

Handed to courier Anderson April 19, 1940 for mailing in New York

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AMERICAN CONSULATE
Milan, Italy
March 7, 1940

Dear Folks:

I have two letters to acknowledge this time: Sarah's of March 4th, which arrived April 3rd, and Dad's of April 2nd, which arrived today. I am planning to hand this to a courier who passing through here Friday to take rail to the Washington. Now that the British are stopping westbound as well as east bound mail from Germany and the neutrals, it will be necessary for me to send all my mail by pouch if I am to avoid delays. In order to facilitate sending things by couriers, I would appreciate it greatly if you would send me, as soon as possible, thirty or more three cent stamps. The pursers of the boats will always mail the letters in the U.S., but I hate to sponge on them to the extent of many stamps. Considering the comparatively large volume of my mail, it will run up in a short time.

There is very little new to report. I got my radio in working order just in time to catch the news from the invasion of Norway. I get London very well both on broadcasts wave-lengths and short waves. After clearing customs, the set had to go to a repair shop to be adjusted for the Milan current, which is 160 AC. I will not be able to use the record player, As it cannot be adjusted to the of number of cycles in use here. If you would like to have it, I will investigate the possible cost of sending it back. Since we don't have any new records, I don't suppose you would want it unless you intend to start buying some. They are very nice to have. Janie might like it, as it would help in entertaining her friends. However, they are so cheap it would not pay to send it home if it cost very much.

Daddy asked about the cost of food and of running the household. It is a little early yet to say just how it is going to go, but I can give you some preliminary figures. Food between the 17th of March and the 31st, inclusive, cost \$10.50 for the two of us. This includes wine for the meals. The maid's salary for the same period was \$2.50 The telephone for three months was \$3.20. Gas for the month of March was \$1.20, and electricity for February and March came to \$4.45. I have made all the conversions at the rate of exchange I actually used, not the official rate. If I went back to the regular rate, [the] prices would be exactly double.

Around the 12th of March we had an opportunity to exchange, legally, through a bank in Florence, any amount of money over \$1000 at 43 lire per dollar. We took up a collection around the office, and sent down \$1500, and the deal was fixed up the next day. Italian importers are desperately hard up for dollar exchange, and every once in a while they get permission from the government to buy dollars at whatever rate is necessary. For really large sums one could probably get over 50 to the dollar, but of course we don't have much money here. The result of this deal was to cut in half the cost of living here, and naturally we were all very much pleased. I was one of the main beneficiaries, as I had a month and a half's salary on hand at the time, all of which I threw in. It proved to be a good thing, as I do not know whether the chance will come again or not.

My last letter from Betty Lou was written on the 31st of March. She seemed to be very happy, and it is evident that she has no intention whatever of coming home before next July. Her attitude seems to be "I'm sorry if it grieves you, but my mind is made up." Unless the situation changes, I don't think there is any chance of persuading her to return before that time. After that, the consul in Frankfort will amend her passport to be valid only for return to the United States, and then she will have to come back, unless she can wangle permission to stay out of the local police. Sarah mentioned that I might be able to go up there some time. I'm

afraid that this is out of the question at present. As you know, my passport was limited in the Department to be good only for Italy and Switzerland. I could not change this without referring it to Washington, and to get the Department's approval I would have to show that I was going on official business. As I couldn't do that, it looks as if I would not get to Germany during the war unless something unusual happens.

In discussing the radio, I forgot to mention its performance. It works quite well, with one exception. I can't get the United States at all. I have no aerial, and they say that none can be erected on my apartment house because of the insurance regulations. I have suggested an inside aerial, but the man does not think that would do any more good than the simple ground I now have. I can get Japan and China very clearly, but the U.S. just doesn't come in. I would greatly appreciate it if you would send me a coil of aerial wire together with some other things that I will mention later so that I can experiment myself with an indoor aerial. Wire here is terribly expensive, as there is a scarcity of it, and the repairmen charge tremendous prices for installing anything.

I have been writing this over a period of three days, so you will excuse it if it is a little disconnected. The things I would like to have you send are my white summer suit and some underwear. I have inquired, and find that white clothes are worn quite a bit here during the summer, although they have only recently become popular. Also to accompany the suit would be my white shoes, which I left at home. I had expected to buy some underwear from the Arrow shirt people in New York, but it turned out I would have had to buy quite a bit in one batch in order to buy direct from them. So I would like to have you send me two jerseys, size 38 and two pairs of shorts, size 32. I like the arrows best, and you can get them from George Pfeffer. That is all that I can think that I need at the present.

Daddy asked why coffee is so hard to get here. It is very simple. There is plenty of coffee in the world for everyone but the Italians don't have any foreign exchange to buy it with. All their available funds are diverted into essential raw materials necessary to run the factories. Of course the strain of keeping up a big army on a semi-war basis is a severe drain on the resources of a country as poor as Italy. Until you have been here, you have no idea how poor the country really is. Virtually all the essential items for Italy's survival and its economy must be imported, and under present world conditions it is impossible for them to export enough to pay for the imports, if the latter were unrestricted. Since most international trade these days is done on a barter basis, and since the United States buys comparatively little from Italy, our trade has suffered very much. There is a tremendous demand here for all kinds of American goods. People who haven't been abroad can hardly realize [how] greatly our products are respected. Were it not for artificial barriers our automobiles, radios, machinery, cigarettes, and hundreds of other items would be snapped up at good prices, but now no permission to import is forthcoming.

I am delighted to hear that the house has been fixed up so nicely, and I'm sure you must very pleased. I'm only afraid that I won't recognize it when I come home next. I hope Sarah's bruised sciatic nerve is better now; I'm not surprised that some bad effects followed that nasty fall. The time has now come to me to rush this down to the courier, so I must close. I would like to have commented on the international situation, as it is very ticklish right now, but I'm afraid there isn't time. Please give my best regards to all our friends and love to the relatives. I was very sorry to hear that Aunt Mary had broken her leg; it hadn't been mentioned before. I shall try to drop her a line, but am not optimistic. Love to all,

[William]

Handed to courier Anderson April 17, 1940 for mailing in New York.

AMERICAN CONSULATE
Milan, Italy
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Dear Folks:

I have two letters to acknowledge this time: Sarah's of March 4th, which arrived April 3rd, and Dad's of April 2nd, which arrived today. I am planning to hand this to a courier who is passing through here Friday to take mail to the ~~NACHTMANN~~ Washington. Now that the British are stopping westbound as well as east bound mail from Germany and the neutrals, it will be necessary for me to send all my mail by pouch if I am to avoid delay. In order to facilitate sending things by couriers, I would appreciate it greatly if you would send me, as soon as possible, thirty or more three cent stamps. The pursers of the boats will always mail the letters in the U.S., but I hate to sponge on them to the extent of many stamps. Considering the comparatively large volume of my mail, it will run up in a short time.

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