Letter 1:

Highland, Minnesota
June 24, 1871

Dear Friend,

I received your letter dated October 12 of last year in good time and I thank you for it; as it pleases me very much to see that you have not forgotten me, and I am also happy to hear that you and yours are in good health. I also thank you for the news you told; although much of the biggest news I had heard before, such as that Vinje, Ant. Bang, and Dunker are dead; for I read the newspapers, and often there is a piece from Norway, where the most remarkable news is included.

First of all, I must now tell you that I am still, by the grace of God, so fortunate as to have good health and am still doing well. I cannot remember when I last wrote to you; presumably it is almost a year ago. I must tell you, therefore, that last summer I received three dollars a day during harvesting for binding and one and a half dollars a day for stacking as well as a week of threshing. Since then I have gotten one dollar a day until November 3, when I began teaching school. I taught school for three months and got twenty dollars a month. Then I didn’t do anything for awhile as I pondered what I should try next; I had decided to travel west and take land; however, nothing came of this, and I am still in the same place. You probably already know that anyone, be he native or immigrant, has the right, according to the Homestead law, to take a quarter section of land, 160 acres (pronounced “aker”). You get this by just paying for the papers, about fifteen dollars. When you have lived there for five years, the land is your legal property.

Now I must answer your questions. As for the first, I must say that I have not seen such natural beauty as in Norway. Here there is rolling prairie with a little woods and some valleys. Still, there is beauty in nature here, too.

None of the animals you mention, other than deer, are found in the woods around here, and even those have just about been destroyed by exploiting hunters. There are many kinds of horses, cattle, and sheep here, some large and some small. Though on the whole I believe that the horses are somewhat larger, but not better, scarcely as good as in Norway. The cows are generally larger and better, the sheep also. Most people don’t keep more cows than what is needed for household use, at least around here, it is different in other places. It would be a bit too complicated to try to give you a complete picture of farm work here. I’ll just tell a little bit now and a little more another time. They seed with machines, they mow mostly with machines, and they cut and thresh with machines too. During the winter the men don’t have so terribly much to do. Their work is to take care of the horses and cattle, to drive and cut wood, as well as to haul wheat to town. The women don’t do anything all year around other than take care of the housework.

Now I must close my letter for this time, as this piece of paper is about full. Write to me soon, please. My address is the same as before. Greet your parents and family from me as well as other acquaintances.

Finally, you are heartily greeted from your always faithful,

A. Hjerpeland

Letter 2:

Brooklyn May 25, 1892

Dear Parents!

The last time I wrote, I had not yet found anything to do and did not know if I would stay here or travel further west.

Now I have found a position at a pharmacy here, so I think I will stay here for a while. The 3rd place I went and asked, I got a position, and as is the custom here – everything is supposed to go so fast, of course – I began working at once in the middle of the day. The wages are in fact not so high yet, only 6 dollars a week, but will go up fast, when I have learned enough English to get by. The usual for pharmacists here is from 18 to 25 dollars a week, and that is good pay, more than one gets in the West.

I pay 4 ½ dollars a week for room and board, so I can manage on the pay I get, and before too long I hope to be familiar with the customs and language, and then I will, of course, be on top of things. The pharmacist where I work is Danish; he has been here a good 6 years and now has 2 pharmacies; at the one where I am he employs a German, so I am learning a little German during the day.

The working hours are long, but there is not much to do, especially for me, since I cannot help the public yet. Free every other Sunday and one afternoon a week, one hour for lunch and one hour for supper. In a week’s time the pharmacist, Cantor, will travel home to Denmark for a visit and while he is gone, another Danish pharmacist, who works in the other pharmacy, will manage both.

On the 17th of May I was at the Norwegian Seaman’s Association’s celebration in Washington Park over in New York. There was a huge crowd, surely several thousand, even though there were also celebrations at 2 – 3 other places. There were speeches, singing and dancing, but the most interesting was something people here call a «tug of war», a kind of American sport, which consists of two teams that tug and pull on each side of a rope. The team wins, which pulls the other team over to its side. During the tugging they almost lie flat and have a large board under them that has sideways boards to set their feet against. This time the battle was between Norwegians, but once every winter there is a tug of war between all the nationalities in the city. Last winter the Norwegians were the strongest.

Everything is still new and unfamiliar for me here; but I think I will soon like it fine here. I am very happy with the place where I stay; the man’s an ordinary working man, but in spite of that, here they live both more energetically and better than, f. ex. at Salvesens in Kristiania; but then he also earns 3 dollars a day and has an 8-hour working day.

But I must close for now. Greet everyone at home and the warmest greetings to you too from your

Andreas

Letter 3:

Brooklyn June 6, 1892

Dear Parents!

I could have written yesterday evening, but when I got off work and came home, the others where I live were going over to the big «Central Park» in New York and asked if I wanted to come along – something I, of course, wanted to do. So I am writing tonight, but it is already late, so this will not be a long letter.

The working hours I have are long; from 7 in the morning until 10 at night, later when I have learned the language, even till 11 at night. On the other hand, there is almost nothing to do there, so I have pleasant, quiet days. During the day we have to find something to do, but we can spend the evening as we wish when we are here and have served the customers who come in. So I could both read and write in the evening, but now during the summer I get too warm and uncomfortable because of the heat, which is especially intense in the evening after we light the gas. The pharmacist has now left for Denmark and I am alone with the German, and we therefore have to speak either German or English; usually it’s German. The German, Mr. Enck, has a friend who has not taken his pharmacy examinations, but who studies medicine at the same time as he works at a pharmacy. So, when I have learned English, I might be able to do that too. I would not have as long working hours then as I have now; but in respect to working hours, it is better at the higher-class, bigger pharmacies over in New York.

The area, where I have a position now, is a kind of business street in the middle of the part of the city where there are mostly working-class people. Here you can see all sorts of nationalities and hear all kinds of languages. In particular, the Irish and Italians stand out from the other groups; around here there are numerous Italians. There are streets where hardly anyone but Italians live, and they give these streets their own style. They have shops with sunshades and stands of fruit, vegetables, fish and so on halfway out into the street; also there are many who walk around in the streets with all kinds of things in handcarts with bells, sometimes screaming out with all their strength what they have to sell. Everywhere the place crawls with big and small, black, screaming children, so it is quite lively in the Italian quarters. In the evening they usually burn all sorts of rubbish right in the middle of the street, where there are a lot of big bonfires, and if there is no wind, one could almost choke from the heat and smoke.

But I will tell more later. Do keep well. Greet everyone at home and greetings to you too from your

Andreas

**Source**: *In Their Own Words*,  University of Minnesota Press, 1991

Dear Pawel,
   The journey over was horrible, but we made it! I never knew how rough the ocean could be. We tossed and turned and rocked and rolled; every movement the Blue Star could make, it made. Several times I thought the ship was going to break because of how loud the creaking was, but the loud noise of the ship's moaning was eventually drowned out by the low murmur of the mass of people that were stuffed below deck. It became so unbearable, that Jozef decided to move us all to the deck. Although it was much easier to breathe up there, it was still crowded and extremely cold. But that is where all six of us stayed, on deck, all huddled in a bunch at the mercy of the elements. I can't tell you how hard we prayed to see land.
   On the tenth day of our voyage, out of the mist arose the massive women holding a torch. She was bigger than any of the buildings back home, but she was nothing in comparison to the buildings that slowly formed. I was so intrigued with the size of the buildings that I barely noticed we had arrived at Ellis Island. We were shuffled off the boat and into something that they called the Great Hall and that is where the waiting began. Line after line of interrogation, "Where are you from? Any mental health issues? Have you had a tetanus shot?" It seemed never ending. Often I looked around for Jozef, you see they separated the men from the women and I was worried when I lost sight of him. After much poking, prodding, and question asking, I was cleared along with all four children. We took an oath, half of which I could barely understand, and we were set free into America. After two more hours of waiting, Jozef finally emerged a citizen too. The health inspectors were suspicious of his birth mark on his left shoulder. The total process took roughly eight hours, not bad considering some had been there for days.
   We soon figured out what train would take us to Chicago and we set off, it was nice not to be on that damned ship! After many more hours, most of which was spent asleep, we arrived in Chicago. Uncle was there to greet us and we quickly followed him. I can't tell you the relief that consumed me after seeing Uncle, I finally felt like I was home. We quickly settled into his already cozy apartment in the heart of town. We all had to share one room that was too small for even three. Jozef found a job within the following few weeks and was gone a lot. He was working in a steel factory and was only home an average of eight hours per day, and that was at night. Well don't worry about us, as I knew you would be, we all getting along just fine here. Love you.
            -Mary Mieczislawski