

West Family Letters, 1943-1945

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Preface

Here are letters written to my father, Robert West by his brother Lawrence, sisters Minnetta and Helen, and parents Walter and Laverne West. He was stationed in the Pacific Ocean as part of the U.S. military in 1945. The letters recount life on the family's Liberty, Indiana farm and what various friends and relatives were doing. Lawrence also was in the Navy during World War II and spent time off Japan and in the Marshall Islands.

May 9, 1943
Lawrence West
USS Stanley
San Francisco, California

Dear Bob,

Hello, how are you, Les, and all the family? I got your letter and your gift, and thank you a million. Tell me are you banking any? You should have a nice little start by the time I come home. Yes, I know I could have had too but I chose love and happiness and gee but I'm glad I did. Maybe you too will know and have it some day. It's worth more than anything in the world Bob if you get the right one and as good a wife as I did.

So much for that. You asked me what I thought about your Berkshire sow. Well I told you she had the makings of a good sow and I think you need no other advice when she had ten pigs and has still got them. You have the makings of a real farmer, kid, and an eye for good stock.

I am impressed that your calf is so big already. You most certainly are taking good care of him and I wish you the best luck with it, Bob.

I know you have an 18th birthday coming up soon and must stop calling you kid. You are a man, a real man. Maybe you will catch me in height but it looks like you will in weight. I stay at 175 pounds all the time now. But if I was home, I guess you know I weighed 186 pounds when joining up [the military].

Well kid, look after my sugar and if need be, whip the hell out of any guy that looks at her twice because that's what I'd do if I were home. Ha ha.

Take care of yourself and write soon.

Your brother, Lawrence

November 4, 1943
Minnetta West Matthis
Connersville, Indiana

Dear Bob,

As Gertrude is going to Martha's this weekend, I expect we had better come over a week from Sunday or November 14. Dick seems better. I was supposed to take him back to the doctor yesterday, but the doctor is sick so I still have my money. Be seeing you until then.

Love, Minnetta

January 21, 1945
Bob West
U.S. Naval Training Center
Great Lakes, Illinois

Dear Kids (brothers and sisters),

You done a swell job the night I left. Thanks a lot. I am glad you did. Navy life is pretty tough. I know what Lawrence went through now. We really done exercises this afternoon. I guess I will learn how to swim. Write again and thanks for the card.

Bob

July 22, 1945
Lawrence West
USS Watts
San Francisco, California

Dear Bob,

Hello, how goes it by now? Have you joined the ranks of deep sea sailors yet? I presume you have had your share of feeding the sharks and are now an old salt.

Do you hit port often and where, if you can write it? I don't hit port often myself, and I still haven't gotten any of my mail so don't know anything about you either. I have been keeping my eyes open just in case you might be around. It could be but I doubt it.

We are operating with the Third Fleet Carrier Taskforce, and took part in the raid on Tokyo July 10th. I can't tell you anymore at present but maybe you already know more. I missed Okinawa but the other boys were there. That was before I caught back up with them. I'm glad I wasn't there because from what the fellows told me, it was really rugged there.

Have you any excitement yourself, Bob? Are you getting your mail regular and do you write home often? I hope so for it is impossible for me to write regular.

I do not know if you are getting my letters

I don't know how the folks are making out Bob. I haven't heard but maybe you have.

Back again after some slight interruptions only I guess this is maybe two or three days since I started this letter. I really don't know what day this is but it really doesn't matter anyway. It must be 24th or 25th.

I do not know if you are getting my letters or not. I hope so. I expect to hear from you soon. If you get anywhere around the islands, where you think I might be, just put my address on the letters as usual. Then write on it where it can be plainly seen Japan Islands. That way, I will get it sooner. If you ever run across D.D. 567, maybe you can signal over so I know you are around.

How much do you weigh now, Bob? Probably getting fat as a pig, I betcha. You should be making a little money on the side now, on that merchant ship. How about it, got any overtime yet?

Sure, I get a lot of overtime 24 hours a day some days, not kidding either.

Well, sailor, write when you can and let me know how you are getting along. By the way, what do you think about sea duty. Like it better than in port? I'll be seeing you around so keep your eyes open.

Your big brother, Larry

September 27, 1945

Lawrence West

Marshall Islands

Dear Bob,

Hello sailor, how are you by now, besides being ready to go home. Yeah me too, been ready for three years now.

I got 20 letters yesterday, 10 from Trudie, one from you, and one or two from all the other kids.

Me doing okay, just waiting now, have my points and my papers are all ready and my bag packed, but my relief hasn't showed up nor any transportation either. We missed your ship coming down here and I had hoped I got to see you again.

I am supposed to get off here next week, but I bet I don't. I hope to go home for Xmas, though, and I hope you can get there too. I think Pop can get you out if he tried. It might take a little time but that's better than 18 more months.

We were in that storm along with about a dozen other storms during our 72 days at sea. We had some pretty bad ones a couple of times.

We are down here for repair now and there is some talk of the ship going back to the East Coast. Sure will fuck me up if they do. Then Gertie will have to get home the best way she can. Am getting mail okay, but none of them at home are getting any of my letters.

Love, Lawrence

November 7, 1945
Walter West
Pea Ridge Farm
Liberty, Indiana

Dear Son (Bob West),

Now every little thing [is covered] by snow. Hope you don't have to stay there much longer. Gets old just staying in one place that way. Well, we finally got the picken started. Done little over 6 acres yesterday and just about the same today. Little more than another day in Thackers field and we have 25 out be ready to start on our own. Lawrence [West] been helping us shovel and we were giving him work out. Ha ha. Got ten loads yesterday and 10 today. Not so bad for beginners. Well looks like rain here last night but didn't rain any.

We also load for hogs every day now. They are doing fine. Some of them go close to 200 now. Pretty hard on horses. Shovel all the corn and have to have to hurry to get back. But maybe we get by some way. Not going buy anymore now anyway. Well, old man kinda tired tonight. I guess he is not the only one either. Ha ha.

Did I tell you didn't do any good with fall pigs. Just little more good. Did I tell you we had buzzed 10 or 12 cord of wood before we started picken the wheat? The wheat looks pretty good now. We got house full now. Galmor Franks still can't find any place or any jobs either. Boy oh boy if things haven't getting in some shape, I wonder what things coming to. Guess no one let run this striking thing they still at it. That's the reason you not getting fresh supplies.

I guess you wanted to know how Grandma was. She seems to be doing fair now. Les [West] and her are still over there and that's where she stays. I got our hands full. We leave her alone in day time but every Saturday night when Les goes to town, we go over and stay til 11 o'clock with her. I don't think she should stay alone but nothing I can do about it.

Well I run out of anything to tell you now so will ring off for this time. Be good boy and God bless you son. Good night. Lots of love.

Your old Dad

November 7, 1945
Laverne West
Pea Ridge Farm
Liberty, Indiana

My Dear Bobbie,

Yes, we got some turnips but not too many anyway after your big brother gets done with them. I will tell him to eat some for you. Maybe we can send you some. I sent some to Bud and he said they were no good when they got there. We been having a hand, Mr. Thacker part-time. They really should eat over there. It is his corn but they eat here part-time. I might get out of practice. Eleanor and Frank [Rapson] have gone to Mabel [Kalsbeek]. Lawrence and Gert [West] have gone to bed. Jean, Pat, and Kate are here eating candy. Dad is playing with the radio. It has been looking like rain for two days and has been warm too but has not rained yet. I hope the men get that food done before it rains. Ralph, Neta, and Martha are here this afternoon. Martha had not seen Bud so we went over

there after three on Sunday. But Bill did not find anyone at home. Hert and Ruby are moving to New Castle and they had to help.

Did you get your letter yet we wrote on Sunday? Frank got a Model Ford and him and Howard are making it over. Eleanor said they shut the carburetor clear off and run to town and back that way. I guess it must have been using gas. Martha said they are going to get tires for your car by December. They have not been over much lately. Lawrence says he is going to raise chickens, 1,000 of them. Will be busy with that.

We are not getting any eggs now. The kids have been buying some to eat for breakfast at 50 cents a dozen. I don't think they would taste very good, do you? Dad is almost all in tonight. Those boys are about to get him down. Will not get me down as I am just down to start with. Are you moving this way or are you going the other way? Jean says Herb Graff is back in the States now. They are looking for Paul Poe any time and Woodrow has to go to Europe on Friday. Loren Sturgeon left Sunday. I think he is going to the Pacific. Well, that is enough. Be a good boy and write often.

Love, Mother

December 1, 1945
Helen West LaMar
Camden, Ohio

Dear Bob,

Well, how is everything today? Same as usual. Thought I would be hearing from you today. I usually do on Saturday.

We are having a little sunshine just now. Don't suppose it will last long. We have been having a lot of rainy, snowy weather. Can't say that I especially like it.

Bill is shucking corn. He will get through in another week providing I help him. He is almost done up at Aldies and just has a little here at home. I don't know whether Dad and the boys have picked anymore or not. It sure has been a hard season for a picker.

Bet you know I haven't been feeling well for sometime. The other day, I went to an osteopathic doctor. He says when Nancy was born, my pelvic bone was put out of place and that is what is causing my back to hurt so bad and causing me to be so nervous. It makes my back bone crooked in three places. I hope he knows what he is talking about. I want to get to feeling better pretty soon.

Love, Helen