

Galveston, Sept. 22, 1900

Dear Tom and Ella:

Galveston is being blessed with fine dry weather and a good thing it is, as so many houses have no roofs, in fact I have not seen a building, business or residence, that there is not something the matter with. I had always wanted to see some kind of a big destruction for mere curiosity but I now never want to see such any more the rest of my life, as the horror will last a life time and some how gives one a creepy feeling.

I worked 5 $\frac{1}{2}$  days on the beach - helped cleaning and burning bodies and of all jobs it was one. In fact I was just played out Wednesday night, my hands and feet swelled until I could go no more but 'twas something in the work that made a fellow work harder than he ever did in his life and after I found my folks all right I thought 'twas only my duty to help some of the unfortunate.

Mr. Pettibone and Frank Vallet were running the gang I was with and had up to the time I quit buried and burned 207 bodies and sixty animals. The smell is getting better now and the slime has about gone off the streets, but my I never will forget how it smelled the first night I was here. They were burning bodies on 40 & M Streets and we got full benefit of that. I will tell you a few places that you and Ella know of and can judge by them how many other places. From the old Tucker place on 37 & P there is not but one house to the beach, from the Garden Vesleu (?) to the beach there are not over four houses. One block east of the Gresham residence, including the big Catholic Church, there are very few houses standing, I do not know exactly how many but not over a dozen and on Postoffice, east, from Rosenberg school there is not a house and on Market from the Infirmary there is nothing. The Infirmary has been condemned. Clarke and Courts building has been condemned, Marx & Blum opposite C&C is a pile of bricks, Garrett's dry goods is a pile of brick, City Hall has the south end gone. These are some of the, what was sup osed to be, best buildings here, and you may have a little idea how the smaller places are, but you couldn't imagine it either. The Kinley houses on 38 & M are turned around, the green house which stood on the corner of 38 & M is out in the street on 39 & M. The Smith house, 37 & M, is turned around and the little house which stood behind it is on Ott's side walk, there are three houses in the street on 37 & M. To look around here at home it looks bad enough but say a few blocks away in either direction makes one dazed.

From our upstairs windows you can see the Gulf in very near any place you look. Tis enough lumber on our side walk to build a house like Styles and in our own yard you find most anything from a kodak to a hoop skirt. The Bienus house has some slate off, the same of the old Flynn and Joe Cole places, the Baptist church on 37 & M $\frac{1}{2}$  has gone to a million pieces, the Kimer cottage on 37 & M $\frac{1}{2}$  the same way, old man Siebel was killed in this house, he was sitting in a rocking chair, pipe in his mouth and a big hole in his head and dead. The Brock houses across the street look like they have a lien on each other, standing on their sides.

My hands are so sore and my mind rattled I can hardly write. Near there are only six houses left down past the Resurvey, the Plitt place, the Hurt, the Kleinicke, Herds - in fact all the old places I know of are gone and you can hardly tell where the places stood. The Ott place is a little unroofed, the Painter and our old wooden Sunday School is smashed. Grace Church has a

little slate off, the water was up to the Changel in it, \$500 will cover its loss, but of all the wrecks I have seen 'tis the St. Patricks - my, what a smash that must have been. The Cemetery 's in hard shape, all kinds of rubbish floated in there, the fences down, some coffins laying on top of the ground, monuments broken, gives one the creeps to think of it. By being out with the "gang" I saw many things and heard so many that I'm so full I don't know where to start. In the Convent that night four women refugees gave birth to babies, and I know no country on earth had as many as Galveston on that fatal evening and after, men with standing collars, that were once, worked side of old pot and said nothing of his blistered hands until they swelled, it seems the salt soaked wood and timber works on the skin and swells them and then they get sore and the same with your feet, going in and around the marshes. Papa has little hopes of ever Southwick getting well. Ella, you know the white headed Mrs. Bell, 'twas eight lost out of their family, including he and her, Mr. Rhumand and wife, Daisy and their children. Tillie Keats was drowned with the rest of their family. Everyone of the Seikes lost. Mrs. Peterson's daughter (Sadker) was lost with two children. (Lizzie Weyer) Mrs. Ray - he, she, children and Miss Ray were lost.

Every day we hear of some one else we know. The city has given Ricker, Lee & Company the contract to clean the rubbish on the streets, will cost \$500,000. The town looks a whole lot different now to what it did when I came here. Most all the streets are passable now, but very few have any pavement left.

I got in here Wednesday night about 10 o'clock - everything dark and I started for home as I was near crazy. I bought an "extra" in Houston that morning and I saw ~~Mama's~~ name in among the missing and you may imagine a little how I felt. But back to where I started home, I got down to Winnie & Tremont and got tangled up in wires and went on to Tremont & I and I fell into a hole and nearly broke my neck and ruined my clothes but I was upset. I didn't know whether I was naked or not, after stumbling and falling down Broadway to 27, a fellow said "Halt." I halted, 'twas a soldier and he made me face about and march down to the Tremont hotel and I had to give my past, present and future to the Adj. General, 'twas then 3:30 A.M. I found me a bed on the floor 2nd story of the Tremont and waited until daylight - and as I was waiting for carriage to go home (Dr. Lumpkin, the last I saw of him was Texas City) I got him to come out here with me, was scared to walk as I was sure to get trotted back to that General and I had already seen him once and I wanted to see my worse than I ever did in my life before.

Found ~~Mama~~ in bed and was glad I had the Doctor as he gave her something which she seemed to think did her good. I think everybody who can leave here ought to, anyway for a month or so, as everybody you see has a tale of sorrow that it keeps them all riled up and they need rest. I expect to have some negroes out here Monday to clean up, Wallace took some pictures of this place but a man with a camera on the street doesn't last long as they ordered all camera fiends to be shot and I tell you an old bayonet makes mighty good people and those who have any roof at all just stay around their homes at night, closer than they ever did in their lives, but they work harder now than they ever did and the soldiers seem to be of a great inducement to keep people off the street after 8 o'clock.

Had the first passenger train in yesterday and I suppose from now on the mail will be more regular. See by today's paper that Fort Worth has had a bad storm.

This town has no fashions or styles now, except the men, they grow whiskers and wear blue flannel shirts and some of them look like toilers sure enough, I had my first shave yesterday. I felt too scratchy and the barber just asked me 25 cents. The poor whites and negroes are living better than they ever did before and there are very few that have wanted for food, cistern water is salty and Alta Loma water is used, the natural fall from Alta Loma runs it here and everybody has enough, but it has made many sick but they boil it and does not hurt anyone.

Mrs. Beal is running a hospital, has 25 refugees there - the Misses Arnolds and some other school teachers and ~~ix~~ a whole lot I don't know.

The water was even with our gallery, about seven feet, was just coming in the house when it went down. Vic (Grandma's man servant - light colored negro, I believe came near drowning coming from the wash house to the back gallery and would have gone but brother Wallace had his boat tied there and he grabbed it and dragged himself in some way.

The only trees left standing on the place are one on east side walk and one by the sitting room, all the rest are flat. The front fence is gone, stable, chicken house, in fact it looks scary even right here.

Tom, you let my men plow the oat stubble again and if it rains, they can pull down the old wire fence across from the old barn, I told Styles about the fence but let them help you when not plowing if you need them as I expect I will have to sow most all the place. I would like to have my corn gathered but suppose hands cannot be had now so I will wait until I get back. I have lots to do around here cleaning up, 'tis nasty old slime and 'tis a surprise to me that everybody here is not sick, but the city is disinfesting as fast as possible and the work that has been done here in cleaning in wonderful indeed in such a short time.

I think every stack and chimney on the factories went down, excepting the brewery, and what people would have done for ice, would been the worst of all. Papa patched up one stack 40 feet and is now running the little machine and storage (at the ice house). He was stopped for a week and his boxes stood at 36 when they went to work again, of course that pleased Papa to know he had such good boxes.

When I first came here I thought Galveston would never come out of this but from the start it has now made will be bigger and better than ever before. The elevators were damaged very little, grain in cars on the wharf were damaged as high as water got into them, but nothing like what everyone expected and to tell the truth, I thought most all of the reports I heard were stories until I got to Houston and then my, I never was in such a crowd of crazy people and I was one of the crazy ones, too, and I then commenced to think it was like reports that I had heard.

Mrs. Carter and Miss Sara expect to go to Luling today, both of them are broke down and nerves shattered.

Papa and Mama both have said that as soon as confidence is restored and property can be sold near its value they are going to move somewhere, but I expect that will be a year or two from now.

I just saw Mr. Montgomery go by, his house on 39 & M<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> was torn badly, but I have not yet seen anything that was not something the matter - cows and horses, legs swollen and cut and bruised, some awful bad. Everyone here thinks the slate from the roofs killed more than what were drowned outright, as there are some 4,000, scattered over the town at different temporary hospitals that are cut and bruised but very few have yet died.

Ella, remember Randall Shantemantel who used to live on Broadway & 38 across (east) from the Bullashers - his Mother was killed by a storm several years ago, he lost one leg then and used a cork one, he was picked up by Texas City and after he revived a little he tried to get the Dr. to let him go hunt for his cork leg as he said that was what saved him and as it had saved his life he wanted it to carry him a little further in life, but the poor boy is now in the hospital very sick from his experience. A fellow hears so many marvelous escapes that he gets used to them and his hair does not stand on edge any more, but just stays flat down in its own place.

Mrs. Pettit and Mrs. Overland seem to take things for the best and hold up wonderful. I was over at Mrs. P's a few minutes yesterday. Belle was there and my, that frail little creature, how she can hold up like she does and having passed through what she has the past year is marvelous. Byrd's piano floated around their parlor and turned upside down. I feel sorry for that family but my, pity, one cannot stop to think who to pity, as there are so many. A retail ice driver who buys of Papa came by here the other evening and Papa and I were on the side walk, and Papa said - "Popular, why don't you go home?" he said "I have no home, no family, no nothing but myself and I ask God every minute in the day to take me, too." His brother, mother, father and children all gone but him. There are quite a number of people who have lost minds the past week, just broke down from the strain.

Uncle's old buildings stood better than anything I have seen, but he had about four feet of water in there.

People down here will steal anything in the world and a good many have been shot in the act and some score or more have been shot looting bodies. The French people across the street took their cow and calf in the house and couldn't get her to go down until two days after the storm.

Wallace nearly killed this part of the family the other night - wanted to know where those trousers were that he had suffered in. You hear of some funny things the last day or so, but my twas like a cemetery here for a few days. Man meet man and embrace and thank God if all were safe and those that had lost some dear soul would look wild and as if their very soul was mashed forever.

Bosque may need cotton pickers but Galveston needs rubbish pickers and needs 5,000. The city won't let you build anything new now but can repair all that is needed and fix your roof anyway you want to, slate and tin have no friends in this city now.

It certainly looks odd to look out of a window and see a house all upside down and another in another direction has one side out or no roof on. I'm told that the rain came parallel and you could not see ten feet ahead of you and the wind blew so hard that when the rain hit you it perforated your clothes like snow.

Cousin Lulu had a marvelous adventure, but I cannot write it now but will do so in my next letter as I know what I do write may help you gather enough to know that those who were and have any reason left at all are a wonder in this world.

Mama keeps up very well but every now and then some one comes in and tells her of some body's suffering and she has a cry then gets over it.

I have had very little sense since I have been here, in fact I was as much dazed as the rest and the work those men have had to do was enough to run them crazy. It is claimed 1/4 of the wreckage on the beach has been cleaned and of course there are lots of people, bodies, still buried beneath them but salt water seems to have pickled them and they do not mortify very fast.

I will have to tell you this as it has been in my mind ever since. I was on a pile of wreckage behind the Tucker place on my way over to Mrs. Beal's to get a bucket of water. I caught hold of a limb of an old oak tree to help me climb over and as I did I glanced up into the limb, and my God, what a horror it was to me. I saw a little child about two years old caught up there, it had hair like dear little Floy's, and if my mind ever had as many things to run through it as it did then I have never known it or do I ever want it again. I wanted to see the little thing buried but it had to be put on the fire with some, two other victims and four horses. I never will get over that sight, it made this old heart of mind throb as it never did before and I had to go off by myself for awhile, but such is this life of ours, one never knows how fortunate he is to have all of his dear ones in this world until he sees the suffering the others have gone through with, but one thing it brings human nature nearer to each other and proves that there are more good people than bad in this world.

The Spence house roof is laying on 39 & M, 'twas tin and looks as though men rolled it up and carried it there.

Worth Pettit is now working for Papa. I don't know what he does. Wallace works on his books for him and Papa says himself he does all right and you know he must or Papa never would say that much voluntarily and should you ask him you know what he would say. Wallace certainly has lots of nerve. He worked all evening on a raft, helping people along the bayou get away and then swam into the stable to get his pony out and take her on the west side by the bath room window. He tried to get Joe out too but he fought and he could do nothing for him and he got killed when the stable fell.

I see by the paper that the money received here sent by many countries has reached \$2,000,000 but

Copied June 26, 1941  
Aunt Ella and Floy say the rest of the letter has been missing for years. I have the original, which Aunt Ella gave to me recently.

Written by Daddy  
(John William Ansell)

Dorothy

