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# EX LIBRIS NEWS

Newsletter of the Ex Libris Association

Spring 1992 (Number 11)

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## EDITOR'S NOTES

This issue continues the custom of publishing transcripts of the papers presented at the A.G.M. in November past. The Fraley Mowat one got more on the record of the personality of a man who made major contributions to the profession with a charisma not often seen nowadays; Judith St. John's recording of the development of the Osborne Collection makes an important contribution to library history and Ex Libris is privileged to publish it. The third paper, given by James J. Talman, will be available for the next newsletter.

We are grateful to these people who took time to make the A.G.M. a meaningful experience through their presentations and their comments (corrections) on the draft manuscripts.

If anything need be added to these notes it is the repetition of our exhortation to those domiciled outside of Ontario for contributions to this newsletter of notes or articles of interest about libraries and librarians. Thank you.

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## MEMBERSHIP ELIGIBILITY

Although the majority of our present members have retired from service in librarianship, membership is open to others interested in the program of the Association as it refers to library history.

Enquiries about membership should be directed to the Association's office.

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Please note that the mailing address of the Association is:

Ex Libris Association  
PO Box 536, Station Q  
Toronto, ON  
M4T 2M5

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

The 6<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of the Association was held at the Hamilton Convention Centre on November 14, 1991, in conjunction with the 89<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Ontario Library Association. The forty-seven members who attended were rewarded with a program of three lively presentations: Dr. James J. Talman's personal reminiscences on the library and archival scene over the decades which he entitled "From the Ontario Archives to the UWO Library", Farley Mowat's perspective on his father, Angus Mowat, through their exchange of letters while Farley was serving overseas in the Second World War, and Judith St. John's "Fortuitous Happenings and Uncanny Coincidences". The 7<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting will be held in Toronto on Thursday, November 19, 1992, at the Sheraton Centre. Maurice McLuhan will be one of our speakers. He is the co-author of a forthcoming book about his brother, Marshall McLuhan.

Elections to the Board brought forward the following slate for 1992: Honorary President: Stan Beacock, President: Janette White, Past President: Betty Hardie, Secretary-Treasurer, Shirley Wigmore. Board members continuing: Al Bowron, Grace Buller, Marian Cooke, Geraldine Hughes, Clara Miller. Newly elected members: Lucille Galloway, Elizabeth Lockett, R. Gerald Prodrick. President Betty Hardie thanked outgoing Board members: Robert Blackburn, Susan Bonsteel and Kathleen Mathews for their contributions to the Association during their terms of office.

Karen Adams, Executive Director of the Canadian Library Association, was present for the business section of the meeting and brought the welcome news that the Elizabeth Homer Morton Fund, initiated by the Ex Libris Association, was close to the initial goal of \$15,000. and offered CLA's cooperation and help with the proposal to publish a history of CLA.

In fact, as of December 31, 1991, the E.H. Morton Fund stands at \$15,200. and, in accordance with a motion passed at the Annual Meeting, the Executive has established a committee to move ahead with proposals for a publication on the history of the Canadian Library Association. It is hoped that this publication can be ready in time to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of CLA:

The Executive has also established a Membership Committee to look at ways of expanding membership. In an effort to attract members from across Canada as well as Ontario the Board has instructed the President to attend the CLA Conference in Winnipeg, June 10-14, 1992, to establish Ex Libris presence at CLA and to contact potential members from all provinces.

In the meantime, all members are urged to let us know of potential members. Send names and addresses to Shirley Wigmore, Secretary-Treasurer at the Association's office.

Janette White, President

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### Announcement of a Grant of \$15,000. from the Elizabeth Homer Morton Fund

The Ex Libris Association in conjunction with the Canadian Library Association announces a grant of \$15,000. from a fund set up to honour Elizabeth Homer Morton, a founding member of member of the Canadian Library Association and its first Executive Director, for the compilation and publication of a history of the Canadian Library Association from its historical beginnings to 1990. Proposals are invited from interested persons. For further information contact:

Janette White, President  
at the Association Office

## FORTUITOUS HAPPENINGS AND UNCANNY COINCIDENCES

by Judith St. John (Abridged by the author from a speech given to the Ex Libris Association)

Forty-two years ago today, on 14 November 1949, Edgar Osborne, the County Librarian of Derbyshire, England, presented his collection of bygone children's books to the Board of the Toronto Public Library as a tribute to Miss Lillian H. Smith and as a memorial of his wife, Mabel Osborne. Fifteen years earlier, in 1934, Mr and Mrs Osborne had visited Boys and Girls House after attending meetings of the American Library Association which had been held in Montreal that year. They were both deeply impressed with the library services for children that Miss Smith had organized and was directing. Mrs Osborne later suggested that they might sometime give their collection of about two thousand books to Boys and Girls House. She died in 1946 after a long illness.

The following year Sheila Egoff obtained leave for study in England. During the year she met Mr Osborne who was a friend of our Chief Librarian, Charles R. Sanderson. She was invited to Derbyshire to see the collection and Mr Osborne later acknowledged that it was her enthusiasm that made him decide to fulfil his late wife's wishes without delay. He offered his Collection to the Toronto Public Library in 1948 with a few wise stipulations. The Board agreed to add to it, maintain it, house it adequately, staff it with a children's librarian and to publish a printed catalogue within a reasonable length of time.

The extension, added to Boys and Girls House to accommodate the circulating library, was opened in 1951. The front parlours of the old House were given over to the Osborne Collection. Sheila Egoff was the logical person to be put in charge of it for she had studied bibliography at the University of London's School of Librarianship in 1947.

News of her resignation did not reach the Branch Library where I was working until Miss Jean Thomson, who had succeeded Lillian Smith three months earlier, came one June day in 1952 to ask me to assume responsibility for the Collection. I was astonished for I had no special qualifications for this position. "You can learn", Miss Thomson said. For three weeks Sheila gave me a crash course in bibliography. I began my duties in July 1952 and continued until I retired in July 1979. Staying at one position for so long affords the opportunity of seeing the cause and effect of seemingly insignificant occurrences. Today I have decided to give positive results of successful efforts. If my remarks have an air of complacency, please remember that I could instead spend a dreary hour recounting neglected opportunities, disappointments and regrets.

For three years I struggled with complicated pagination, signatures, binding descriptions, etc. while I doggedly studied bibliographical text-books. I took delight in reading and annotating the books I catalogued and in searching for elusive bibliographical or biographical material. With the growing Collection I realized by 1955 that if we continued to provide so much detail, the printed catalogue would have to appear in several volumes. Dr Sanderson who had previously been a cataloguer at the John Rylands Library of Manchester called a meeting with Miss Dorothy Dingle, the Head of the Cataloguing Department, with her assistant, Eldred Fulton, and with Miss Thomson and me. Together we hammered out a formula to suit our needs. It is set forth in Jean Thomson's Preface to Volume I of the Catalogue published three years later. Dr Sanderson was most helpful and knowledgeable. I had an appointment to take a

long list of problems to him on the morning we learned that he had suffered a massive stroke from which he could not recover. He died in July 1956. I felt bereft for I had depended on his bibliographical decisiveness and his kindly wisdom.

Harry Campbell, his successor, arrived in September. A most fortuitous happening occurred before he left his UNESCO post. When he was bidding good-bye to a librarian in a remote German town, this person exclaimed, "You're going to Toronto! That's where the famous Osborne Collection is." Now Mr Campbell had not heard of this gift to Toronto. On the day of his arrival he came over to Boys and Girls House to see it. His interest and support have continued until this day. He is an Honorary Patron of the Friends of the Osborne and Lillian H. Smith Collections.

He wisely took no part in the preparation of the Catalogue but he arranged for Mr Osborne to come for five weeks in November to give advice on unresolved problems such as the closing date for the Collection. Mr Osborne favoured 1914, the beginning of World War I. The year 1900 was ruled out of the question because our privately printed first edition of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* was published in 1901. When this matter was still under consideration I happened to notice when looking up some author in the *Dictionary of National Biography* that Edward VII had died in 1910. Now Mr Osborne was born in 1890 so his boyhood extended to 1910 for twenty-one was then the age of majority. It was after it had been decided to close the Collection 'at the end of the Edwardian era' that Miss Thomson realized that Miss Smith had been appointed in 1912. Seeds were then planted for the formation of the Lillian H. Smith Collection to show the best books published for children from a literary and

artistic point of view published in English from 1911. It was not formally inaugurated until 1962 to celebrate fifty years of library service to the children of Toronto.

Mr Campbell took steps to find funds for the printed Catalogue. He invited the University of Toronto Press to prepare a modestly bound dummy with a few sample pages of text. With this in hand he set out with Mr Mallon and Miss Thomson to find a magnanimous sponsor. They encountered some disappointments before they were directed to the McLean Foundation. It happened that the Trustees at that very time had been looking for a vehicle to promote book production in Canada. At that time most Canadian books were manufactured in the United States. The University of Toronto Press had been sending all its colour printing to Holland. Mr Clair Stewart, the Art Director of Rolph, Clarke, Stone, had encouraged the interest of the Foundation in book production, convincing them that Canada had craftsmen of exceptional ability. The Trustees were delighted to learn of our non-commercial venture and agreed to pay whatever was necessary to produce a beautiful book in Canada. The drab, modest dummy was returned to the University Press with the unique request to design something more lavish. The Press set about the task with enthusiasm, choosing better paper, Bembo movable type and designing a cover inspired by one of our spelling-sheets. The Foundation agreed to pay for six coloured plates, twenty-four half-tones and numerous text illustrations. The Provincial Paper Company heard of this enterprise from Clair Stewart. This company offered to pay for six additional colour-plates if they could have permission to reproduce the twelve plates with an accompanying article for their organ, *Provincial's Paper*. Rolph, Clarke, Stone was

engaged to do the colour-printing which they did with exceptional care.

When publication was assured, Hazel MacTaggart was released from her duties in the Cataloguing Department to revise my entries. She was indeed a godsend. She had been a gold medalist in Classics at Queens and so was particularly helpful with Latin texts of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Doris Scott of the Boys and Girls House staff was freed to lend her careful, accurate assistance, especially with the Illustrators' Appendix, the compilation of the index and the mammoth task of proof-reading. Miss Thomson read all my annotations, seeing only the books she could not visualize from my descriptions. The editorial staff of the Press was most helpful. We were warned that the notes must be succinct for the boards could support no more than 600 pages. We thankfully came within the limit with 588 printed pages. The Osborne Catalogue was the first book in Canada to be catalogued at the source. Hazel MacTaggart had heard of this forthcoming practice and the University of Toronto Press was persuaded to include it at the end of the book.

The day came when our opus went to press. At that time the presses were on the campus. Because we had all laboured so diligently I was invited to see the pages of the 1500 copies whirling through the gigantic machine. It was a wonderful thrill to see this final stage.

That night I went soundly to sleep but I suddenly awakened about 3:00 a.m. in a frenzy of anguish. I remember sitting bold upright in bed with the sickening realization that I had failed to index 'Three bears, The story of'. I knew that we had included 'Story of the three bears' but I was absolutely certain that it was not under *Three*. Now this little manuscript, written and illustrated by Eleanor Mure for her

nephew's birthday present in 1834, is known as the first written version of that famous story.

Mr Osborne had located it in a lot of books that he had purchased and it was, I believe, his favourite in all the Collection. It was the only book at that time that Mr Campbell personally knew. I was sure that to the test the index they would both look up *Three bears* and it would not be there. I rose early that November morning and made my way to Barbara Plewman's office. She was startled to see me sitting there when she arrived at 7:30.

"Whatever are you doing here?" she asked.

"*Three bears* isn't in the index," I replied.

"Well that's too bad but the book is all printed.

There is nothing I can do about it." I pleaded with her urgently. She consulted the page proofs. *Three bears, The story of* was not there. My distress was so evident that she reluctantly telephoned the pressroom at about 7:45 a.m. She asked if they had finished printing the Catalogue. "Almost," came the reply. "We hadn't quite finished when it was time to go home." "How far did you get?" she asked. "We were doing the index. We stopped at the letter 'Q'."

If you examine the index of the first printing of Volume I you can plainly see: '*Three bears, The story of, 37*'. My reputation was miraculously redeemed by the Printer of the University Press. You can appreciate my feelings of gratitude when the review in the *Antiquarian Bookman* praised the 'perfect index'.

Copies of the Catalogue were delivered by hand to all the Trustees on 29 December 1958. It was reprinted with minor corrections in 1966 and again in 1975 to coincide with the publication of Volume II on 14 November, sixteen years ago today. The production of that volume was full of drama but I shall not dwell

on those vicissitudes.

Although most acquisitions have come through the antiquarian book trade, auctions, or from generous donors, the media has sometimes sparked a sequence of events. One summer's day in 1962 news must have been scarce because a reporter came from the *Star Weekly* to see if we had recently acquired any newsworthy book. It was soon after the arrival of *The Royal Primer; or, An easy and pleasant guide to the art of reading. Authorized by His Majesty King George II. To be used throughout His Majesty's Dominions*, first printed for John Newbery about 1755. The article attracted the attention of Mr Sam Campbell who decided to visit the Collection. That autumn he chose as the subject for his thesis leading to a Master's Degree, 'Books of instruction for children in the eighteenth century'. After a winter of reading at Boys and Girls House he decided to enter the library profession. During the year he told me that his neighbour had an eighteenth-century book and that he would ask her if he could show it to me. He arrived one day with his neighbour's book. To my surprise and delight it was the fourth edition of *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes*, printed for John Newbery in 1767. Now Mr Osborne had searched for forty years for a Newbery edition of this famous little book, first published in 1765. It was in print for about two hundred years and it inspired a host of adaptations and imitations. For ten years I, too, had looked in vain for a copy published by John Newbery or his successors. Here in my hand was a rebound copy with the last forty pages wanting from this well-worn, well-read little book. Sam Campbell gave me his neighbour's name and address and Harry Campbell wrote her a letter with a fair and generous offer. We waited for weeks to hear from her. She had decided to have it appraised

by a New York dealer. Fortunately for us, his appraisal was the exact figure of Mr Campbell's offer and the book became a prized possession.

About five years later, Barbara Smith who was teaching children's literature at the newly-opened School of Library and Information Science of The University of Western Ontario, brought her class to visit the Osborne Collection. She also brought a book to show me. She said it had come with several lots of books bought from a second-hand dealer to give students practice in cataloguing. To my astonishment the book she showed me was the fourth edition of *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes* published by John Newbery in 1767. This copy, too, was imperfect. Pages 33-4, 47-86 and 91-96 were wanting. Those pages were in our first copy. The pages from 115-156 and the four pages of publisher's advertisements missing from the first copy were in the second copy. Together they were complete. The University of Western Ontario had a rule that they did not sell holdings but it was possible to arrange an exchange. For this rare little book we sent a copy of Volume I of the Osborne Catalogue, a copy of *Flowers of Delight*, an anthology compiled by Leonard de Vries from the Osborne Collection and published in 1965, the facsimiles of Eleanor Mure's *Story of the Three Bears* and Amelia Howard-Gibbon's *Illustrated Comic Alphabet* in the limited editions produced by the Oxford University Press for the Friends of the Osborne and Lillian H. Smith Collections, and the first five titles in the series of facsimiles sponsored by the Toronto Public Library and published by the Johnson Reprint Corporation of New York in 1968. It was all we had to offer at that time and we were grateful the University was willing to receive them in exchange for their shabby *Goody Two-Shoes*. According to Sydney

Roscoe's definitive bibliography, *John Newbery and his Successors*, only two other copies of this rare fourth edition are recorded. One is in the St. Bride Printing Library in London, England, the other is in the Doheny Collection at St. John's Seminary in Camarillo, California.

One day I noticed white dust on the floor of the Osborne Room. A succession of men came to look at the floor and to gaze up at the ornate, moulded plaster ceiling. They seemingly did not know what to do about it. Now in those days my free day came on a Thursday. One week I had a full day of appointments and engagements arranged but before closing time on that Wednesday, Mr Campbell's secretary telephoned to tell me that a distinguished visitor was coming to the Library the following day and that Mr Campbell would be bringing him to see the Collection at 10:30. I was furious. "We're no better than slaves," I complained to my colleagues as I cancelled appointments. I took the following Monday as my free day. It happened that I could not reschedule any of my engagements and as it was a wet and dreary day I decided to take an afternoon sleep. When I was safely sleeping in my own bed, three hundred pounds of plaster came crashing down on my desk with a thunderous roar. The oak wood was gouged and my chair upturned by the blast. If I had been there I would have been killed. This is a useful anecdote when advocating devotion to duty.

The authorities who examined the havoc condemned the old House which had been used by hordes of children for forty years. It was replaced by a new building on the same site. It was opened on 7 May 1964. Mr Osborne was not able to visit our new quarters until September 1965 when he came with his wife, Kerstin. Fourteen collectors of children's books were invited to a Colloquium held at Boys and

Girls House during their visit. Mr Campbell announced at the final luncheon that as a result of that gathering a Friends of the Osborne and Lillian H. Smith Collections would be organized. The inaugural meeting was held the following April.

A fortuitous happening occurred on New Year's Eve, 1969. In those days we were entitled to a day on either Christmas Eve or New Year's Eve. That year I chose to work on New Year's Eve. About two o'clock on that quiet afternoon, Professor Stephen Vickers arrived. He had just realized that all applications for candidates of honorary degrees must reach the offices of the University of Toronto by 31 December. He had promised members of the Executive Committee of the Friends that he would present the name of Edgar Osborne. He needed pertinent information. At the Convocation in June, Professor Vickers read the citation and Dr Osborne received the degree of Doctor of Laws (*honoris causa*). He delivered the convocation address which marked the first time that the University of Toronto had officially recognized the academic study of children's literature. If Professor Vickers had not been able to submit the application that New Year's Eve, Dr Osborne would never have been able to receive this high honour as a civic benefactor. He was never well enough to visit us again.

The late Doris Pringle Lewis was in my year at Library School. We both looked forward to a visit at O.L.A. Conventions. One year she told me that she had moved to the country. The next year she told me that she had a neighbour who had an aunt who used to correspond with Beatrix Potter. The next year she told me that she had seen some of the letters (or copies of them) and that they looked just like the illustrated letters she had seen at Hilltop. "I've



told them all about the Osborne Collection," she said. Needless to say, these conversations were carried on most discreetly. She knew and I knew that knowledge of the whereabouts of a cache of Beatrix Potter letters was classified information. Every year I asked her, "How's your neighbour and how is your neighbour's aunt?" Doris would reply, "I'll keep you posted."

On 18 November 1975, exactly four days after the publication of Volume II, Doris telephoned me. "Hazel has received a letter from her aunt with a postscript: 'Is that library still interested in my letters?'" "Where does Hazel's aunt live?" I asked. "In Florida," Doris replied. Now because I had not had a proper holiday in the summer due to Volume II, I had already made plans to go to Sanibel Island for the first two weeks of December. On the second last day of my holiday I flew over to Miami and called on Mrs Ivy Steel and her daughter, June. Mrs Steel told me of her friendship with Beatrix Potter. It began because her mother was Beatrix Potter's milliner. Ivy remembered delivering hats with her brother to Miss Potter's home in Bolton Gardens. Although the milliner died when Ivy was nine years old, Beatrix Potter kept in touch with her children. The letters

written to Ivy as a child had been lost. In 1920 she emigrated to Ontario to be close to her sister who had married and lived on a farm near Kitchener. Ivy met and married Jack Steel and they moved to the United States. Her letters from Beatrix Potter began in 1924 when June was a baby and continued until September 1943, three months before Miss Potter's death. Mrs Steel asked me to return the next morning. When I arrived she had the letters ready in a shoe box for me to take away on approval.

With the financial assistance of the generous Friends of the Osborne and Lillian H.,. Smith Collections, the Toronto Public Library was able to acquire this collection of more than fifty letters written and illustrated by Beatrix Potter. The first exhibition, mounted in April 1976, was opened by the Lieutenant-Governor, the Hon. Mrs Pauline McGibbon. This gala event also inaugurated the Trust Fund of the Friends. The following year they published *Dear Ivy, Dear June, Letters from Beatrix Potter*, an attractive book that is still available.

An era came to an end with the death of Dr Osborne in November 1978. I retired the following July after twenty-seven years filled, for the most part, with a succession of fortuitous opportunities and uncanny experiences to enjoy gratefully in retrospect.

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## REMEMBRANCES OF MY FATHER, by Farley Mowat

(Farley and Claire Mowat were guests of the Ex Libris Association at its annual meeting, November 14, 1991, in Hamilton, where Farley, reading from his latest book to be published in 1992, gave a very entertaining introduction to the book, essentially a collection of letters exchanged

with his father, Angus Mowat, during Farley's wartime experience in the Canadian Army in Italy, 1944. The following excerpts edited from a transcription of his reading give an idea of the human breadth and excitement we can expect from the book as a whole. The details of life in the Canadian

Army in Italy are engrossing and shocking enough, made more so when contrasted with the replies received from Angus, already head of the Provincial Library Service, reflecting the peaceful ordinary concern of a family on the home front in Canada.)

### **Introduction by Al Bowron**

I am not going to introduce Farley and Claire Mowat because there they are. We also have with us in spirit his father, Angus Mowat, one of my very best and dearest friends. I was browsing through the Ontario Library Review as I am wont to do quite frequently and in the 1925 issue I found an annual report written by Angus when he was the Librarian at Trenton. I just wanted to read you a couple of paragraphs to show you, to remind you, what kind of person he was. Surrounded by other annual reports from Windsor and Walkerville and others all just perfect, full of statistics and how the library is doing and all that sort of thing, in the middle the one from Trenton says, "Once again the hated first of the year has dropped astern. Column after column in the old account book has been added, re-added, subtracted, divided, multiplied and generally shivied about until the last, the odd seventeen cents has been located and the figures marshalled in imposing array and laid with dignity, one hopes, before the august board. The same old bank draft or brother to it stared us in the face. Even that might be worse but thank heaven it isn't. One hates to see that dyspeptic look spread over the manager's face when we breeze into the sacred precincts so full of cheerio

and good will toward men. In the case of this particular overdrawn, our fairy godmothers, the library club, has once again come to our aid most handsomely. I wonder if any other town is so blessed with so active and untiring an organization as our Ladies Literary Club is here." And it goes on like that. Nobody writes annual reports like that. I wish to heck they did.

Farley and Claire Mowat, two distinguished authors - Farley.

### **Remembrances of My Father**

You know, I'm a library brat. Not exactly born in a library. There is some doubt, er possibility, that I may have been conceived in a library. It wouldn't surprise me at all. You may or may not know I spent my early formative years in the libraries of Trenton, Belleville and Windsor where my reading was extremely catholic. I read everything I was permitted to read and I discovered where the books that I was not permitted to read were kept. Since we usually lived in the libraries I would sneak down when everybody was doing something else the evening and load up with Boccaccio or whoever else I could find in the secret hideouts, take it upstairs and so increase my knowledge of the world and how to do things that I shouldn't do. The one thing that I really learned as a library child was that there was something about books to give me the background to become a writer. I think if all would be writers could spend three or four years growing up in libraries, the quality of writing would be enormously

enhanced.

I don't make public speeches anymore: I don't make public appearances. I wouldn't be here today at all except for that indomitable dragoon himself sitting beside my wife who knows my weak points and how to reach me. So he produced the bottle and waved it in front of my face with the cork out and softened me up to the point where "I couldn't shay anything". And so here I am trapped into making a public speech. What I have done is to bring along a badly Xeroxed copy of a few pages from my current book. This book sprang full blown from my brow this summer when I found I couldn't go on an Arctic cruise. It had been canceled for some reason, so I had the summer to do nothing and I started looking through some documents that I had taken down to Cape Breton. These included files of the letters that my father and mother wrote to me during the Second World War and the letters which I had written home. He religiously kept everything. He kept carbon copies of all his letters and, of course, he kept the originals of mine. I had been stumbling around for some years trying to think of a way to tell the last part of the war story, my war story - the first part being *And No Birds Sang* which ends at Christmas in 1943 - and I had not been able to find a way. Reading these letters over, it just suddenly hit me over the top of the head that the book was already essentially written and nothing appeals to a writer as lazy as me to stumble over a book that is already written. This makes life so much easier. So I am going to read you a

selection.

(The book by the way is called *Dear Squib*. Angus was the first "Squib" with one "b". In the Second World War I inherited his nickname but for some reason it had two "bs" and this bothered him for all the years of the war. He thought I had been paid off by the Squibb dentifrice organization.)

It begins on August 7, 1944 with a letter of mine to my parents after we attacked the Hitler Line which you may or may not remember. It was a major victory in the summer of '44 in Italy. We were driving north, chasing the Germans we thought, and the Germans stopped being chased and turned around and bit us. And this is the beginning of the campaign, the winter campaign of 1944. It went on and on and on and cost the Canadian Army an enormous number of casualties, a totally stupid military blunder from beginning to end. This is how it looked to me and my parents in Canada as it happened.

August 7th. Dear folks: I am getting somewhat lax in letter writing but things are a bit difficult at the moment so excuse. A letter from you written aboard the "Scotch Bonnet" on your cruise has just arrived and it makes me drool. Why couldn't they post me to the defense of the Belleville Bridge or the Murray Canal? It would free up a zombie (Zombies, as you may or may not remember were the conscripts who would not go overseas.) and I might even be more use there than I am here since I am developing a fine set of whiz-bang nerves. I can hear the damn things coming before they are even fired. And when it comes to

maintaining a military stance, hell I walk around doubled over like I had the crud. This is pretty silly since, being back at brigade headquarters, (where I was the Intelligence Officer, don't laugh, that was my official title "Intelligence Officer") I am in nothing like the line of fire like the boys up the line. My current job, and it is driving me nuts, is to make sure that we are unidentifiable, all insignia on uniforms and vehicles removed or covered, compete wireless silence, no contact with civilians, etc., etc. Yesterday when I drove Lulabelle (that was my Jeep) into a village which the Jerries had just left which our troops hadn't yet occupied, it was to be greeted by a chorus of kids chanting "Ah Canadese, multo bono, viva Canada." In case I haven't mentioned it before, I have had the Italian trots for about a month and if I loose any more weight I'm like to blow away. It hasn't seriously incapacitated me except that I can't touch vino any more. Mother dear, if this is the result of one of your prayers, please lay off. (She was always afraid I would become an alcoholic.) I don't feel any the better for this enforced abstinence and not much the worse for the bug except when the nearest latrine is in the open, 300 yards away and it is raining shells. I'll never get acclimatized.

August 20th. Sorry for the last week's silence but I have been very busy earning my seven bucks per day. (Seven bucks a day, how fantastically overpaid we were.) The intelligence racket has become the most bewildering collection of odd jobs that one man ever told another about. Between

rounding up civilian spies at midnight, these turned out to be an old geezer leading his mule to a safer place by lantern light, lecturing on chemical warfare, keeping track of the field of battle, trying to second guess Jerry on our front, trying to mislead said Jerries, and doing stooging for the Brig, I have very little time left to reconnoitre new slit trenches every day. Another job the intelligence walla has is to predict the future. In the mess the other day I got tricked into betting that la guerre in Italy might be finito by November 15. If I am right I'm going to set up shop at Delphi. If wrong I will be a cinch for the job of military commentator on the Toronto Star.

(Now a letter of Angus's. These letters sometimes didn't connect directly and I've had to sew them together as best I could.)

September 2nd. Squib, old son: Saturday morning and the building (the building was Queens Park of course.) is closed and as dead as a tomb. I sit looking over the week's accumulation of letters from frantic librarians. But they don't look particularly interesting so I will have my weekly gam with you. Helen (my mother), Elmer (their dog) and I have been out for a week inspecting libraries, Welland and Haldimand Counties. You don't know where they are even if you are the brigade's map expert. We began at Niagara Falls and went up the bank of the Niagara River to Fort Erie and then branched off to Port Colborne taking in many small villages and towns en route to end up at Simcoe on Lake Erie. A pleasant late summer drive and a lot of the worst to understand since this is a wealthy farming

country. We could see why the farmers were wealthy though having bought a bushel of melons which were very nice on top and extremely rotten below. The run from Niagara to Fort Erie where your great grandmother Jones, who was a Stanton, was born has been prettified with parks and boulevards on our side of the Niagara River. And on the American side it's a forest of smoking factory chimneys. Blake's dark satanic mills if ever I saw them. Imagine people living in such places in this year of our Lord. The best part of the whole drive was a free chicken. It lay on the road, dressed and ready for the pot. And why do they say "dressed" when they mean "undressed". Helen insisted, somewhat to my embarrassment but to Elmer's great interest, on picking it up and taking it along. So we carried it for two days and then had it for dinner at Kay Holley's summer cottage on Lake Erie by which time it was well hung even for my gamey tastes. We did not tell Kay its history. This afternoon we are going on a duty sail. You know how much I hate going to all the work of getting "Scotch Bonnet" underway just for an afternoon's outing. But I have been promising to take Reg Saunders and his staff for years. (Reg was about to publish Angus's second book *Carrying Place*.) There will be about seven or eight of them and they will all be under foot. And it will probably blow like hell and the rotten old mainsail will rip to ribbons and all will be as merry as a wedding bell. I have to sail around single handed from Ashbridges Bay to Toronto for "Bonnet" is moored in

Ashbridges Bay and I have to pick the guests up at the ferry dock. I dare not ask them to go to Ashbridges which you will remember from your birding hikes is the outlet for Toronto's sewage. They might fall in as Elmer fell in not long ago. It was three days and seven baths before he was fit to live with and a publisher might never be fit to live with after such an experience.

Well son, even you and I have to admit that the news from the front is damn good at last. Of course the broadcasters and newspapers are several weeks ahead of our armies but this breakthrough at the Gothic Line by the Eighth Army was announced. This was a shock to Helen who had developed a theory that the Germans had withdrawn from Italy and that you would be seeing no more action until the next war. She is keenly disappointed and that is not as silly as it sounds because the war is already won as far as the civilian populace of Canada is concerned. This does not please everyone for there are some who might have wished that it and its accompanying profits could have gone on for fifty years and I'm afraid I know quite a lot of officers in all three services stationed in Canada who will also be plagued by regrets about the need to go and look for a job which might entail some honest work. Mom sends her love and Elmer wants to get going so it's off to sway out the old red sails again. No word from you for some time now but the reason is not far to see.

September 5th: (He wrote regularly every day and so did my mother.)

Your mother has decided that the present

you insist on giving us or giving her for Christmas is to be a wrist watch. Actually I gave her one on our twenty-fifth anniversary but as I haven't got around to the actual purchase yet she has become a little impatient. We were talking about your rank last night. (I had just been promoted to Captain after becoming the oldest surviving lieutenant in the whole of the Second World War.) I said that we must pray that the war continues for at least six months after the date of your promotion to acting captain in order that it might be confirmed. I explained that if you were sent to another task in the meantime you would again become a lieutenant.

This put mom in a "quarry" as her mother always used to say. (She was often in a "quarry" and until I was about fourteen I never understood why she spent so damn much time down in a rock bound hole in the ground.) But on the whole she thought it would be better if the war ended tomorrow and you remained a subaltern forever.

I am glad to have some details of what a brigade's intelligence officer's duties entail. I'd begun to wonder if there were any. I've asked some of the staff wallahs of my acquaintance but they were even vaguer than usual. One said he didn't know and didn't think anybody else did. "Top secret stuff" he said, "They keep it all under their hats." Not helmets mind you but hats. It is partly nice and partly upsetting to see the Eighth Army back in the news again with the breakthrough of the so-called Gothic Line. The Globe and Mail even got around to mentioning the units of the First Brigade

this morning and Wilson Woodside on CBC last night referred to the half forgotten Eighth Army. This made me very angry considering what is owed to that Army. But it is quite understandable. I have permitted myself to hope that it might all be over in Europe within a year or so. But I am waiting to see how the Huns do on their own soil. By the way have you seen Eisenhower's statement in which he takes the US press to task for creating the impression that the Yanks have been doing the whole show in France. He stated that the British and Canadians had been given the hard tasks and without their performance the Yanks couldn't have moved a yard. Some of the Canadian press, which takes its cue from south of the border seem quite surprised to hear this. I wonder how long it will be before we become American in everything but name. Or will we eventually lose even that.

We had an earthquake last night. After accusing each other of shaking the bed Helen decided it might be Elmer scratching himself in the bathroom where he was sleeping. However (he's a very small dog) I didn't think he was big enough to tear the toilet from its moorings and scratch himself with it which is what it sounded like. So I sallied forth on Elizabeth Street to find half of Richmond Hill walking around in their pyjamas wondering if they were drunk. But nothing serious fell or was bust so Helen concluded it was just a forewarning of the end of the world and went back to sleep. Your mother has faith. Elmer was sleeping in the house because of a violent electrical

storm which frightened him. He was locked in the bathroom because the night before he had run foul of a skunk again.

The sail on Saturday was successful. It blew right smart and some of the male publishers deposited their lunches, which had been mostly liquid, in Toronto Bay. Some of the lady publishers tried to use the toilet and turned the valves the wrong way and nearly sank "Scotch Bonnet". It's all grist to my mill for the next book.

(There's a bit of overlap here. He knew that the Gothic Line had been broken through but our letters hadn't reached home. This is my first letter to them about that action.)

September 11th: Dear parents: It is now 22:05, 10:05 p.m., and at midnight the Eighth Army will strike the blow which ought to be the beginning of the end for the Hun in Italy. By tomorrow night we should know whether the war will last a month or another winter. Now it is all in the hands of the gods in Valhalla and may they smile upon us, particularly on the men of the poor bloody infantry, PBI, who at this moment are feeling their way tensely in the black night toward the Sangro River and the start line for the attack on the Gothic Line. And yet the night is silent. A tomb-like somnambulance seems complete. No gun has been fired from our side of the river for days now. Nothing done to disabuse the enemy from concluding that the Adriatic Front remains quiescent manned only by skeleton forces while a major offensive is being prepared on the opposite side of Italy. It has been part of my job for the last three weeks to help foster this illusion and we

will soon know how successful we have been. I don't know what kind of barrages you had in your war but I can conceive of nothing to match the obliterating concentration of fire that will descend on Jerries' position soon. It seems incredible that any living thing will be able to live through the weight of mettle that will whine and shrill above our heads. Tomorrow I think there will be many herrenvolk for whom der tag has come. And there will be farm lads from the counties, maybe a stockbroker from Toronto and a host of others some of whom will be friends of mine. The ground is beginning to quiver now from the vibrations of hundreds of tanks still so far away to be unheard but only felt as they crawl up to join the infantry. My God, the way I'm talking you would think I am anticipating what's soon to come with enjoyment instead of being scared stiff. Right now my set is tuned to London and I am trying to concentrate my attention on the thin strains of a dance band. Also I am sitting at a typewriter banging out a letter to Canada in which I say, "Don't buy me anymore goddamn war bonds." Who the hell is crazy around here. A flock of messages is coming in now from the forward posts. It looks as if Jerry is getting restless as well he might. I gotta go.

(later) This is the continuation of the airmail I wrote you on the so and so. Three days later the first stage of the offensive is over and there has come about one of those inexplicable lulls that makes the shift in the moods of battle so extreme. For twenty-four hours my every thought was contingent on

the flat crash of exploding shells. Then I went to bed and got up to a quiet, comfortable Indian summer day like a weekend holiday at home. Sounds of battle had faded to a distant rumble like a departing summer thunderstorm. We had canned bacon with real eggs for breakfast eaten under a fig tree, refreshed by a balmy breeze from the Adriatic. Chicken stew for lunch. Then an hours sunbathing, then a hot bath in the open air, an evening drink and a good book to read. Jerry had decamped. To be frank I have never experienced such a terrific and complete contrast before and I marvel at the adaptability of the human animal that enables me to write this, feeling perfectly normal after a good nights sleep and as happy as usual. However I suppose we will pay for it later. This evening we talked about the paucity of good Canadian writing. My God, we could have been sitting in a Toronto pub. You will in due course read about this battle which, if it continues to unfold as well as at present, will likely be the beginning of the end of the Italian campaign. The Brigade has certainly does its part and is now resting and licking its wounds while others chase after Jerry. We hope they make out OK otherwise we will have to help them. We have had a lot of prisoners to deal with.

Glad to hear you are being sensible about buying your gifts. Get them and that's an order. Well, I think I will go and read *Brave New World* again and have my little laugh along with Huxley.

(From my father) September 12th. Dear brother Squibb: All right two "bs". Your

letters of August 25th and 29th written just before and after the attack came over the weekend. It's hellish decent of you to write so often these days knowing that scraping woodwork and painting until we are too tired to see straight doesn't really do much towards allaying anxiety. Putting together what you are able to say and the news dispatches I get at least some idea of what is going on. There isn't much said about Italy and what is said is veiled - some of it is just pure balls. Like telling us on the radio this morning that the Germans are getting out of Italy because a neutral diplomat in Milan said that 500 trucks a day were crossing the Brenner Pass laden with Italian art treasures.

Helen now listens to the news upstairs while I listen downstairs because she can no longer bear my yips of anguish and bellows of rage when something as fatuous as the above comes over the air. I have sometimes been known to growl quite loudly when, in the course of an entire broadcast from the forward zones, there is almost no mention of the infantry only rhapsodies to the air force, the tanks, the artillery and as often as not, the navy too. For generations the navy prided itself on being the silent service but now the mantle evolves upon us, or I should say, you fellows in the PBI. Probably we should be grateful if they don't write or talk about us. You said quite a lot when you remarked that in spite of the way you apparently settled into calmness after a show, you will probably pay for it in after years. Yes, you will. You will feel the effects full force if you get hit or come out



of the line for any other reason and know you aren't ever going back in. It's a delayed response and is very tough to take and you have got to prepare for it. Different people handle it in different ways. My cure was to immerse myself totally for weeks in western stories, of all the damn silly things. And of course there are many who don't ever get over it.

Since beginning this letter I met your mother at Eatons and bought her a 30 cent lunch after which she bought me some sea chanties to play on Mr. Edison's machine. So I had to buy her a new nightgown. She is off now looking at wrist watches for you to buy her. Unless you come home in the meantime I contemplate decommissioning the Bonnet next year. She is not much use until I can get some new sails and the time to use them. Elmer, who is under the desk (at Queens Park) making dreadful smells sends his love. He sniffs your letters and gets an intelligent look as if to say "Hells bells, of course I remember that guy from Camp Borden days." Elmer was just a youngster then and now he is getting up in years just like your pop.

September 1st. Dear parents: I see from my in and out book that this is about the one hundred and twentieth letter I have shot out at you since I came over. You have a garrulous son it seems. We are enjoying a couple of days in reserve although I am working twice as hard as when the Brigade is in the line. And I am not so fond of this goddamn war is over the better, say I. My principal grouse is that the new boss doesn't

see eye to eye with me on how battle histories and official war diaries should be written. Somewhat to my surprise, I find that ill-informed, make that stupid, and inept literary criticism of even such run-of-the-mill stuff makes me excessively annoyed. The temptation to tell him to write his own bumf and then stuff it is almost irresistible.

Seeing as how I'm in such a good mood today herewith another gruesome epic guaranteed to send the children to bed in fits. (I kept sending him verse that I was writing until I realized that this wasn't to be any good to anybody.)

*Encounter with a Stranger in an Italian Ditch*

Black lips that swelled in thick distorted curves

Forever severed from the sensitive nerves

No longer know the much touched lost caress

Of women's mouth, the clinging urgent stress

Of flesh to flesh that numbs sensation

Yet fires the blood through mindless exaltation.

These lips are cold. Their breath is putrefaction

And the stink of death. And his opaque and listless stare

Earnestly scans the long blue upper air

Unseeing, frozen save for a clean fly

Disgusted way across the sunken eye

Beholding emptiness that once saw part of beauty in you

Mirror the quick start of passion.

Now his flesh is thrust

Into oblivion 'neath a filthy dust.

I also practice vivisection on the side. Jerry seems to be washed up these days even on our front so maybe I will again see them fair shores ere I become toothless and senile.

(And on the 5th) Some mail got up to us today, the first in a couple of weeks. And amongst the letters from you was a parcel

from Molly Noonan, whom I loved and lost so long ago in Kingston. I can't think why she should remember me at this late date but mine not to reason why, lots of good grub to eat instead. I wait patiently for the appearance of *Carrying Place* which, despite pop's pessimism about the reading public, is sure to have a wide appeal. I'm counting on this if only to free me from the drudgery of slaving for a living when I get home. Speaking of writers, one, Mrs. Ernest Hemingway, arrived on my doorstep today in slacks, a bandanna and a US combat jacket, strung with cameras and notebooks. The Brigadier and the Brigade Major were busy fighting a war so I got stuck with her and had to listen to and try to answer a lot of asinine questions.

About "Bonnet's" new suit of sails, I would take it as a compliment if you would let me pay for same. After all I hope to get lots of use out of them in future days. Mother, don't worry about my sex life. Monogamy is not going to be my style. I expect to have a houseful of women which, I'm told, can be a paying proposition. I've decided to make my living after la guerre by writing, and I am growing a new moustache. I hope this one will be visible.

It's getting too damn noisy up here in the "I" truck. I think I will make for a nearby cellar. Bye the bye did you ever get the Hastings and Prince Edward stuff I sent you. Or any other parcels. I've had two from you in the last six weeks. Sorry pals, it's getting too hard to concentrate and anyway my corporal says he can't properly

hear the whistle of incomers over the clackety clack of the typewriter. (It was a portable Olivetti which I liberated in Sicily and which continued with me throughout the war and I still have it.)

(And a last letter from Angus) September 20th. Dear Squibb: You do get gruesomer and gruesomer in your verse. I can only surmise that your vivisection activities are only on the side and by way of light relaxation. Remember how you used to say to me, "Write a funny work daddy?" Well you too. If your first novel doesn't turn out as a second "Dracula" I'll miss my guess. *Carrying Place* by the way should be out by the tenth of next month. I'll send you an autographed copy. The price is \$3.00 which you can remit by money order or bank draft. Reg Saunders has made a handsome book out of it. Advanced sales are going well. One order of 100 already, several 50's and a number of 25's. But that doesn't mean a damn thing since the booksellers are buying it on Reg's reputation not mine. And he is making it his leading book with two front pages in his catalogue, ahead even of Matthew Halton's war book. Halton is the only correspondent whom I would walk across the room to turn on the radio to hear. I'll send his book too as soon as it is out.

The highways are full of service men hitchhiking these days. On the way to Oakville the other day I picked up a seaman from the west coast, another from the Atlantic patrol, a service corps sergeant from Borden who is also an alderman of Welland, a flight sergeant-major who was shot down over the North Sea eight months