

## EXCERPTS FROM LETTER #6 FROM SIERRA LEONE

{NOTE: I assume there was a letter #5 because I numbered the letters I sent home, but it was not in the file. It would have covered Kennedy's death.}

December 26, 1963

School ended on the 13<sup>th</sup> and doesn't begin again until January 6. The last week was devoted to finals. In my form I geography class only 8 out of 53 passed with 50% or above. I was upset because I had all but drilled a hole in their heads and funneled the info in. I don't know how they did on the exams in my other classes because I got sick, and the sisters very kindly marked them for me.

I had a double ear infection with a temperature of 103 for two days that completely upset my sense of balance and my digestion. The night it started I was getting a snack and suddenly felt funny. After my roomies picked me up off the floor from having fainted, I developed quite a nice shiner. For the next couple of days, I was too dizzy to raise my head or keep any food down. Sister Hillary, a M.D. from a Catholic hospital out in the bush, took care of me. Her final prescription was quite nice—go to Freetown and sit on the beach, take it easy and recuperate. It took about a week to get my energy back. A-OK now though.

The illness threw a kink in my vacation plans. I was supposed to go to Jimmi Bagbo to help build a primary school library out of mud bricks, but Sister Hillary said NO! Since one roomie had left for Liberia and the other for Freetown, I first stayed with an English couple (the wife teaches at QRS) and then with the PC fellows up the road.

I went to Freetown on the 18<sup>th</sup> and came back today. It was a lazy week filled with afternoons at the beach, parties, going out to dinner, sleeping late, and reading. I always stay with Mike Sherrin and his roomie Kyle (SL II) when there. Their couch is a converted bed (frame and springs) and is uncomfortable. Mike had gotten a small fir tree that we decorated with lights and balls, plus other room decorations. The living room looked like Christmas anyway. I must admit I was very homesick and couldn't get the Christmas spirit.

It just doesn't seem like Christmas. No Christmas decorations or displays in the shops, no Santas, no Christmas spirit in the air, and no carols either. I especially missed the Christmas music. None of the excitement of shopping and wrapping

presents. No fruitcakes or cookies baking or the odor of dinner cooking. I intended to go to a midnight service, but they are so crowded that you have to have a reservation to get in. Then Christmas day I had a case of African tummy and spent the whole day in bed. My dinner consisted of crackers, butter and cheese.

The PC staff had a conference on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, but I suspect one of the main purposes was to get us all together so that, at least, we would have our friends around and wouldn't be sitting alone upcountry. The PC rep had a Christmas eve party for us. And there were several parties yesterday, but being sick I didn't go.

The natives do not celebrate Christmas at all like we do. Their method is a cross between the Fourth of July and a New Year's Eve party. There are fireworks, parades, drunken parties, etc. They march up and down the streets beating handmade drums and shouting. The procession is usually led by a bush devil—a person in a grass costume, with a mask, and other decorations. If it's a male devil, he is connected with a poro secret society; and if a female devil, she is connected with a bundu secret society. These are the societies that prepare kids for adulthood, and are pagan. One can't take pictures because it offends the devil, unless you pay him. Otherwise you'll be mobbed and your camera smashed.

Yes, the Washington Post has started arriving. (Note: I had requested a subscription to the Sunday edition to be sent sea freight as my Christmas present. It usually took 6-7 weeks.)

It is all well and good to praise Kennedy where praise is deserved, but this mass hysteria and making a super human being out of him is too much. All this name changing is also—especially the suggestions of renaming West Virginia and the Peace Corps. No one in the PC here that I've talked to wants to be in the Kennedy Corps. Peace Corps has more meaning. And, I object to any suggestion of change without consulting those of us involved. I admired Kennedy very much for his stand for peace and civil rights, but that does not blot out the rest of his record. People would probably have reacted the same no matter who the president was. Johnson seems to be capable of handling the reins quite well.

P.S. I was home for Christmas, but only in my dreams.