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Thursday

Dear Folks:

The train is just beginning to warm up and I am going to try and write you a long letter from beginning to end. First of all we left home yesterday morning at 8:30 A.M. and believe it or not the sun was shining. We had a grand time and I saw so much of the countryside. The trip took 5½ hours over fairly good roads. Germany is so strange. You see a cluster of houses surrounded by the cultivated gardens. The farmers do not each own a piece of land with their house on it, they walk from their house to their piece of land and believe me the so called barn hitches on to their house so that pigs, cows, hens and people practically all live together. We stopped off at Nurnburg and went to the PX there. Nurnburg is a very large place and it seemed good to see a large PX. You cannot imagine the feeling. I just had to look at loads of American products.

If you recall your papers Nurnburg is where all the famous trials were held. I saw the house of Justice where the trials were held. Also saw the large building Hitler had commenced for his world capital. The building is beautiful but not finished. Large blocks of bricks are still in piles waiting. Also, this large field where Hitler intended having his reviews. Then we rode past the Walled city of Nurnburg which is years old. The wall around the old city was built in 800 and it is still there, imagine that. We stopped at Ingolstadt to eat and fill up the gas tank and then I crossed the Blue Danube. ~~The-Blue-Danube~~. I still pinch myself to think all this could happen to me. Me crossing the Danube. The Blue Danube was not blue and really was a disappointment to me. We then rode by Dachau where that horrible concentration camp was.

Then Munich itself is really something. Saw Hitler Platz a large open-air amphitheatre (I guess you call it that) where he made so many of his speeches. Saw the rubble of his house, nothing but walls standing. We stayed at this Excelsior Hotel, a beautiful place. The dinner was delicious, and with dinner we had a bottle of sparkling burgundy. We walked around the stores of Munich and went into a German department store (my first) and it reminded me of Filene's basement. Not a bit attractive looking and supposedly one of the better stores. That is all for now. Oh yes, my travelling companions are lovely. There are four of us.

1:30 P.M.

We are now beginning to go through the Alps and it is truly beautiful. You can see the snow on the tops plus the clouds in between and it is just gorgeous. The houses are altogether different looking, more like the Swiss chalets. Of course all houses are of brick or stone of some sort, but these houses are spread out and prettier, not peasant looking. All have balconies.

Our train is not too bad. This is a German train and we each were given a bag of food (picnic style) for our lunch which consisted of 2 hardboiled eggs, 1 apple, banana, pear and orange, 1 bottle of mineral water which I hate, and 2 sandwiches. Not bad, hey.

We are now at the Austrian border and brother what a job to get through. You practically have to stand on your head. They check your passports, visa, and ask a million questions. This to at least 3 Germans that speak no English. So help me, I actually feel like a criminal and my heart is pounding. Without a doubt 25 various conductors have checked on us. We are beginning to roar at it all now, for we know we have our tickets (we hope) okay. I have seen my first really beautiful castle and it is gorgeous. Something like the Ocean House, although this is a large brick white. I have never seen such beauty. We are now entering the Solbad Hall, in Tirol and this is most beautiful. Oh Marion, how I do wish you could see this place.  
6:45 P.M.

We have just had dinner at the Brenner Pass and it was really delicious, all Italian foods and a small bottle of wine. I had a marvelous time flirting with these Italian Policemen that guard the station. One nice-looking, young man that could speak a little American asked me if I knew any girls he could write to and marry in the U.S.A., as he wanted to go there. We gave them some cigarettes.

Friday 6:30 A.M.

Good Morning:

Well to tell you the truth I did not sleep any too well but I don't feel the least tired now altho I would love some clean air. You see the 4 of us went 2nd class and had to sit up all night and it was rough but the difference in prices is really something,

It is amazing to go from one country to another and everything is so different. I keep pinching myself wondering if it is all true. The Italians seem so much gayer than the Germans and their language is softer to your ears. Germans are so serious and you would never see groups of them together laughing as you see here. Most of my travels so far in Italy has been at night except at the various stations so I cannot describe the houses or towns to you. Remember I am writing this on a fast moving train.

Sat. Morning 7:55 A.M.

Good Morning, I do hope you will appreciate this bit for I assure you I would like to sleep but I do know that this letter would never get finished then. Let me see now, we arrived in Roma at 8:15 yesterday morning and got off in the most beautiful railroad station that I have ever been in. This station is all marble very modern, loads of glass walls and simply beautiful. Right outside the station I saw the Servian Wall which is nothing really but a part of a very old wall built in 42 A.D. Then we came to our hotel "The Villa Washington" and washed up and had breakfast. This hotel belongs to a Prince, is simply elegant, gorgeous chandeliers, high ceilings, very ornate looking and medieval furniture (with the exception of the beds and night stands) Evidently he has had to turn his house into a hotel since the war. Then we had coffee and rolls for breakfast and I detest the coffee, but that is all I hate so far. The coffee is thick and strong. Then we went shopping and Marion I guess I never wished more for money in my life. The shops are beautiful, sweaters, blouses, tablecloths, jewelry, lingerie, dolls out of this world. I saw everything I wanted for everyone especially a blouse for you. But this is a

Pilgrimage and not a shopping trip.

We also had to go to the American Express and get our money changed and find out about our tours.

So then home to lunch where we had spaghetti first, then roast veal, candied carrots, potatoes, wine, and fruit. The meal was delicious.

Then out for our first tour. En route in a filled bus the guide would point out various places such as where Nero had his Golden house and the baths, the wall which enclosed Rome Etc. We stopped and went into St. Mary Major and my heart went plop! I had goose bumps and a lump came in my throat. This I can't describe but to see first of all the different Pilgrimages in groups of fifty being led by a priest with someone carrying a cross either reciting litanies, singing or praying out loud was most inspiring. Then in came a group of nuns singing with their sweet voices--all this I seemed to notice first.

Then the church itself--imagine a beautiful marble floor, gorgeous design called The Cosmatti Pavement, 800 years old. The ceiling 400 years of age decorated with the first gold from America brought by Columbus. The 36 columns, eighteen on each side is fifteen centuries old.

The paintings seem so alive looking. In the Borghese chapel of this church the present Pope gave his first Mass. This chapel has the Madonna said to have been painted by St. Luke. It is the Blessed Virgin holding Jesus. It isn't a bit faded looking and as you keep looking at the eyes it seems to do something to you.

Another chapel has the tomb of Pope Pius the Fifth. This is glassed in so you can see all but his face. He is wearing the same clothes in which he was buried. He is the Pope who had the

vision about this church.

From there we went to St. Peters-In-Chains where I actually saw the chains. They too are enclosed in glass. This church has Michaelangelo's Moses and what a life like statue- you can even see the veins in his hands, his piercing eyes, etc.

After that we went to the Coliseum and what history! Just ruins still three sides of the building can be seen. Our guide showed us a piece of metal about two thousand years old. You could clearly see where the monsters all sat, where various staircases were, the cages where the animals were kept, etc. I stole a tiny little rock from there!

Then we drove along the Appian Way stopping every now and then to see the old Public Baths. This is the same road, of course fixed up, that St. Peter took in 42 A.D. We saw the spot (a church is there) where Our Lord appeared to St. Peter in a vision. I saw the exact piece of marble in which are the footprints of Our Lord. This is in the church at the Catacombs.

We went through two floors of the Catacombs and Pa even you would be impressed here. You go down through caves, very creepy, and see first century inscriptions here and there- saw Augustus Caesar's. There are various dug out places with marble coffins and so help me skeletons are still there. One large tomb (no one knows whose it is) has a marble designed ceiling. I also saw where St. Peter was buried and the mosaic floor was lovely.

I bought Rosaries there from the Franciscan Monks. After dinner we talked over all we saw and then fell into bed.

This morning we went through the Vatican and its Museum. This was indeed most interesting. There I saw

a statue of Hercules from the sixth century, Apollo from before Christ. This statue was found in fragments and in places had to be restored but you could see just where. We went into the Sistine Chapel and saw many of Michaelangelo's paintings. Believe me they were really beautiful. Then we saw many stones with hieroglyphics which Pa would like to have seen. I touched them all and imagined those days. The Mosaic is something-- small particles of marble fitted into pictures and one was very colorful, a basket of flowers right from the first century and nothing added to it at all.

There was also a marble chariot the Greeks used and this had been all glued together making it still look intact. The whole place was out of this world and something I'll never forget.

Of course the crowning touch to our day was seeing the Pope. I really was carried away at this and the crowds there. All the Italians shout "Viva" and then everyone follows suit. He looks exactly like his pictures only his hair is now gray but he looks well. His eyes are very piercing and expressive. He gives a speech in German both Bavarian and Prussian German, Spanish, French, Italian, and English. You would be amazed at the number of English and Americans there. You could tell by the applause when he was speaking English. I think he looked right at me once but it is hard to tell. We are trying to get a private audience for Tuesday but that is difficult. He blessed all I had with me plus everyone else's.

The Swiss guards who surround him are something to see with their colorful uniforms. All the Italian costumes are beautiful.

Well we stayed at Saint Peters for two hours and the time flew. It was now 2.15 and time for lunch. Afterwards we went shopping and to St. Rita's Church.

Although this is not so outstanding it is supposed to be one of the favorite churches of Rome. I prayed hard there especially for world peace.

The stores are gorgeous but the prices outrageous. I came back emptyhanded but I still intend buying something for myself from Rome.

It is now 7.15 and dinner will be served in fifteen minutes so I better freshen up. I am very tired but will feel better after dinner. Tonight we are going to the famous Hotel Excelsior where all the four hundred of America meet.

Sunday 4:00 P.M.

Back again for just a moment. We have just finished lunch and now are going to hire a horse drawn carriage to see Rome.

This morning until 2:30 P.M. that is, we made the Pilgrimage. To do this you must receive, visit four churches, and say four Our Fathers, Hail Marys, Glory Be To The Fathers, and one Apostles' Creed. The churches were all packed and so help me it did things to me. St. <sup>Peters</sup>~~Rita's~~ is simply beautiful, imagine it is larger than Madison Square Garden and the statues alone are just immense. We kissed the bronze foot of St. Peter that was made in the fifth century and each year the foot must be repaired as the bronze is worn off by kissing.

We visited St. Paul's, one of the four churches, and the altar where the Blessed Sacrament is exposed is magnificent. Saw just where the three fountains sprung up, now three altars are there, and touched the marble pillar where St. Paul was ~~t~~ied. One should

certainly visit Rome if there are any doubts in one's mind as to being a Catholic.

Also visited St. John The Lateran, another major church and one of the four. This is the oldest and greatest of all. This is the church the Pope claims for his cathedral. Imagine the main doors which I touched were built by Julius Caesar. Many Bernine statues are here. Also there is the wooden Papal altar said to have been used by St. Peter. I will tell you more tomorrow as we must go now.

7:45 P. M.

Right now I am so excited I can hardly think let alone write but I must tell you this. We have a private audience with the Pope tomorrow morning at 9:15 A. M. Just imagine, the four of us and it was all my doings, that is the part of asking for it. You see I borrowed a "Pilgrims' Guide Of Rome" from our library at Bad Kissingen and really this has been wonderful for informing me of things I would have overlooked. Anyway the book gives the address of The American College, a Jesuit college, and it says you might be able to get a Baciamento, kissing the ring, audience so I suggested we try this, and after some persuasion we went there. Of course you know me, whereas the others said, "Oh no, we shouldn't," "The Pope would never see us," "It's too nervy," etc. I kept insisting it would do no harm to try. Well we went there and met a Father Lafferty and his first question was, "What is your reason?"

We all, even I, were dumbfounded as to a good reason but Mrs. Heavey's husband is the commanding officer of Hammelburg and the Father said that was a good reason. So you see if I didn't insist upon our going, even though it is due to Mrs. Heavey, we would not have had the audience.

I brought my black faille dress, shoes, and bag but we had to buy a black mantilla for our heads.

My book says private audiences are given only to senior members of the Roman hierarchy especially the Sec. of State, Cardinal Prefects of Congregations, Royalty, Ambassadors or Diplomats--so what are we I wonder?

Mamie, won't you be thrilled to know your niece talked to the Pope and I am so glad I bought the Madonna. I hope you like it. I have purchased Rosaries for the rest of you. I am so thrilled I can't think of anything else.

But I must give an account of my day. We went for a ride in a hansom through the Borghese Parks and then to Dovey's where the elite meet to eat French or Italian pastries and coffee. They are so gay and smart looking. Brother though I have also seen the Italian peasants.

After that we walked to The American College where Father L. gave us the good news. Then across the street to St. Rita's church and prayed real hard. Then we came home. We had intended to go to the exclusive Hotel Excelsior for a cocktail but decided to come home and study the book so as to be able to converse with the Pope in the morning. We intended going to communion first thing and then buying our mantillas, then our audience.

This has really been a lovely trip and my travelling companions are very nice. We are all in a holy mood and I can't even think of shopping. I do wish Joe were with me to see all, or you folks, but you all may be assured I am praying hard for you. Marion, this letter will also include the Henrys for I can't possibly write all this twice. I keep thinking I am not good enough to kiss the Pope's ring but I know all of you wish you could be me so I will



try to do the best I can.

Tuesday 7:15 A. M.

Imagine I have just come from church and here I am writing. The others are all in bed but now I seem to wake up automatically at 6:30 so decided to go to church on my last morning in Rome.

I almost feel like I am in Heaven. The churches are so beautiful here and the choirs lovely and I have missed all that.

Well I suppose you want to hear the news. Yes I saw the Pope yesterday and he asked me where I came from in the states, about my children and if they are good, and then he spied my bag in which I was carrying Mamie's Madonna and wanted to know if I had something to be blessed. Now how do you like that? Every American we have talked to, and there are many here on Pilgrimage, wonder how we did it!

I honestly think it was a wonderful mistake for listen to this. We were out in front of St. Peters at 8:40 A.M. but by the time we arrived in the anteroom of the Pope's receiving rooms it was 9:00 A.M. precisely, and all these navy men, marines, plus Americans were coming out. Then a Cardinal took our invitation and in French (Mrs. Heavey can speak French) said we were too late! Why me, of all people it should affect so, I don't know, but I actually burst out crying and one of the Ambassadors was moved and said to wait. He took the invitation from the Cardinal, read it, and then another Cardinal and Ambassador came up and the four argued. We think two were for us and two against because they kept looking at their watches and talking and it was still not 9:15. So my Ambassador, as I call him, walked away with the invitation, came back and told us to hurry. We ran through about three rooms and a hall and then came to this room where he

motioned to us to get ready. We had to fix our mantillas and of course we were out of composure completely. But we lined up and he came in. Words cannot describe the feeling. Gerrie Freymuth (she is my roommate and I like her a lot) was first. She knelt and kissed his ring, spoke a few words and I was next. Just to look at me he knew I was upset so after kissing his ring he held my hand and talked to me. My answers I can't even remember for there was such a lump in my throat. Then he turned to Jocelyn Heavey and her mother and spoke a few words. Then he spoke to each one of us again and we all knelt and received the Papal blessing. I did ask for an extra blessing for my three children. The Cardinals and Ambassadors were standing in back of the Pope beaming at us. On the way out "my" Ambassador held my hand and I kept saying "Gracios" and "Merci beaucoup" for I still don't know if he were the Italian or French Ambassador!

Then we went back to where our coats were and all the Cardinals and Ambassadors were looking but by this time my nerves were all shot to pieces and if I didn't cry again but this time gently and only for a few moments! It was so impressive to see the Pope, the Cardinals in red velvet, the Ambassadors in tails, breeches, and black patent leather shoes with buckles on them, the Swiss Guards with their striped costumes which Michaelangelo designed for them. They hold long hatchet looking affairs. The Pope himself wore his white outfit, white beanie hat, beautiful red velvet shoes with gold beading. His face is very kind looking. I think he is a bit hard of hearing for I noticed he turns one ear toward you. His eyes are almost black, his hair mostly gray, and he is thin but wiry looking. His face is lined with age though.

The place itself is beautiful. I am trying to be most

observing on this trip but I can't seem to recall

much of the room we were received in. I do recall so clearly the Pope himself and the Ambassador trying to tell us where and when to kneel, etc. The Pope asked us where we were now living, if our husbands were in the Army or Navy, and then turned to me and asked where I came from in the states. When I said Mass. he wanted to know if it were Boston. I said north of Boston. He asked Jocelyn if she were studying etc. He asked me what I did and I said I had three little children. He said how little so I gave their ages, and with a smile he asked if they were good. I beamed all over and said I thought so. After that was when he noticed the bag and blessed everything. I can assure you I am broke from buying Rosaries but as long as I knew we were getting this blessing I decided to go all out. I must confess in my hurry I forgot a thing for a man including my own husband although I had taken his beads along.

Mamie, I know you will treasure your Madonna and I in turn some day will love having it to give to Patty. Everyone remembers and remarks on the beauty of it and now it has taken on an added beauty.

Wednesday 8:15 A.M.

This little bit is going to end up my letter. First of all yesterday morning after writing you we ate and went on our last tour going through the Forum. This is strictly ancient and historic. The ground has all been excavated to what was the street level in B.C. and it is amazing how far beneath the present it is. We saw the exact spot where Julius Caesar was cremated, where the so-called House of Senate had their buildings, the columns and some of the freizes are still standing. We saw where Mark Anthony delivered his speech, the various stalls or market places and imagine in the Court of Justice parts of the floor are still standing.

Small pieces of the sides of the walls and some of the marble decorations are still there too. Apparently this is wonderful marble because much of it is still intact. The guide has you right back in the first century and it makes one feel strange touching these various walls and walking on the floors.

We saw a few of the tombs, a few empty caskets, also columns of one building that the archaeologists can't figure out for it goes back to before the first things were discovered. Our guide says it is called "The House Of Satan" and must have been made right in the beginning of time.

Next we saw the Capitoline Hill which Michaelangelo designed. The City Hall is there now and was then.

In the afternoon I had to buy the children some gifts and the prices are sky high. I ended up buying little Swiss Guard miniatures which I'll let them see and then take away. Isn't that cruel?

This train is wicked. We are over the wheels and oh how we jog! We took a sleeper but I sure did not sleep. I do not like trains much at all.

Last night we had tea and scones in a tearoom and met a Mr. and Mrs. Petrich. They are going to be in Boston around December 16th or 17th and she will call you up. She is most charming and of course not poor.

I guess that is about all although I know I have missed telling you so much. The Vatican Museum would love for its history. You should see the ancient sun-dial there. Also the Egyptian mummy with polish on her finger and toe nails. Plus the real old mosaics that made their floor. Then there is a statue of Apollo dating from 42 A.D., etc.

This will probably end my letter and I do hope you can

read it and will enjoy<sup>13</sup> it. I tried to make it interesting but I am no writer. The trip was worth much to me due to the Pope and the Pilgrimage. I feel now as if I could never be horrible again!

Love to all

Rita

Tuesday, December 12, 1950

Dear Folks,

Tell me the truth now did you notice the corner of this envelope? Joe came home at 12:20 yesterday to tell me he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and to proceed with plans for a party. When one gets up there it is necessary to have a large promotion party that evening and all must come and all must be invited. So we really had to work, had to phone all the girls, make all the arrangements, etc.

We had a cocktail party supposedly from 7 to 9 but the last guests didn't leave until 12:10! Approximately 82 people came. We had it here in our house and I can tell you even with that many people we were not crowded so you can figure out the size of this place.

We hired a pianist, fiddler, barman, male helper, and what they call here a chef (he more or less takes care of everything). We had all kinds of drinks, hors d'oeuvres, had the florist come and decorate the house Christmassy and everything was a success.

This promotion is really quite an honor and although we knew his turn was coming up soon we didn't realize this soon. Also many as you go higher up are turned down, Joe is thrilled to pieces and was shaking like a leaf last night. He had it fixed up with the bar man he would drink nothing for he was so nervous. I had a wonderful time talking to everyone and the house received lots of praise. It did come at a good time for it now eliminates having a Christmas party.

Excerpt from Rita's letter