

Letter from Helen Piper to "Friend," October 28, 1935

*Helena, Montana
October 28, 1935*

Dear Friend:

I feel quite sure that all of our friends are anxiously awaiting news of our most remarkable deliverance. . . . On the night of October 18th, all of the ladies were downstairs at our weekly meeting. There had been one heavy quake just a short time before we came down. . . . Just one week before we had quite a severe one which made many cracks on the walls. In about an hour there came a crash and with the crash the weaving of the building. Truly, the walls went in and out in a most indescribable way. Plastering fell and the lights went off.

Our children were on the upper floors. We called to them to be quiet, that we were coming. Some went up and the old gardener and myself went to the basement to get candles. The boys on the fifth floor had been organized and . . . when the housemother went down in the evening she told the boys that if anything happened to get their teams together.

The walls went out on the fifth floor. Radiators came down. Those brave youngsters jumped out of bed and got their teams together. We could hear them calling to each other to be quiet and not get excited. . . . One of the boys who was quite nervous started to run and his captain said, "You stand still in line, or I'll knock the tar out of you." . . . The little girls were aided by the older girls and some of the teachers. I know you will all be quite proud of our school management when I tell you that in six minutes time in a dark house the children were all taken out and not one child cried.

The next morning when we looked at the building and saw how huge granite blocks were hanging on the edge of the fire escapes, we felt

more than ever that our Father was taking care of us. . . .

Just a few minutes after we were out the yard seemed to be filled with people. The neighbors and members of our Board rushed to our aid. The children were quite comfortable, because those of them who were not dressed had on their bathrobes. . . . The men went to the third floor and threw out mattresses and bedding. . . . We moved the autos out of the garage which is steam heated and placed the mattresses on the floor. It was early morning before the children quieted down. . . .

That night we moved our children to a dance hall near the school. This hall is a quarter of a mile from a man who used to attend the school. He opened his house to us and we had all of our meals there. People in Helena provided the food.

On Sunday morning, one week ago today, I came to [this] building and went over it and worked out a floor plan. I got in touch with the plumber and electricians. Everybody was busy because of the torn down condition of Helena, but how good everyone was to us, putting others aside so our children could be taken care of.

I am sure we were directed to this building. I am just as sure that our Father means for us to carry on, for there is no other place in Helena in which we could be housed. So today we are forgetting the past and are pressing on more determined than ever. . . .

Helen C. Piper

Source: *Montana Governors Records, 1889–1962. Manuscript Collection 35* [box 63 folder 1]. Montana Historical Society Research Center. Archives. Excerpted in *Not In Precious Metals Alone: A Manuscript History of Montana* (Helena, 1976): 201–202.