yourselves and let me know.

The war looks no better from what to put me through the day. Tis nearly five months now since last I saw my boy, and my very being calls for him. It seems so much worse as it draws nearer his time to go to France. Still, Edith, in spite of all, I feel certain and he feels certain he is coming home all right. Let us hope and pray it may be so.

Now I must close, as I have yet to write my love letter. Had a cable message day before yesterday and got quite a shock. However it was business arrangements about property so all was well.

Loads of love to all, Your loving sister, Edna

A994.058.011 (4) letter

Box 146, Sta. D
West Toronto, Aug. 16, [1915]

Dear Mother:

Am sending you by this mail photos of George taken in Folkstone, England. There is one each for you, Edith and Tosey. They are not as good as I would like. George was much disappointed with them. Still we are all glad I know to get even half a glimpse of a face we all love dearly. Am sending Edith by this same mail some of my letters from George that I want you all to see. Then too, I want you to save your letters for me to read when I go up. Are you planning to get down for Exhibition? Do your best to come. The trip will do you good. If someone is down during the last week and if the excursion ticket is cheaper than single fare, I want whoever comes to buy me a ticket there so that I can go back on it. I promise if someone comes down to go back with them for a month. I know it will do the children good after the heat here. We have had loads of rain but the atmosphere has been very heavy and close.

How did your crops survive that awful storm? I have often wondered about them. The farmers down here have lost heavily. The wheat has grown 4 inches in stook and is still wet. The farmers who have lots of stock to feed the damaged grain to will come out all right, but the trouble is so much stock has been sold out and they cannot use the grain to any advantage. The children are doing well, though. Baby had a real sick spell last week. Her fever went up every night for three days and at end of that time she was too weak to walk. She soon picked up though, and now is fine. She is a great big white angel. Everyone admires her wherever she goes. Geraldine has had mumps but is OK again. Baby slept with her every night and shows no sign of them as yet. I hope she escapes. Geraldine often asks to go up to Grandma's.

George had such a lovely trip through England and Scotland, though as you will see by his letter, he is not much struck on Scotland. He used to be such an advocate of the Scotch. He says the war is going all right. I wish we could think so, but of course we never hear the inside news, just what the papers guess at. Milton Aitken and someone named Cleave were spending a couple of days with George when he wrote last. Milton is a Sergeant now – a fine looking fellow. George says he has been mentioned in dispatches and almost got a Distinguished Conduct medal. He was on his way to front the day after George wrote.

How is everyone keeping this summer? Say, I quite forgot to send that tea money but will take it with me when I go up. That is carelessness on my part. Am taking Dickie up with me. I do not know whether he has lost his voice or not but thought he would be better if put with another singer. He has got such a screech that I cannot stand him in these small rooms. I think it is from so many sparrows around here.

Well, must close. Love to all, Yours lovingly, Edna

A994.058.011 (5) postcard

Cranston's Ivanhoe Hotel,
London: Bloomsbury Street, W.C.
Mar. 6, 1916

Dear Edith:

Arrived safe and sound last night. George met us here in London. In Liverpool we had no trouble as train was right at boat. Babe contracted a heavy bronchitis and is under doctor's care here in hotel. Otherwise we came through fine. The children were better sailors than I by far. I missed my meals for a whole week, never in dining room once in that week. George looks well for what he has been through. A rifle grenade went right through the centre of his hand. He will be in hospital two weeks more, and then we expect to have a month at least together. Some doctors think his hand will be stiff four or five months before he can use it. Hope you are doing better.

Loads of love from all. Lovingly, Edna

A994.058.011 (6) letter

Eversfield, Ember Lane
Esher, Surrey
March 18 1916

Dear Friends

You will no doubt be looking for word long ere this. Have been so very, very busy house hunting (and it's is a dreadful job here) that I have had no time for anything. Have written about twenty-five or more letters in connection and made short trips, but at last have succeeded in getting what I am sure will suit at above address though we will not be in it until about the time you receive this - March 30th. At present we are rooming - two bedrooms and a sitting-room - in a suburb of London, Wimbledon by name. Came out here yesterday and expect George and Major Emmerton-to leave hospital on Monday to come and live with us for about six weeks. Won't that be fine?

The hotel was no place for children and if I told you what we paid for the time we were there (less than two weeks) you would be shocked. The children made it count up so. We are so comfortable here and so much less expense that I wish we had come sooner. Then too we are

so anxious to have George with us and this is so much healthier than London. Georges' hand is doing remarkable well, is nearly all healed over and he is going to have full use of it again. The massage treatment is taking all the stiffness out. All I am afraid of now is that it is doing too well and he will go back too soon. Col. Wigle is holding his position open for him and I cannot persuade him to ask for the "leave" that is his by right after being wounded. George always did study others more than himself. However, the war is looking better than ever now and though not much expressed the general opinion now is for an early ending. Some think June, others a month or so later.

George looks well but gets tired very easily. I think his nervous system is out of order, but he and Major Emmerton think not. He says it is from the nerves of the hand being injured. From the shock of the injury one of the bones of the wrist were put out of place and overlap another bone. They found this out just this week by x-ray but hope that massage will cure it. I think though when he gets his hand out of the bandages and sling that he will find it much stiffer than he thinks. It amuses him now to be able to wiggle his middle finger, the one in which the bone (in the hand) was so badly smashed. I have not seen his hand as yet but when I do I threaten to irritate it in some way to keep him longer in going back.

Major Emmerton looks real well, fat, hale and hearty though he suffers dreadfully in damp weather from rheumatism. He will not be able to go back until hot weather and may not then stand it. I do wish, and he wishes very much too, that Mrs. Emmerton would risk the ocean trip and come over. She is afraid of the water - I never thought of that myself, my only desire being to reach George. He will stay with us as long as George is with us. The house we rented (furnished) is very, very nice and so prettily situated. It is in a quiet residential street, one of a picturesque row of houses.

Both front and back of it are large tracts of golf links and common. The house itself has one of the loveliest gardens at the back one could wish to see - green grass, gravel walk, shaped flower gardens, arch of roses, small vegetable garden, fruit trees. Will send you some snaps as soon as possible. It is three stories high. I do wish you could see the way they fix their windows here. It makes their houses cosy inside and out. The picturesque way they build too makes such a difference. Our houses in Canada seem like mere boxes in comparison, here they combine beauty and use, and I guess find it quite as cheap and so much more pleasing. It is that makes the country so pretty. Then there [sic] gardens and lawns too, no dirty back yards anywhere to be seen.

The price of living is dreadful here. Beef steak is 60 cents a lb., sugar can scarcely be had at all (11 cents a lb.), buns or cakes of any kind are 2 cents apiece, tea is 60 cents, coal is dear and we from Canada use so much for we cannot stand the cold as the people here, and must keep fires

in the grate in whatever room we sit or sleep in (a grate in every room). I paid 37cents a day for fire in my grate in hotel.

Have seen nothing much of London yet. Baby was in bed for nearly a week and I spent the next week house hunting. But now that we are nearly settled will look around. But now that we are nearly settled will look around. We can get to London from here for 12 cents, so will look around while George is with us.

Now I must close. Will write Tosey or Edith next. Love to all from all.

Lovingly Yours,
Edna

A994.058.011 (7) letter

Eversfield, Emberlane,
Esher, Surrey,
May 2, 1916

Dear Edith,

No doubt you will have lost patience with me by now for being so negligent but really the time has flown. It seems just like yesterday we landed and here it is nigh on two months. George and Major Emmerton are away to attend "Medical Board" this morning and I feel so anxious I had to do something so at last settled down to write. They receive their "sentence" either a further leave of absence or to report at Folkesline tomorrow prior to sailing direct for France. I fear George will leave at once, in fact I know he will, as he is determined to turn every stone to get there. He is getting special mention as to his fitness for service from the Doctors at Hospital and Col. Wigle is here in city to help him through as he is determined to get him back, he misses him so much. Otherwise he would have got a further leave of six weeks.

He has had so little time with us as he attended hospital quite regularly until last week. His hand is healed over nicely but of course will leave quite a scar. The wrist however is very weak and I fear he will often find trouble with it. He cannot raise himself with it nor rest much on it, and cannot even close his fingers in a grip yet. For example, yesterday he tried to sharpen his pencil and could not hold the knife, so you see if he were like some men trying to "slide out of things" as so many Military officers are doing too, he could easily get three months' leave if he wished. That is not, however George's style. He knows he is needed and he is only too anxious to go. Major Emmerton may not pass as fit, as he is still far from well with Rheumatism. A

change of weather crippled him right up. He expects something either here in England or in Canada.

Col. Wigle is expecting to get command of a Brigade soon and if so, is giving George a staff appointment on it. It will not be a promotion in rank, not for a while at least, but may lead to something later, and as I figure it, much more safe. He will get a substantial increase in pay too. He might be rather undecided about taking it as if Col. Wigle leaves '18th' it will mean George being second in command and then, anything happening Major Mulligan, would mean Georg being Lt. Col. in command of his dear old '18th'. That rather appeals to him as he loves the old Battalion. The '18th' suffered terribly lately. Col. Wigle wrote that it was 'Hell'.

Major Emmerton's brother Sergt. Emmerton was shot in the face and the piece of shrapnel had to be cut out of muscles of his neck. He is in England now and has lost sense of taste and smell completely. Lance Corporal Fleming of Owen Sound a fine big six-footer and really good looking chap had lost one leg. The shell that hit him killed the two men with him in Transport service.

Took a few snaps yesterday - had to borrow a camera as George's is still in France with Sid. Will send you some as soon as finished. Have one if it turned out all right, of the two Majors in gas-masks. We have two months yet in our house here which now begins to feel like home to us. June 22, we leave here and expect to get something somewhere on the east or west coast for summer months. If there is still no hope by Fall of George going home with us we will sail for home about Sept. or October. George will have leave in June or July and we will spend it in Scotland. We may then wait for his next leave for sailing. It should come in Sept or October. The children are doing so well and are as happy with daddy. Babe seemed to know him right from the first sight of him. She rubs his face and says "my daddy". Geraldine will allow no one to do for her but daddy, and do you know poor dad has been compelled to sleep four in a bed for we all wanted him and he tried to suit all.

We have now with us a Scotch girl about my own age or older as companion help. She is educated and refined and is very nice indeed Miss Jessie McIntosh. She takes full control of the house and I can go out at any time leaving her with the children and know that all is right. She is just right sort of cheery companion one needs when alone and the children like her well. She is an excellent cook and we have enjoyed many good dishes since she came. And now for the surprise: we pay her \$7.68 a month. Do you not wish you could strike a snap like that over there - 8 shillings a week. Tonight she is planning a big farewell dinner for the 'Majors' and leaves me perfectly free to spend all my time now with George.

Well must close for now. Do write me soon as I long to hear from Canada and will so much more after George goes. Much love from all to all.

Lovingly yours,
Edna

A994.058.011 (8) letter

Little Lacton House
Willesboro, Kent, England
June 29, 1916

Dear Edith:

Yours of June 5th to hand a few days ago. Was so pleased to receive it as also was George his. George went up to London Monday to attend his Medical Board and where I fully expected him to get one or two month's light duty. He was ordered to report for duty at West Sandling which means that he must attach himself to their Base Battalion – the 39th – ready to go forward as occasion demands. He may be there some time and he may be called out on short notice. He has no idea himself.

We have made a move to be near him and are nine miles from his camp with a Motor Bus passing the farm here between Hythe and Ashford. He would have us go no nearer as there are so many troops stationed all the way down the line. He can also reach Ashford from Sandling by train in ten minute's time and we are 1 1/2 miles from Ashford. Ashford is quite a busy town. It is the main depot of the Canadian Ordinance and wherever you go there are Canadian soldiers to be seen. There is also a "Works" here that the Germans have tried a couple of times to get by Zeppelin. They hit quite near here at one time and reported to Germany that they left Ashford in ashes. However everybody laughs at "Zeppelin raids" and have no fear whatever. I made sure of a good cellar here, so I guess we will be OK.

We drove down to West Sandling with George on Tuesday and left him there. It was quite a sight to see the collection of huts there and the soldiers training. I felt like having something to say to them all because they came from Canada. We saw some beautiful places on our ride down. Kent is a beautiful place, a regular garden. I never in my life saw such roses, as large as our Peonies and all shades. If we only had suitable weather it would be excellent, but really, for last three weeks or more it has rained every day. If we go out it is a risk. Sometimes we get back just in time for a shower and sometimes I have had to run the children into a store for shelter. It quite spoils all sightseeing.

We have been here a week today. We have a comfy sitting room downstairs with piano in it and a good large bedroom upstairs. They are an old English couple, farmers, with one daughter at home (Swift, by name) and really, they could not be more attentive or kind. They are already very fond of the children, especially Babe. I buy in the food and they cook it, serve it and keep the rooms clean. They do not even let me make my beds, as they do that while we eat breakfast. All we pay them for room, piano, attendance is \$5.64. It is so much cheaper, nearly a quarter the expense we had at Esher. The furniture is grand, so old in style and good in quality, nothing like our modern furniture. Our bed has a big square canopy at the top all hung with nice flowered drapery. Geraldine said "Oh mamma, this is better than any King's or Queen's beds". She remembered the beds at Hampton Court where King William, Henry VIII, Queen Mary, etc. had slept.

Oh say, speaking of the children, Edith, I scolded Babe for being naughty at table this evening and the saucy wee thing looked up and said "You make me tired, Momma". I could hardly believe my ears, but she said it so distinctly. You will see quite a difference in her. She is such a lively wee rascal, and, oh, say, Geraldine wants me to tell Aunt Edie that she will not need the false teeth. Two new teeth are coming now in top row in front and are such monsters that they fill the space where four came out. One is nearly through. I think they affected her health quite a bit as she is very, very thin.

Am trying to get some papers for you, Edith, some of the back numbers about Kitchener's death. It was a great shock amongst the people here. We tried to get tickets for memorial service in St. Paul's but papers said it would have taken a place three times the size of St. Paul's to have held the officers that applied. I went up however and stood to watch procession to and from the church. Saw the Queen and King both going and coming. Had a full view of them both times. The king looked very, very sad and worried. Also saw Queen Alexandra, and Dukes and Duchesses, also Russian noble, Serbian, Belgian, French, Japanese, etc. It was a remarkable assemblage.

Since Sunday we can distinctly hear the sound of the British guns in France and Belgium. They have kept up a steady pound. They surely mean business this time and no doubt. We are near the sea and on high land. Still it seems remarkable that we can hear them for a distance of forty and fifty miles. Went out this evening to listen again and at each rumble tried to picture the awful havoc that each meant. Last night sixteen troop trains passed through Ashford on way to front and today they were still going. The Canadians are in rest quarters for a month. They sent over from Bramshott, Sandling 13,000 men to fill the vacancies caused by 11,000 casualties in two week's fighting. Their losses have been horrible. Whole Battalions have been wiped out.

We would look up those addresses you gave me when leaving and also Abbie Fenton, but really they are so scattered and a long way from us as distance goes here for railways are expensive. Well, must close for now. Must write Tosey next. Will be able to catch up with all my writing now.

Loads of love, Your loving sister, Edna
George's address now is Attached 39th Canadian Battalion, West Sandling, Kent, England

A994.058.011 (9) letter

Lacton House,
Willesboro, Ashford, Kent
Aug 15, 1916

Dear Tosey,
Yours of July 29th received this morning and I must say am glad to get it. Received one from Edith last week and feel so much better to have heard. If I could only hear from my people now I would be much relieved, but have not heard for some time. Sometimes I fear something is wrong and they are keeping it from me. You know Mother went in June to Beaumaris, Muskoka, to spend the summer and it has worried me so much about the fires up there. However they may have just been a little careless in writing and I will wait a wee bit longer, now we watch for Canadian mails here, and it is quite disappointing not to receive any. Think I have been homesick these last few days. Bidding "goodbye " to Major Emmerton and seeing him start for dear old Canada makes us long too. Am quite sure from George on Sunday that he would be only too glad to be going too. It is very odd to see him and Major E, parted for they have followed one another around so closely. However if George's going back would mean he's coming out again I would just as soon see him stay where he is, for the work is interesting him very much and will last the duration of the war. The only drawback is that it may last six months after the war closes.

Major E. liked it so well that he said if his wife and child were here he would not think of going back now. His position there however is one in which he will stay until the demobilization of the army. No fear of his coming over to fight again. In George's case, however, he would only accept a position there because it would give him a chance of further promotion and of seeing more service in France. He wants to win the D. S. O. which a year's service in France would give him. So you see why I think he is just as well where he is. Dr. Howey of Owen Sound is on their Medical Board. The Doctors are all a fine bunch.

We may move down to be nearer George or right with him if he can make the proper arrangements. Now we only see him Saturdays and Sundays each week and oh, how long the weeks seem. Now that Major E has gone he would like us to be with him. However we must wait a week or so to see if he is permanently settled as they are always creating new boards and moving the officers in charge around from place to place. George would not mind a move as he does not like Folkestone at all and hates the thought of taking the children from here there.

Babe has been doing so well but just now has a nasty cold in her head from the change in weather lately. Geraldine is taking it too I think because today she is like a meat-axe and oh, grouchy. "Grouchy" is Daddy's new name for her.

Oh say, Tosey, I was speaking to Edith in a letter last week about having the house cleaned throughout and then if we would not be home this Fall it would be ready for renting furnished. Have since been thinking it all over and think it best to leave it till we know more definitely, which ought to be in a few weeks now, and if we are to stay here the winter I will ask each of you to take a load of boxes and furniture home with you: Arthur one, Horatio one and Will one, and store them for us. That would be best I think when we know for certain we will send the Johns a month's notice and any time during that month you could move the things. Now this is asking a lot I know of the men during their busy Fall work but we will try to do something for each of them later on.

Call Edith up as soon as you get this and tell her not to do as I asked her in her letter, which was to spend a few days in with Mrs. Thompson and oversee some woman in there to clean it all. We will let you know in good time if I decide to give up the house so do not do anything until you hear. You see it would not be fair to the Johns to leave that house vacant in cold weather, nor would it do my things any good. Well must draw to a close. You see you cannot complain of promptness this time in answering. Am sending your letter on to George now too. Received the one containing notice of interest due. Do not worry about opening it. That was all right.

Am very glad the boys and girls did so well in school. Tell Dorothy not to beat Geraldine as that would be awful. Poor Geraldine does not want us to just let in a school here next month. She says she likes Canadian schools, but not English schools, although she did real well in the six weeks she was in school at Easter. Will have to consider her school in making a move as we want her in a good one and want to be quite near for her. It is an expensive business here. Some are \$10 for three months, some more, I often-smile at her counting 1,2,3, 'faw' etc., quite English. Babe says " Look over theah " (there).

That was a two-faced trick of Nellie Forsythe. If Harry Livingstone had understood how it was she would not have received that letter. As it was, George impressed upon him when he was leaving to carefully answer all parcels received for the Society so that they could not think George had anything to do with receiving them. Harry Livingstone is a fine fellow. He was an advance Agent of a good Theatrical Company in New York at [the] time war broke out. He is well up in Theatricals and it was he who took us to see the play "My Ladye Frayle" in London on his last leave. We often hear from him.

Now bye-bye for now. Loads of love for everybody.

Yours lovingly

Edna

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A kiss for each