

Ward A, Street 2, Unit 7
Merced Assembly Center
Merced, California
August 9, 1942

Mr. H. A. Strong
Electrolux Corporation
417 Montgomery Street
San Francisco, California

Dear Mr. Strong:

This is a long delayed letter to let you know of our experiences since leaving Petaluma. We moved from Petaluma on March 27th and 28th to my wife's folk's ranch at Livingston, Merced County, which was a lesser restricted zone at the time. This was several days before the dead line date to move from one zone to another to consolidate families and though I wanted to stay on the job with Electrolux until Petaluma was evacuated, I reluctantly yielded to family pressure and moved. During April and the first week in May I obtained special traveling permits and went to Petaluma three times. On these trips I attended to my personal affairs, sold a few Electroluxes and rendered as much service as possible to my customers.

On May 10th we moved into this camp which is located at the south-west edge of Merced on the fair grounds. I haven't been able to find out the acreage here but we are very crowded. With the exception of a few fair buildings which are used for administration purposes and the warehouses and animal exhibition sheds which are used as warehouses, the rest of the camp is of recent construction. The buildings we live in are just like chicken houses. The entire camp was put up in a great hurry and the contractors apparently employed any one who could use a hammer and saw. Consequently the buildings are crudely built and pro workmanship is glaringly apparent. The buildings are 20' x 100' which are divided into 5 uneven size rooms for 5 varying size families. Five of us, including our family and one of my wife's sisters, occupy a 16' x 20' room. The floors are in most of the buildings of concrete, others have plain wood floors made of square edge green mill run lumber. Both types of floors are laid right on the ground. In many rooms, morning glory and other hardy weeds have grown up between the cracks in the floor and also around the walls. We are also bothered with crickets, grass hoppers and many other varieties of bugs, insects and mice and rats getting into our rooms. Those people with wood floors have a very unsanitary condition because the boards have dried out leaving spaces for dirt and debris to collect. Fortunately we have a concrete floor and though it is hard on the floor brush we find it easy to clean with our Electrolux. The walls are 8' high of a single thickness of 1" boards unfinished inside and covered with a solid layer of black building paper on the outside. The roof is covered with black composition roll roofing and inside the ceiling has been left out. Each room has from 3 to 5 single windows about 3' square which slide to one side to open, a light globe in the center of the room and a n electric outlet on one wall. The partitions between the rooms are of a single thickness of $\frac{1}{2}$ " plywood and do not extend all the way up to the roof so we do not have much quiet privacy. In the prevailing hot weather our rooms are just like ovens. There is no escape because there isn't any artificial or natural shade except for a few scattered trees in inconvenient places.

Wherever possible, 4 buildings have been built on one street. 24 buildings comprise a Ward of which there are 10 designated alphabetically. In each ward there is a mess hall of the same dimension and construction as our living quarters with a capacity of 160 people. Each mess hall serves 3 shifts of each meal. We eat in the first shift at 6:30 A. A., 11:30 A. M. and 5:00 P. M. Breakfast comes too early for Gary, who is 4 years old now and Nancy, who is nearly 2, so we bring their breakfast home to them. Each ward has a laundry building with 12 laundry trays for hand washing of clothes and separate shower and lavatory buildings of inadequate capacity. The spaces between most of the buildings are 25'. The main roads are 100' wide and graveled. The soil is adobe and as cows and other livestock had been run on it to keep down the grass, the surface is very irregular and hard to walk on.

The population of this camp is slightly over 4500 people.

For the use of the entire camp, and located in a central position, there are 3 hospital buildings 20' x 100'. The outer construction is the same as other buildings but the inside is finished completely with plywood and the floor is doubled and raised off of the ground. We also have a 4 man barber shop using home made wood stools instead of the regular barber chairs, a canteen store selling refreshments, toilet articles, drugs, stationery, fruit, tobacco, etc., a fire department with 2 motorized units, a police department, a miniature library and 3 20' x 100' recreation buildings. And to top it all off we have a barbed wire fence around the entire camp with high guard towers, manned by armed soldiers, placed at corners and intersections of the fence. At the single entrance to the camp there is a double sentry guard system.

We have good athletic facilities here as we have the use of the fair ground grand stand, bleachers, ball field and the track. We have an ample supply of privately owned and government issued athletic equipment of all kinds. The Girl Scouts and the Boy Scouts are functioning strongly. As I have been associated with the Boy Scouts in Petaluma since 1929, I am doing my little bit to help out with the Scouts here.

During the past few months we have passed through many hard days. We have been sick too often and too long, due to the crowded inadequate housing, bad food--low grade--little variety--too much of it canned and spoiled, pitifully inadequate medical facilities (only 3 doctors and a very limited supply of drugs and equipment), and the weather. We received a good taste of what was in store for us the first night we were here. In the middle of the night the sky opened up and we had a near cloud burst and though the buildings were new, they leaked like sieves around the doorsy windows, and worst of all the roof. In our little room we had about 7 roof leaks. Beds, clothes, personal effects, all got wet. The rain lasted on and off for nearly 2 days. As the weather had started to warm up and because it was May the 10th, we didn't bring winter clothes or rubber shoes, so we had a very difficult time of it getting around the camp through the sticky wet adobe. Nearly all of us caught colds. Adults as well as children stayed in bed during the day just to keep warm. There has been a number of unnecessary deaths in camp due to the previously mentioned reasons. On July 13th, I went over the head of the camp doctor who kept on insisting that the current colds our children had was only a repetition of the colds that so many people had contracted from time to time since coming into camp and reminded the camp manager that there might be more unnecessary deaths in camp if conditions were not improved or better medical attention provided. The camp manager made immediate arrangements to have our children examined at the Merced County Hospital. Gary was able to come home the same day with new medicines, but Nancy was cared for in the County Hospital for 6 days. My only regret in telling you of our experiences and describing the physical aspects of this camp is that I am not able to send you snap shots as we are not allowed to have cameras. Of course we don't need snap shots to remember what we have gone through and what we are going through, but I would like to furnish visual proof for all my statements as I have done in my Electrolux demonstrations.

The administration and control of the camp is a mixture of the Army and the W. P. A. which is more confusing than a single authority. There is too much paper work, red tape and delay in all departments. Good old fashioned, hard hitting private business methods could work wonders here but there isn't any thing we can do about it beyond executing the various assignments in our work as efficiently and rapidly as possible.

Nearly 1500 people are working here all under the W.P. A. The wage scale per month, working 44 hours a week, is as follows;

\$16.00 a month for the professional classification which includes doctors, dentists, registered nurses, pharmacists, chief accountants, head book keepers, chief draftmen, grade A foremen, supervisors of education, recreation, etc., and all other department and discipline. *Handwritten: \$16.00 Handwritten: \$16.00*

\$12.00 a month for the Skilled classification which includes carpenters, plumbers, electricians, some nurses, stenographers, grade B foremen, senior clerks, cooks, most truck drivers, etc.

\$8.00 a month for the Unskilled classification which includes junior clerks, janitors, garbage men, gardeners, typists, firemen, policemen, messengers, waiters, nurse's aides, common laborers, etc.

In addition to this scale of wages for workers, everyone, workers and non-workers receives free coupon books to use at the canteen store and barber shop. They are issued each month as follows:

\$4.00 book of coupons to each married couple.

\$2.50 " " " " " individual 16 years or over.

\$1.00 " " " " " " under 16 years.

In addition \$2.50 books may be purchased. We are also given a free clothing allowance each month as follows:

\$4.61 for adult women. \$2.85 for girls 6 to 18 years.

\$3.82 for adult men. \$2.15 " boys " " " "

\$2.60 " children 1 to 5 years. \$2.25 for infants to 1 year.

A contract has been made with Sears, Roebuck & Co. for a very limited selection of clothing.

I started work as a carpenter (\$12.00 a month) expecting to do finish work on all the newly constructed buildings, but I soon learned that they were considered finished as the contractors left them. The work was too heavy and hard for me as it consisted of rough work making saw horses, work benches, tables, etc. Because of my weakened physical condition due to our environment I didn't last 2 weeks as a carpenter. After quitting as a carpenter I decided to get a job where more brains would be used than muscles. After submitting a history of myself to several divisions, I was taken on as a grade B foreman (\$12.00 a month) in the warehouses handling everything except food. Our month runs from the 4th to the 4th. On July 4th (my 34th birthday) I was raised to a grade A foreman (\$16.00 a month). My principal duties are to see that everything is properly received, stored and issued. The work is very interesting and instructive and I enjoy my work very much. There are 8 of us, including a girl stenographer, in our department. We are using five 20' x 100' warehouses. There is a separate transportation department and they do all the delivering for us.

Tentative plans are that we will be moved to a permanent location or camp now being constructed at Granada, Colorado. According to these plans, the Merced camp and about 2000 people from another temporary camp will be moved to Granada. The War Relocation Authority, the agency in charge of these permanent camps, recently released an announcement stating that loyal American born Japanese who can obtain bona fide employment outside of the coastal states would be released together with their families. I have always been an optimist and I have been lucky too. So far the worst things that have happened to me have been turned into something more favorable than the situation I enjoyed when the apparent disaster struck. So in this instance too, I feel that somehow, somewhere, I will find suitable employment. Nothing would make me happier than to help in the American war effort in the most positive and all out manner possible. It is hard to be forced into comparative idleness when our efforts could be applied to more beneficial uses.

My wife and I hope you and Mrs. Strong and your associates are well and fine and that business is as good as possible under war conditions. We miss our association with all of you and the business of representing Electrolux in Petaluma more than words can express. We are looking forward with eager anticipation to happier days when we can again enjoy those very happy personal associations with you. We cherish the friendship and understanding that has existed between us and we hope that these pleasant relations will long continue. We thank you very much for your many past favors and for continuing the payment of installment commissions. Electrolux has always been as good as we made it and during these trying days Electrolux is still good to us, for which we are most appreciative.

With kindest regards and best wishes to all, I remain

Sincerely yours,