

IN REPLY REFER TO

FILE NO.

AMERICAN CONSULAR SERVICE



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AMERICAN CONSULATE

Milan, Italy

August 15, 1940

Dear Ninny and Aunt Vonie:

I am so sorry that I haven't written to you before. I had hoped very much that Daddy or Janie would send you some of my letters, but I guess Dad keeps them to show around town. Last week I wrote an especially long letter, and to make sure that you get to see it, I am sending you a copy together with this letter. I hope that you do not mind receiving a copy; you know how busy we are, and besides that, it seems such a waste of time to write the same thing in two different letters when one writing would be enough. In any case, I want you to know that I am thinking about you and loving you just the same, whether I write or not. And I hope in the future to do a little better.

Since I wrote to Dad about the unpleasantness of the black-out, the moon has been waxing and there is plenty of light at night, furnished by old mother Nature herself. This makes it much easier to get around; in fact, it is very pleasant to walk around in the quiet, half-deserted city, lighted only by the pale cool light of the moon. Unfortunately, it also gave a splendid opportunity to the Royal Air Force, who picked a particularly bright night to surprise the Italians with a little air raid. And they were really surprised. The planes came over at one A.M.; I had been in bed about fifteen minutes and was just beginning to doze off when I heard them. I thought of course they were Italian planes on patrol. Then, away off in the outskirts of town, I heard a thin, shrill siren start whining, followed immediately by a couple of bangs. I thought this was a gun, but later learned that it was probably a bomb, for it has been said all over town that bombs were dropped before the regular sirens were sounded. In any case, a few seconds later, the whole group began howling together, and then guns rattled, boomed or banged, according to their size.

High in the air, far above the range of the anti-aircraft guns, the planes calmly flew around for one solid hour, dropped a few light bombs, and then flew away, allowing me to go back to sleep. The damage in the city was not heavy, at least, as far as we can tell. They aimed at a couple of aircraft factories, but the bombs fell mostly among private houses. One garage was set on fire and twenty automobiles were burned, according to reports.

At the present moment, Milan is a dead city. Today is what is called "Ferragosto", a traditional Milanese holiday. Beginning about the first of August, shop after shop has been closing, to reopen either on Monday, the 19th, or not until the first of September. During this week, practically all the stores except grocery and meat shops and those handling other necessities of life are closed. Even the poorest people go out of town for "Ferragosto", and it is considered that anyone who stays is absolutely declass . This, unfortunately, includes me. I have been left to be on duty in the

Consulate while my two colleagues are away; it is customary to leave some one always on hand in case of an emergency. Generally it is very hot at this time of year, but this summer has been unusually mild. I am glad of this, for it has been quite hot enough to suit me. While I still prefer hot weather to cold, I must admit that it was easier to stand the heat working at a swimming pool than in an office. It has been over two years now since I had a chance to be in the sun long enough to get tan, so you can imagine I am pretty pale.

Northern Italy is one of the most beautiful countries I have ever seen. Although the area around Milan itself is as flat as a pancake, only a few miles to the north the mountains begin. To add to their beauty, there are several gorgeous little lakes right among the mountains. Geologically, it is like the Finger Lakes in the Adirondacks. I have had the opportunity to spend a few week ends on some of the different lakes, and I am enclosing here a picture of me with Lago Maggiore and the Alps in the background. *You can't see much of the Alps, but they're there.* It was taken one weekend when I was invited to spend two days with an American and his wife who were staying at a delightful summer resort near Stresa. You can find Stresa on the western shore of Lake Maggiore if you have a fair-sized map of Italy. It was one of the finest weekends I have ever had. On another occasion, I stayed with a family on Lake Como, which is directly north of Milan. In many ways Como is the most beautiful of all the lakes. They call it "the garden lake", because practically all the land around it is occupied by villas owned by wealthy Italians and foreigners, the grounds of which are excellently landscaped. I know of nothing like it in the United States. Our scenery, especially in the mountains, is wilder, more rugged, and less well tended. Both types of beauty have their advantages, and I like them both.

I think this, together with the copy of Daddy's letter, is about all I have to say for the time being. I do hope you are both well, and missing the heat wave which they have been having in the north. Daddy said it was so hot he really didn't feel like living. I should, of course, be delighted to hear from you. The best way is by air mail, but that is rather expensive. Write c/o Milan Pouch, Dep't. of State, Washington if you don't use air mail. My love to you both,

*William*

Hand written on back of envelope in pencil, unknown hand:

*Ann Linda Cooper baby*

*McKinney*

*Ferris Owen engaged*

*Mary Elizabeth Couton married*

*picture*