

West from Home: Letters of Laura Ingalls Wilder to Almanzo Wilder Study Guide

West from Home: Letters of Laura Ingalls Wilder to Almanzo Wilder by Laura Ingalls Wilder

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Plot Summary

"West from Home: Letters of Laura Ingalls Wilder to Almanzo Wilder, San Francisco 1915" is a nonfiction work comprised of 124 pages. The book is a series of letters from Laura Ingalls Wilder to her husband, Almanzo "Manly" Wilder as she traveled from Missouri to San Francisco in 1915 to visit their only daughter, Rose Wilder Lane. Rose was at the time a writer and editor for The Bulletin, a San Francisco newspaper. Rose was also busy writing the biography of Henry Ford.

Although Laura was born into a struggling pioneer family, she had the heart of a traveler. For Laura the decision to leave Rocky Ridge Farm, the Wilders' fruit and dairy farm in Mansfield, Missouri, was at the same time difficult and simple. Laura wanted to see San Francisco, Rose and the Pacific Ocean as desperately as Rose wanted her to see those things. On the other hand, leaving Almanzo to tend to the farm could prove to be a tremendous strain, both physically and financially. In the end, Rose offered to pay Laura for the potential loss of income from the Wilders' chickens while she stayed in San Francisco for two months.

Laura was vigilant in writing letters along every leg of the trip. In the letters, she expressed concern for Almanzo and the family dog, Inky, while explaining everything she saw from the window of the train as it passed through the Midwest and into the West. After boarding in Springfield, Missouri, Laura had stops in Denver, Ogden, and Kansas City. The trip proved to be grueling and difficult for Laura, who at the time was forty-eight years old.

The letters to Almanzo explained in detail everything Laura encounters on her trip, from the people on the train to the sights and sounds outside the window of her car. There are humorous stories, as well as complaints of being exhausted and uncomfortable. Along the way Laura shares that she's met quite a few nice people who have been helpful in some way.

There is a sense of relief when Laura finally arrives in Francisco. During Laura's stay, she is delighted with the plethora of sights and sounds that San Francisco has to offer. Among these are the Golden Gate Bridge, the Pacific Ocean, Russian Hill, the World's Fair, and Panama Pacific International Exposition. The Panama Pacific International Exposition was held to commemorate the Panama Canal's completion as well as the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of the Pacific Ocean. San Francisco, the Pacific Ocean and the PPIE were all magnificent sights to behold particularly for a girl who had grown up in the Midwest and resided in Missouri.

The book ends with a letter to Almanzo, dated October 22, 1915, in which Laura talks about preparations for the long journey home.



Introduction and On the Way, Pages 1-22

Introduction and On the Way, Pages 1-22 Summary and Analysis

West from Home: Letters of Laura Ingalls Wilder to Almanzo Wilder, San Francisco 1915 begins with a brief history of San Francisco and an explanation of the trip. Laura Ingalls Wilder took to visit her daughter, Rose Wilder Lane, in the late summer of 1915.

The book was edited by Roger Lea McBride in 1973. Laura Ingalls Wilder died in 1957 and awash in grief, Rose could not bear to go through her mother's letters and postcards. The items were put into a box to be gone through at a later date, but it never happened. After Rose died in 1968, Roger Lea McBride, Rose's executor and friend, found the letters and was responsible for editing and arranging them into book form.

The introduction by McBride gives us a brief history of Laura Ingalls Wilder's life. Many people have read the "Little House" books and have also seen the television series and know that the Ingalls family was a pioneer family that homesteaded in several areas including De Smet, Dakota Territory and Walnut Grove, Minnesota. Life for the Ingalls family was hardscrabble. At age eighteen, Laura married Almanzo Wilder and the couple settled on a farm in De Smet. After years of toiling thanklessly on the farm, Almanzo and Laura both took jobs in order to support the family. Almanzo worked as a kerosene salesman for the Waters Pierce Oil Company. Laura was the manager of accounts payable.

Rose recalls an evening tradition where Laura would read while Rose and Almanzo ate dinner. Rose claims it was one of the happiest times of her life.

Rose became a world-famous writer long before her mother. Although Rose was unable to go to college, she read voraciously and eventually went to work for Western Union as the telegrapher. Rose became one of the first female real estate agents in California, and by 1914, worked as a feature writer for The San Francisco Bulletin under the guidance of Fremont Older, a "great American editor."

In 1915, the World's Fair opened in San Francisco in conjunction with the Panama Pacific international exposition. The Exposition was a celebration of the completion of the Panama Canal and also the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of the Pacific Ocean by Balboa.

Rose was eager to have her mother travel from Missouri to see the Exposition and to spend time visiting on the west coast, a place that Laura had never been. The letters contained in the book include Rose's invitation and stories of Laura's travels, written to Almanzo to whom she referred to as "Manly." The book's editor believes that there are letters missing between Rose's initial letter and Laura's letters that would include the planning of the trip. Since the initial letter from Rose was not dated, there is no way of



knowing how much time had passed since the invitation or how many letters might have been exchanged until Laura left Rocky Ridge Farm on August 21, 1915. At the time of the journey, Laura was forty-eight years old and Rose, her only daughter, was twenty-nine years old.

The first letter in the series was from Rose to Laura, who was known as "Mama Bess." All of the letters written by Laura were also signed Bess or Bessie. Laura had adopted the nickname Bess shortly after meeting Almanzo since Almanzo's sister was also named Laura. Therefore, Almanzo adapted Laura's middle name, Elizabeth, to avoid confusion between the two women.

The first letter from Rose was written in the spring of 1915. The return address on the letter was that of The Bulletin, the newspaper where Rose worked. It was addressed to Mrs. A.J. Wilder, Rocky Ridge Farm, Mansfield, Missouri. The letter begged Bess to make a trip to California. There wasn't a lot of money even though Rose and her husband, Gillette, were working, but Rose was sure that she would be able to manage the expense of her mother's trip in addition to \$5 per week to cover the income that would be lost from Bess' absence on the farm. Rose promised that Bess that they could go to the Fair, and "play together all the time that I'm not working." Rose also said that she would be able to arrange an aeroplane flight if Bess wanted it. There is a footnote that states that Rose had already flown over the San Francisco Bay "strapped to the wing of Lincoln Beachey's plane." Beachey, the first man to ever do a loop the loop in a monoplane, later died in an accident during the Exposition.

Rose offered Bess an opportunity to write short stories for an eastern magazine for which she would be paid \$50 per story. Rose claimed that it wasn't great pay but it might help with some of the bills on the farm. Rose asked Bessie's opinion on some of the work she had been doing, including the story on Art Smith, the man who replaced Lincoln Beachey as a pilot at the Exposition after Beachey's death.

Rose went on to tell her mother what to bring in the way of clothing and accessories.

The first letter from Bess to Manly was dated August 21, 1915. The letter was started sixty miles away in Springfield, Missouri at the home of Bess' friend Mabel. Springfield was the first stop on Bess' journey. While in Springfield, Bess had her eyes examined and was told that she would need to get glasses. However, the glasses would not be finished for the trip and Bess would have to make do or pick up an inexpensive pair of readers until she got back. Bess closes letter by asking about the well-being of Manly, Inky, the family dog, and the farm.

The second letter is dated Sunday, August 22, 1915, from Kansas City. The train was late leaving from Springfield, and Bess told of a German man who was kind to her on the train.

The next letter was written Monday morning, August 23, 1915 from the train. Bess relayed some of the first sites she had seen from cows and horses to her first dwarf sagebrush. Bess also talks about some of the people on the train, including an



obnoxious lawyer who graduated from Harvard. Bess did not like the lawyer and said that the man talked too much and "takes too much for granted." There was also a seventy-five year old Frenchman that Bess found interesting, particularly his stories of being in Belgium just before the war and a story about seeing the Cathedral of Rheims.

The letter picks up later, after Bess had missed her connection in Denver and was forced to spend the night in a nearby hotel. There was a train that would have driven throughout the night but Rose had told Bess to enjoy the sunrise as she may never have the opportunity to travel that way again. The Frenchman was kind enough to help a Bess take her bags to the hotel and offered assistance while she was there.

In the morning, Bess forgot to mail Manly's letter and gave it to the conductor who mailed it from Malta, Colorado.

On the train from Denver to Salt Lake, Bess wrote to Manly saying that she was having only half as much fun as she would be than if her husband was by her side. This was Bess's first glimpse at the desert and the "frightful" mountains that surround it. Bess said that the mountains reminded her of pictures of Austria, where there were old castles and that castles would also be perfect atop these rocky peaks.

Bess had a three-hour layover in Salt Lake, an hour on the train to Ogden, and then she would make the last connection on her way to San Francisco. The train cars were overcrowded, and as a result, everyone was uncomfortable. There were no sleepers to be had and Bess was exhausted. It is apparent that the trip began to wear on her. Bess writes, "if I had known what a hard trip it would be I don't believe I'd have had the courage, but still I'm sure I'll always be glad I came."

Bess talks about acquaintances she made on the train including an English family.

Bess also asks if Mr. Nall, the hired hand, was able to help on the farm. Bess' humor shows through when she tells Manly to make sure that Mr. Nall and Inky see that he is cheered up.

Bess send a postcard from Salt Lake City and then wrote a short letter while waiting in the train depot.

The next letter was written on the train at some unknown location in Nevada. The letter is dated Thursday, August 26, 1915. Bess was able to get a tourist berth and did not have to change trains in Ogden. Settled in for the last leg of the trip, Bess writes about seeing the Great Salt Lake and describes it as most beautiful sight she's ever seen, as it was under the moonlight. Bess describes sunrise on the desert. As the train travels through the desert, Bess laments that there is "not a living creature or a green thing in sight."



San Francisco, Pages 23-49

San Francisco, Pages 23-49 Summary and Analysis

Part two, San Francisco, begins with a letter dated Sunday, August 29, 1915. Bess arrived safely and was greeted by Rose, who then led her mother to the ferry.

Bess describes the ferry and says that she did not take notice of much because she was extremely tired. Rose's husband, Gillette, met the women after they got off the ferry and Bess was treated to her first ride on streetcar as they made their way to Russian Hill and the Lane's house on Vallejo Street.

Bess was excited about her first trip to Land's End and the first glimpse of the Pacific Ocean. When describing the Pacific Ocean, Bess says, "To say it is beautiful does not half express it. It is simply beyond words." Bess also writes about seeing boats in the Golden Gate

Rose and Gillette took a Bess on a trip to the Sutro Estate, and together the family walked several miles across the public park. Bess describes the lodge, stone lions, and many details of the area including statues and the view. Afterward, Rose, Bess and Gillette went to dinner at one of the local restaurants. Part of the next day was spent resting. In the afternoon, the family went to see Niles, an exhibition aviator. They were also able to see the Tower of Jewels, which was a premier feature at the Exposition.

Bess talks about the Lane's house on Vallejo Street. Although Bess does not like cities, she loves San Francisco as it is so beautiful. The house on Russian Hill has a glimpse of the Bay, lights on the water, and Bess refers to it as a fairyland. The Lane house has a good view from the windows and sits at the very top of Russian Hill. The house was built by Willis Polk in the 1890s. Polk, who built the house for his own use, eventually became Chairman of the Board of Architects for the Exposition. The house is still standing today.

Bess tells Manly about a trip to Chinatown and her dislike of Chinese food. There is also conversation about an ear spoon, a device used to clean out one's ears.

Bess was fascinated by a trip to Telegraph Hill, including the trip through an Italian tenement that is occupied by Italian fishermen. The hill is so steep that there are cleats across the path in order to help people climb safely to the top. Atop Telegraph Hill there is a fantastic view of the Bay as well as views of Oakland and Berkeley. After spending time on Telegraph Hill, mother and daughter walked down to the docks where they watched the waves and Bess caught her first glimpse of Alcatraz. During a walk on a pier, the women encountered sailors from a battleship and their pet black goat that was let loose to run on the wharf. The final stop of the day was the California Fruit Association's cannery. The trip was eye opening to Bess, who had previously imagined



canneries to be dirty and unsanitary places. Bess claimed that the cannery was so clean that she was longing for some canned fruit.

Bess was fascinated by the ships in the Bay and the glimpses of the nearby towns and cities as well as Alcatraz, Goat and Angel Islands.

Bess shared information on one of Rose's stories, "Ed Monroe, Man Hunter" with Manly and Mr. Nall. Bess was fascinated that the story was actually true and that "Ed Monroe" had dinner with Bess and the Lanes. The man was a former crook, not a detective, and worked for The Bulletin in the circulation department.

Gillette made plans to take Bessie into the valley where there were an abundance of poultry farms. This was of great interest to Bess since Rocky Ridge Farm also raised chickens. One farmer in particular interested Bess when she learned that the man raised 10,000 hens on fifteen acres and made a profit of \$1.38 per hen each year.



Pages 50-80

Pages 50-80 Summary and Analysis

The first letter in this section is dated September 13, 1915 and was written while Bess sat atop Telegraph Hill watching the ships in the Bay. Bess describes the ships for Manly and how they are arranged on the water.

Bess writes that she and Rose will be working on more stories together in the coming week.

Bess is also interested in the sight of the mast on Goat Island that belongs to a wireless station. The people on the island can radio Honolulu.

Lastly, Bess tells Manly about the disappearance of Rolf Pelkie, an artist who worked at The Bulletin with Rose. It was alleged that Pelkie was a German spy. The editor added a footnote to say that Pelkie was not a spy, and although his sudden absence was never explained, he returned to San Francisco and had a long and illustrious career.

Bess writes to Manly about the purchase of a horse and how it could and would affect the team. Someone had stolen grapes from the farm.

Bess sent one of Rose's stories back to Missouri. The story was inspired by something heard at the Zone, an area of the Exposition.

Gillette took Bess to the Presidio, an army reservation where soldiers live in tents and barracks. Gillette had a friend who was a lieutenant in the Navy and as a result, received an order that he and Bess should be allowed to tour a battleship with every courtesy extended to them.

Bess claims that she has not written of everything she has seen at the Fair because there is simply too much to see and it would not be possible to describe it all. Bess chose to make notes in a book about the Exposition so that she might explain and describe it once she arrived back at Rocky Ridge Farm.

Rose and Bess went to see "Dogs of all Nations" and Bess wrote about her disappointment. The only dog mentioned was an Irish Wolf Hound, which Bess claimed was a monster and it was amazing that a creature could be so large and still be considered a dog. There were also trips to see other animals, including Belgian and Percheron horses and the Carnation milk cows. Bess had literature sent to Manly on automatic milking machines which she thought would be beneficial to the farm.

Rose and Bess went to several of the areas surrounding San Francisco, including Sausalito, San Jose, Petaluma, Mill Valley, and the Santa Clara Valley. Rose thought Bess and Almanzo might enjoy living in the Santa Clara Valley but Bess hated the heat and claimed that it was worse than Florida.



Bess saw two moving pictures, one with Charlie Chaplin who she said was "horrid," and one in which the Germans captured Przemys. The brutality of it was upsetting to Bess.

Finances are addressed. At the time of the most recent letter, September 21, 1915, Gillette was unemployed and the family was being supported by Rose's paycheck of \$30 per week. Gillette stated that if he was able to get a good job, he would pay off the \$500 mortgage at Rocky Ridge. The idea is nice but Bess will not count on it. It was also a possibility that Rose and Gillette would pay back part of the \$250 they borrowed to get started. Despite all of the fun and exciting things happening, Bess assures Almanzo that she is being extremely careful with their money and had not forgotten why she made the trip, which was to learn how to write.

Rose expressed the desire to take Bess to Los Angeles and travel by steamer as the beginning of Bess' journey home.

Bess is unhappy that she had little news from De Smet, where Bess' mother, recently widowed, was living with Mary, Bess' older sister who was blind.

Contained in the series of letters is a postcard from Rose to Manly. Rose spoke of the milking machine and said that "Papa" should tell Inky not to be jealous of the Dogs of All Nations as there wasn't a dog that was better in the lot.

Bess describes the trip she and Rose took to the Santa Clara Valley, including experiences on electric streetcars. Bess enjoyed seeing the vineyards and livestock. The possibility of prohibition was beginning to pose a real threat to the grape growers and Bess believed that it would be highly possible for many of them to go out of business if the amendment passed.

For the first time, Bess expresses a negative opinion about Gillette's lack of a permanent job. According to Bess, there would be hope of receiving part of the \$250 if she was still in San Francisco when a payment came in, otherwise there would be little hope of getting even a portion of it. Bess claimed that Gillette let "money run through his fingers like water."

During this time, Rose had a particularly difficult work assignment so Bess was left on her own.

Bess writes of a trip she and Rose took to Berkeley. Bess liked Berkeley with its hillsides and beautiful homes. One of the most interesting things to Bess was a "Greek Theater" that was set into a hillside. The theater was styled after an open air Greek amphitheater.

Rose arranged a tea party for Bess to meet her female friends. Bess enjoyed them thoroughly, particularly the women who wrote for the Bulletin. Some were well known and others would go on to have successful careers. The men at the Bulletin were merely acquaintances to Rose and Bess claimed that some were nice while others she disliked quite a lot.



Pages 81-117

Pages 81-117 Summary and Analysis

There is a postcard dated September 29, 1915 that details Bess' trip to the Carnation Milk Condensery. Bess was fascinated by the process and promised to detail the operation once she got home to the farm.

Bess and Gillette went to the Exposition to look around. Rose went as well but had to spend the entire afternoon tracking down more sources for a story she was writing about the railroad. One of the exhibits Bess liked was the Australia exhibit. There were kangaroos and wallabies, which Bess found ugly but interesting. The rest of the exhibit was mainly wool and minerals. There were also visits to the French and Belgian exhibits, which were visited only briefly due to a limited time to spend at the Exposition.

One of the exhibits that pleased Bess was the Food Products building. There were some descriptions but Bess told Manly that she would tell him all about it when she got home. Later, Bess published an article in the Missouri Ruralist that recounted all the sights and developments at the exhibit.

The Keen Kutter Cutlery exhibit was also of great interest. The exhibit was centered on a waterfall and a river. The space was approximately two hundred feet square and the water and waves were chains. The entire exhibit was powered by electricity. There were also animated knives and spoons as well as a group of blacksmiths working their hammers on anvils.

Bess tells of an incident on the way home that once again shows her sense of humor: "To cap day, as we came home on the streetcar a man sat near us who was chewing gum. He wore a stiff hat pulled down tight on his head every time he chewed, his hat moved up and down fully 2 inches, up and down, up and down, with perfect regularity as though he were worked by electricity. "

The next letter is dated October 1, 1915. Bess writes that Rose has given her a \$10 gold piece. That is in addition to the \$10 she had received earlier and now Bess will take home \$30 in gold. There is \$5 left of the original traveling money and Bess will use that for the trip back to Missouri. The \$5 should be enough to cover the cost of a sleeping berth and food. Rose begged Bess to stay until the train ticket expired on November 15. Rose continued to give Bess \$5 per week which would mean that the trip could actually make a profit for Bess and Almanzo if Almanzo could handle preparing the farm for winter without Bess' help. Bess told Almanzo that it would be a good idea only if the farm could manage without her, that if there was a chance of losing the potato crop, it would not be worth it.

Rose continued to beg Bess to stay. The extra expense would not be a problem with Rose's job, even though Gillette remained unemployed. Gillette stated that the lack of



newspaper jobs could easily be attributed to the Fair and the fact that so many reporters and newspapermen were in town for the event. Gillette expected the market to open up once the Fair was over. Meanwhile, Gillette focused on real estate, something he and Rose had worked on previously. There was a great deal of money to be made. The real estate company owed Gillette and Rose a significant sum of money, some of which would go to Bess and Almanzo if Bess was still in town when the funds were received. Gillette also spoke of finding a job in Kansas City or St. Louis. Although it would be difficult to manage for Rose's job, even though she worked at home, Rose embraced the idea. It would also mean that she would be closer to Bess and Almanzo.

Bess sent a postcard to Manly telling him about a \$600,000 theater that seated 4,000 people and was the largest in the U.S.

The next letter is dated October 4, 1915. Rose was called into the editor's office at The Bulletin so that she could make changes to the railroad story which was scheduled to start running in the newspaper that Thursday. Bess went along to the offices. The editor wanted Rose to write a story on an Austrian violinist who was in San Francisco. The violinist spent a month in the Austrian army and was wounded so he received a discharge. The man spent his time after the military playing the violin. Bess commented that he is a wonderful musician. The man made a statement to the newspapers that unless something is done soon, there will be nothing left of Europe.

The funds that the violinist made while in the United States would be used to support artists in Europe who were struggling. Many were dying of starvation after leaving the army. The man and his wife had already adopted forty-three soldiers' orphans and were prepared to clothe, feed and educate the children as their own.

The editor was so impressed with the story that he decided to run it in place of the railroad story, saving the latter piece for a later date. That meant that Rose would be extremely busy writing the piece on the Austrian so that it could be finished and edited before the newspaper went to press.

Bess returned home while Rose went to interview the Austrian. Bess wrote to Manly about a house near the Lane's house. The materials for the house were "brought around the Horn in the old days." The couple who owned the house quarreled so much that the man deeded half the house and lot to his wife and then the couple separated, using their own shares of the property. The house was eventually converted into apartments. The house and grounds were enclosed by a high rock wall with an iron gate. Solid stone steps lead up to the entrance of the house. Bess wrote about the balustrade and small balcony and the view over the Bay. In one of the apartments lived Berta, "the little artist girl," who had illustrated some of Bess' verses.

Bess wrote in detail about a sunset on the Bay as seen from a boat. Bess had a fondness for the water and seemed to go there as much as possible. Bess wrote about the things that she saw while on the boat as well as the feel of the wind and water.



Bess closed the letter by saying she was glad Mr. Nall was there to help Manly with the farm and that the peas and corn were taken care of for the winter.

The next letter is one that was enclosed with Manly's other letter. This one was marked "private." Bess assumed that Manly was reading her letters to their friends and wanted to keep some things just between them. In the letter, Bess spoke about Gillette's new job at the Call, The Bulletin's rival newspaper. Bess believed that Gillette would begin to feel better now that he had work. Rose managed to syndicate her story on Charlie Chaplin. The concept is an exciting one as the syndicate would receive an estimated \$500 per week for five weeks on the story. Although Bess is fascinated with writing, the amount of work Rose must do causes Bess to say: "The more I see of how Rose works the better satisfied I am to raise chickens."

Bess' next letter contains a story about Rose's scare regarding Bess' alleged disappearance. Bess had decided to walk down the hill to see Berta and left a note on Rose's table saying where she would be. Meanwhile, Rose was busy at work and called home. Alarmed at receiving no answer throughout the entire morning, Rose became frantic and began to convince herself that Bess had been in an accident and had no identification. As time went on, Rose became more and more frightened until she ran home and went on a search for her mother, finally finding the note.

The thick fog made an impression on Bess, as did the sound of the foghorns, which Bess described as distressed and mournful, like two lost souls crying out to one another in the night.

There are descriptions of the ships that are temporarily trapped in the Bay due to the fog. One is a passenger ship from the Orient, one is a US transport, and a third is a Greek tramp.

Bess returns to the topic of the Austrian violinist, whose name is revealed as Fritz Kreisler. Kreisler debunked the tales of barbaric behavior among the troops, saying that it was all made up by the newspapers and that they were treated all the same, whether the soldiers were German or Russian. Kreisler and his wife were also supporting three Russian families in addition to the forty-three children. Mrs. Kreisler served as a nurse with the Austrian army. Rose stated that the Kreislers were the loveliest people she had ever met.

Bess announces the price of eggs, which are \$.50 per dozen.

The trip to Los Angeles is still up in the air and will not be decided until Bess decides the date of her departure and Rose's work schedule is determined.

Bess managed to find a pair of glasses that helped the strain on her eyes, yet she remains tired. It may be that the special glasses will have to be ordered in Springfield after all.



One of the items of interest on a sightseeing trip was a silver watch in an antique shop downtown. The watch was made from the first silver ever mined in California and purchased by a prospector. The watch weighed three pounds.

Bess spent another day at the Fair with much to write about. Some of the highlights were the wood exhibit and the French and New Zealand exhibits. Since Almanzo was an accomplished woodworker and carpenter, Bess took particular care in describing the types of wood and tools used in the exhibit. The French exhibit also intrigued Bess. The statuary, especially one of the Minute Man in 1776, was of note. So were the tapestries and fine furniture.

Bess seems to have missed a letter from Manly as well as from one of their friends. The mail is tossed onto Rose's desk at work and "pawed through" by five people. Bess asks Manly to send all further correspondence to the house on Vallejo Street.

Rose wrote a letter to Almanzo reporting that "Mama Bess is getting fat." Rose vows to keep her away from the scones.

Less than a week later, Rose wrote again to say that Bess had fallen off a streetcar and hit her head on the cobblestones. Although she had to spend a little time in the hospital, all in all, there was no major harm done. Bess hadn't wanted Manly to know because he would worry about her.

On October 22, the day after Rose wrote to tell Almanzo about the accident, Bess wrote another letter. Bess assured Manly that she was all right and focused on the fact that Manly had been sick and Inky had injured himself. The Ruralist had approved Bess' proposal for work and sent passes to the Fair so that she would have the opportunity to explore everything. Bess laments that it took so long for the newspaper to reply.

Bess stated once again that she knows she should be at home on the farm and that the trip must seem as if it has taken much longer than expected. However, there is much to see and do, Rose is busy, and the activity is tiring to Bess.

Gillette may have an opportunity at a permanent job. The real estate man is still out of town so the monies owed to Gillette and Rose have not been paid.

Bess wrote briefly of Rose's meetings with Henry Ford and a story about an engineer.

The last letter, written on October 22, 1915, stated that Manly should not expect to receive any more long letters as she was preparing to leave San Francisco where she would go straight to Kansas City and then home to Rocky Ridge Farm.

Pages 118-124

Pages 118-124 Summary and Analysis

The last section, the appendix, is very short. It is a condensed version of an article written by Bess for the Missouri Ruralist which was published on November 20, 1915. The article was only one of many written on the Exposition and Bess' trip to San Francisco.

The title of the article is "Magic in Plain Foods." Bess claimed that the idea for the article came to her as she wandered through the Food Products Building at the Exposition. According to Bess, even Aladdin had less power in the kitchen than the modern woman. The foods and machinery available to the modern woman are amazing and bring the world to her doorstep. Bess briefly follows the progress in how foods are prepared and laments that her space to talk about the exhibit is limited.

The article ends with recipes for Russian Forrest, Mexican Tamale Loaf, German Honey Cake, Italian White Tagliarini and Sauce, Croissants, and Chinese Almond Cake.



Characters

Laura Ingalls Wilder

Laura Ingalls Wilder (1867-1957) was a well-known traveler, writer, and Renaissance woman of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Laura, referred to in West from Home, is referred to by her nickname in the Wilder family, Mama Bess so as not to be confused with Almanzo's sister Laura.

Bess was born in the log cabin around Pepin, Wisconsin in 1867. The family eventually up rooted and traveled across Minnesota in Kansas by covered wagon. The family eventually settled in the Dakota Territory.

The travels and adventures of the Ingalls family are well known due to nine books written by Laura Ingalls Wilder. The first of those books, "Little House in the Big Woods," was published in 1932. Since that time, the adventures of the Ingalls family have been immortalized through books and several television series.

Bess began to teach school at age fifteen. Three years later, at eighteen, she married Almanzo Wilder. Their only child to live into adulthood, Rose, was born in 1886. A second child, a son, died shortly after childbirth.

Laura and Almanzo traveled throughout the Midwest and also spent a brief time in Florida before settling at Rocky Ridge Farm in Mansfield, Missouri. The couple struggled for many years, particularly during the Great Depression when their investments were lost. Eventually, the fruit and dairy farm made enough money to keep the family afloat. In their later years, the Wilders gave up farming at the behest of Rose who could afford to support them in their retirement years.

Laura visited Rose in San Francisco in the late summer of 1915, where the mother and daughter visited the prestigious Panama Pacific International Exposition and world fair. The trip and stay at Rose's was carefully documented in letters to Almanzo who elected to stay behind and run the farm.

Laura was in her sixties when she began to write the Little House series with the help of Rose. The books eventually became extremely famous and lucrative.

Rocky Ridge Farm is now a museum.

Rose Wilder Lane

Rose Wilder Lane (1886-1968) was a noted American author and political figure and daughter to Laura Ingalls Wilder and Almanzo Wilder. Like her Grandfather Ingalls, Rose had a bit of wanderlust and spent quite a bit of time traveling, which she later capitalized on when she became a travel writer. When married to Gillette Lane, Rose



and her husband traveled the country executing a number of profitable promotional schemes. That experience would later help Laura with the marketing of the Little House series of books depicting her childhood as part of a pioneer family.

Rose eventually settled in San Francisco, where she worked as a writer for the Bulletin, a newspaper frequently mentioned in the book. After a few years, Rose quit The Bulletin to become a successful writer of short stories and novels. Although Rose and Gillette's personal life was reported to be happy, Rose's journals showed that she was often depressed and disillusioned by their relationship. The couple had one child that died shortly after he was born. The couple had no more children and eventually divorced.

Rose became politically active during her career and was the first biographer of Herbert Hoover. When Franklin Delano Roosevelt was in office, Rose gave up her career as a writer to oppose paying income tax. Rose also was a strong opponent against the New Deal, welfare, and communism. As a result, Rose was instrumental in founding the Libertarian Party, the name of which she allegedly coined.

Almanzo Wilder

Almanzo Wilder - Husband to Laura, father to Rose. Wilder, dubbed "Manly" by Laura, was known as a hardworking man on the farm as well as an accomplished carpenter. Wilder suffered a bout with diphtheria that left him paralyzed for a time and as a result, caused him to walk with a cane.

Claire Gillette Lane

Claire Gillette Lane - Rose's husband.

Inky

Inky - The Wilders' dog.

Mr. Nall

Mr. Nall - A farmhand at Rocky Ridge Farm.

Charlie Chaplin

Charlie Chaplin - Famous filmmaker and movie star best known for his character "The Tramp."



Lincoln Beachey

Lincoln Beachey - The first pilot to ever fly upside down. Died in a plane crash in San Francisco in 1915.

Art Smith

Art Smith - Subject of Rose Wilder Lane's first biography, "The Story of Art Smith".

Henry Ford

Henry Ford - Friend to Rose Wilder Lane and subject of the Wilder's biography, "Henry Ford's Own Story."

Herbert Hoover

Herbert Hoover - Thirty-first president of the United States. Friend and biographical subject of Rose Wilder Lane.



Objects/Places

Panama Pacific International Exposition

During Laura Ingalls Wilder's visit to San Francisco in 1915, the Panama Pacific International Exposition was held to commemorate the Panamá Canal's completion as well as the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of the Pacific Ocean. San Francisco was just one of the cities that were being considered to host the exposition. In 1911, President Taft named San Francisco as the host city.

San Francisco, the Pacific Ocean and the PPIE were all magnificent sights to behold, particularly for a girl who had grown up in the Midwest and resided in Missouri. Although Laura Ingalls Wilder had settled down on Rocky Ridge Farm with her husband, Almanzo, Laura never lost her passion for travel. When Laura and Almanzo's daughter, Rose, insisted that her mother trouble last to San Francisco, Laura could not say no.

In addition to being held as a celebration, the PPIE was important to San Francisco in that the city was in desperate need of rebuilding its economic infrastructure after the fire and earthquake of 1906.

The exposition was set up in the area known today as the Marina. The exposition covered 635 acres and its northern boundary, backed up against San Francisco Bay.

Although there were many magnificent sights at the exposition, the most notable was the Tower of Jewels. The tower was forty-three stories high and in its faux jewel encrusted exterior, brilliantly reflected the lights on the Bay. Also included at the exposition were many attractions and exhibits, including an amusement park. The exposition ran from February to December 1915.

San Francisco

San Francisco, California was the final destination for Laura Ingalls Wilder as she traveled cross-country by train to visit her only daughter, Rose Wilder Lane. Although Laura had a passion for travel, she had not traveled much since her well-documented childhood. The timing was perfect to go to San Francisco, as there was a grand exposition taking place, as well as a world fair. The Panamá Pacific International exposition was held to honor the completion of the Panama Canal, as well as the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of the Pacific Ocean.

Rose Wilder Lane and her husband, Gillette, lived atop Russian Hill, a popular residential area with writers and artists. Today, Russian Hill is one of the most desirable neighborhoods and the city.

One of the first places Laura went was to Land's End, where she saw the Pacific Ocean for the very first time.



As a first-time visitor to San Francisco, Laura was eager to see everything she'd ever heard or read about. During her stay, the family visited the Golden Gate ridge, Sutro Estate, the Panama Pacific International Exposition, Fisherman's Wharf, and many other sites.

Dakota Territory

Dakota territory - the location in which the Ingalls family originally settled.

Mansfield, Missouri

Mansfield, Missouri - location of Rocky Ridge Farm, Laura and Almanzo Wilder's farm.

The Bulletin

The Bulletin - newspaper at which Rose Wilder Lane worked.

Alcatraz

Alcatraz - famous prison, situated in San Francisco Bay.

Rocky Ridge Farm

Rocky Ridge Farm - the farm belonging to Laura and Almanzo Wilder and Mansfield, Missouri.

Denver

Denver - Laura's first stop and overnight stay on her trip west.

Vallejo Street

Vallejo Street - street on which Rose and Gillette Lane lived in San Francisco.

Golden Gate Bridge

Golden Gate Bridge - the Golden Gate Bridge, which is situated across San Francisco Bay, is one of the premier landmarks in the world.



Themes

Travel

West from Home: Letters of Laura Ingalls Wilder to Almanzo Wilder, San Francisco 1915 is a series of letters from Laura Ingalls Wilder to her husband, Almanzo "Manly" Wilder as she travels from Missouri to San Francisco in 1915 to visit their only daughter, Rose. Laura was much more of a traveler than Almanzo and therefore he elected to stay on their farm, Rocky Ridge Farm in Mansfield, Missouri, while Laura traveled. The decision to go was at the same time difficult and simple. Laura wanted to see San Francisco, Rose and the Pacific Ocean as desperately as Rose wanted her to see those things. On the other hand, leaving Almanzo to tend to the farm could prove to be a tremendous strain, both physically and financially. In the end, Rose offered to pay Laura for the potential loss of income from the Wilders' chickens while she stayed in San Francisco for two months.

Laura was vigilant in writing letters along every leg of the trip. In the letters, she expressed concern for Almanzo and the family dog, Inky, while explaining everything she saw from the window of the train as it passed through the Midwest and into the West. After boarding in Springfield, Missouri, Laura had stops in Denver, Ogden, and Kansas City. The trip proved to be grueling and difficult for Laura, who at the time was forty-eight years old.

Still, the excitement of seeing San Francisco and all of the sights that she'd only read about made the trip worthwhile. Readers are treated to the stories of people met along the way, Laura's reactions to various landscapes, and tales of the World's Fair and Panama Pacific International Exposition.

Money

Although the Wilders were doing well enough financially at the time of the letters, money was still tight and the trip would be an extravagance. However, it was important for Laura to visit Rose and experience things she's only ever read about. The Wilders had struggled for many years before becoming solvent. As a result, Laura was frugal and focused on exactly how much money was being spent while she was away, making adjustments as needed so that she would spend no more than was absolutely necessary.

The decision to go to San Francisco via train was at the same time difficult and simple for Laura. Laura wanted to see San Francisco, Rose and the Pacific Ocean as desperately as Rose wanted her to see those things. On the other hand, leaving Almanzo to tend to the farm could prove to be a tremendous strain, both physically and financially. In the end, Rose offered to pay Laura for the potential loss of income from the Wilders' chickens while she stayed in San Francisco for two months. At this time,



Rose could afford to offer support to her parents as she was working steadily as a writer at The Bulletin, a San Francisco newspaper.

Writing

In 1915, Laura Ingalls Wilder had not yet begun to document her childhood in the nine book "Little House" series. Rose Wilder Lane, however, had been working as a writer for The Bulletin, a San Francisco newspaper for some time. Rose was experiencing moderate success at her job as well as submitting short stories and articles to publications across the country. Eventually, Rose would give up the job at The Bulletin and develop into a full time freelance writer. Rose's first book, "The Story of Art Smith" a biography on aviator Art Smith, was first published as a serial in 1915.

In addition to being a writer, Rose Wilder Lane was also an editor. As Rose's career became busy, she offered Laura an opportunity to write a piece for Eastern Magazine, which would pay \$50. Rose claimed that the pay was not substantial; however, considering the times in which the offer was made, the fee seemed quite generous to the layman.

While in San Francisco, Laura spent a great deal of time with Rose as she worked, undoubtedly gaining insight into the life of a writer/editor as well as the processes involved.

Laura Ingalls Wilder took her daughter's advice to heart. It wasn't until her sixties, however, that Laura wrote the first of the "Little House" books. With Rose's assistance in editing and marketing, the books soon became a great success and beloved American classics.



Style

Perspective

West from Home: Letters of Laura Ingalls Wilder to Almanzo Wilder, San Francisco 1915 is a series of letters from Laura Ingalls Wilder to her husband, Almanzo "Manly" Wilder as she traveled from Missouri to San Francisco in 1915 to visit their only daughter, Rose. Although Laura was born into a struggling pioneer family, she had the heart of a traveler. For Laura, the decision to leave Rocky Ridge Farm was at the same time difficult and simple. Laura wanted to see San Francisco, Rose and the Pacific Ocean as desperately as Rose wanted her to see those things. On the other hand, leaving Almanzo to tend to the farm could prove to be a tremendous strain, both physically and financially. In the end, Rose offered to pay Laura for the potential loss of income from the Wilders' chickens while she stayed in San Francisco for two months.

Laura was vigilant in writing letters along every leg of the trip. In the letters, she expressed concern for Almanzo and the family dog, Inky, while explaining everything she saw from the window of the train as it passed through the Midwest and into the West. After boarding in Springfield, Missouri, Laura had stops in Denver, Ogden, and Kansas City. The trip proved to be grueling and difficult for Laura, who at the time was forty-eight years old.

During Laura's visit, the Panama Pacific International Exposition was held to commemorate the Panama Canal's completion as well as the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of the Pacific Ocean. San Francisco, the Pacific Ocean and the PPIE were all magnificent sight to behold particularly for a girl who had grown up in the Midwest and resided in Missouri.

Tone

West from Home: Letters of Laura Ingalls Wilder to Almanzo Wilder, San Francisco 1915 is a personal look into the thoughts and experiences of Laura Ingalls Wilder as she traveled from Missouri to San Francisco to visit her daughter Rose Wilder Lane. The tone all the book varies widely, depending upon the incident at hand.

As Laura leaves the story on the first leg of her trip, there is a sense of excitement, anxiety, and guilt. There is great excitement about traveling across country and seeing Rose; there is anxiety about the unknown; and, there is a sense of guilt for leaving behind Almanzo to tend to the farm with the help of one hired hand while she goes off on a lengthy vacation.

The letters to Almanzo explained in detail everything Laura encounters on her trip, from the people on the train to the sights and sounds outside the window of her car. There are humorous stories, as well as complaints of being exhausted and uncomfortable.



Along the way, Laura shares that she's met quite a few nice people who have been helpful in some way.

There is a sense of relief when Laura finally arrives in Francisco. During Laura's stay, she is delighted with the plethora of sights and sounds that San Francisco has to offer. Among these are the Golden Gate Bridge, the Pacific Ocean, Russian Hill, the World's Fair, and Panama Pacific International Exposition.

Structure

West from Home: Letters of Laura Ingalls Wilder to Almanzo Wilder, San Francisco 1915 is a nonfiction work comprised of 124 pages. The book is separated into two sections. The first section is titled "On the Way." This section is comprised of twenty-two pages and contains letters starting with Laura's departure from Springfield, Missouri to her arrival in San Francisco on August 29, 1915.

The second section is titled "San Francisco." The section is comprised of ninety-five pages and contains letters from the rest of the trip until Laura prepares to leave to return to the story in Missouri.

The third section is an appendix, which contains a copy of a condensed article written by Laura that appeared in the "Missouri Ruralist" in November 1915. This section is six pages long, and is titled "Magic in Plain Foods." In addition to commentary, Laura includes several recipes.

The average length of the three sections is forty-one pages.

As the book consists of a series of letters from Laura Ingalls Wilder to Almanzo Wilder, there are no chapters or chapter breaks. The letters are presented chronologically from the time the Laura leaves Missouri until the time she prepares to leave San Francisco.

Also included in the book are twenty-four pages of photographs, including pictures of Laura, Rose, the Lane house on Vallejo Street, and pictures of various sites in and around San Francisco.



Quotes

"I simply can't stand being so homesick for you anymore." p. 3

"At Land's End I had my first view of the Pacific Ocean. To say it is beautiful does not half express it." p. 25

"You know I have never cared for cities but San Francisco is simply the most beautiful thing." p. 30

"I did not write you particularly of the time we spent at the Fair, for I saw so much that I could not describe it all." p. 57

"I do enjoy being with Rose but I am so homesick it hurts." p. 67

"Oh, I hope you're fairly comfortable and can get help to take care of the crop so we will have the chicken feed for this year." p. 73

"I love a ride at on the street cars at night and to get to the ferry station we go through the famous Barbary Coast." p. 80

"To cap day, as we came home on the streetcar a man sat near us who was chewing gum. He wore a stiff hat pulled down tight on his head every time he chewed, his hat moved up and down fully 2 inches, up and down, up and down, with perfect regularity as though he were worked by electricity." p. 85

"The more I see of how Rose works the better satisfied I am to raise chickens." pp. 92-93

"All night and all day we can hear the sirens on different islands and headlands, and the ferries and ships at anchor in the bay keep their foghorns bellowing." p. 95

"I'm anxious to get an answer to my letter in which I asked you to say how long I might stay." p. 97

"Do not expect to get any more long letters from me for I will be so busy doing all the writing I can for the papers and getting things wound up so I can start a home that I will not have time. Nor do I think I should spend the time writing what I can be seeing more things and tell you about them all when I come." p. 117

Topics for Discussion

How might Laura's trip have been different if Almanzo had accompanied her?

On the trip across country, Laura commented that if she had known the trip was going to be so grueling that she would not have had the courage to undertake it. To you think Laura's opinion changed after she arrived in San Francisco?

Do you think Laura would have gone on the trip if Rose had not been able to support her financially?

Which part of the journey stands out most to you as a reader? Explain.

Laura made the comment, "The more I see of how Rose works the better satisfied I am to raise chickens. " However, Laura went on to become a writer. What do you think changed her mind?

Rose wrote to Almanzo to tell him of a new development in farm equipment. Henry Ford told Rose, his biographer, about a farm tractor that weighs 1,500 pounds and costs \$200. How do you think this information affected the way Almanzo farmed?

Do you think the trip inspired Laura to write the memoirs of her childhood? Explain.

What was the impact of Laura's streetcar accident on the entire trip?