



Elizabeth's Jamestown Colony Diary: The Starving Time (Book 2) Selected Passages

The debatable issue for this project is:

Does Elizabeth become dehumanized at any time during the "starving time" of 1609 - 1610 in Jamestown?

These passages can be used as evidence to support arguments or counter-arguments on one side or the other of the debatable issue. Passages are followed by their page number in parenthesis. All passages are taken from *Elizabeth's Jamestown Colony Diary: The Starving Time, Book 2* (Scholastic Inc., 2001), by Patricia Hermes.

Selected Passages

"I have made a friend! And surprise! It is Mary Dobson. She is not the conceited person Jessie and I thought she was" (12).

"I must tell you about baby Abigail. She is almost one month old today. Already she holds up her head and holds tight to my finger. She is a strong baby. That is good, because only strong babies can survive here. At night I take her out-of-doors to show her the stars. I tell her the names of the wind as Pocahontas taught me. Her eyes get big and wide. She stares into my face. I think she knows just what I am telling her!" (14).

“I know it is wrong of me to hate. But I cannot help it. I hate the Bridger family. Here is why: they are loud and crude and vulgar and very, very lazy. Worse than that, they are just plain mean” (16).

“I am very hungry today. All we have eaten for two days is a bit of hardtack and some cornmeal. This morning, the cornmeal was crunchy with bugs. I tried not to notice. But it was hard not to gag. Papa noticed. He laughed and told me that it was good and nutty! I know he was trying to make me cheerful. But it is hard to feel cheerful. It is hard to feel anything but hunger. All I think about is my stomach” (20-21).

“Francis sat beside me to help [make tiny dishes out of acorns]. As he shaped the tiny cups with his knife, he began a story. He told of elves and fairies who would use these plates. But before we knew it, we were both talking about food – food, food, food. We talked about porridge and meats and jams that we would put in the bowls and cups. I know there are more things to think of than food. But I do not know what those things might be” (22).

“Then [Mary] told me that she had given her blue hair ribbon to John. It is a secret gift. He can hold it and feel close to her. Again, she asked me what I did think. I could not tell her the truth. But I shall tell you. I think I would rather be a spinster woman my whole life than marry John Bridger. Actually I would rather die” (25).

“I am to go [with Papa to look for food]! Mama is terribly frightened. I told her we shall return. I said it strongly. I wish I had a chance to tell Mary. But there is no time. I know she wishes me well. NIGHT. It is [now] night. We are returned safely. I have so much to tell” (29).

“Nights are so cold. And we are more hungry than I ever thought we could be. We have taken to eating everything. A skinny dog has lived in our compound for months. Last week, he disappeared. We all know that he has been eaten, though no one knows who ate him. In England, that would make me sick to think. But I do not think that sick right now” (38).

“[Mama] picked up a worm. She looked around. She did not see me sitting her, but I did see her. She put the worm in her mouth. I watched her chew. And swallow. And chew and swallow. And then she bent and picked up another worm. That, too, went in her mouth. And oh, she was smiling! I had to turn away. She is so hungry! We are all so hungry. But to eat a worm!” (39).

“I am amazed how much enjoyment I have with Mary Dobson. She chatters as much as I do. We can talk for hours and hours about little or nothing. And everything. Today, we made plans together. No matter how hungry we are on Christmas Day, we said, we shall have a Christmas. Perhaps we can have presents. Together, we shall figure out how to do that” (46).

“Mary and I have come up with a plan. We shall sew some bits of canvas into little bags And for Abigail, I shall stuff the bag with pine needles. I shall tie it near the top to make a head. I can paint a face on it. It will be her very first doll. It will smell so sweet. Mary and I have worked feverishly all day. Oh, what joy it is to have surprises! I can picture the pleasure on Mama’s face already!” (49).

“I do not mind at all that Master Bridger is gone. I cannot wait till he comes back for those loutish boys” (55).

“Remember how I said I was thinking up a plan? I lie here still weak, but my thoughts run away with me. And this is what I think: I think I should go to find Pocahontas. She befriended us at the fort. She brought gifts. Maybe it is because Captain Smith is gone that she no longer comes. But if she knew our illness and hunger, would she not help us? I believe she would” (57-58).

“I could have painted the bags red with my very own blood, I stuck myself so many times. But they are finished. And Mama and Papa will be happy. The doll is the sweetest thing ever. I stuffed it full of pine needles. I painted such a sweet, sweet face for it. I used the ink that I do use here in my journal. It is a smiling face with big eyes and long eyelashes. Abigail will love it when she is well again” (63-64).

“There is no longer anyone in charge. There are no meetings. There are no workdays. There is nothing of our common life. Just us. Hoping to make it to spring. Hoping to make it till the supply ship comes” (68).

“It was Mary! But she is so thin, so wispy-looking, that I truly did not recognize her for a moment. We fell into each other’s arms. It was so good to see her again. Right away, we began talking. We talked and talked and talked. I feel so much better tonight. Talking to a friend makes you feel full up. It is almost as good as having foot to eat. But not quite” (69-70).



“I wonder what is hope? There is no hope here. When I said that to Papa today, he only sighed. He did not even scold me. That is how bad he feels. . . .I think his heart will break. I know mine is broken” (95-96).

“We wander freely in and out. We no longer fear the Indians. What is left to fear? There is only death. I think we have become used to that” (96).