



# HOPE

*in a Jar*

DIANE RUGGIE

A young doctor slowly walks back to his own tent from the army mess tent. His head is full of questions. He just heard the news the war is over in Europe. Winston Churchill and President Truman declared victory that evening: May 8, 1945.

But this doctor isn't in Europe. He's deep in the Philippine jungle, with a completely different enemy, in what feels like a completely different war with the same name: World War II.

He takes out a few sheets of paper and finds a pen. He wants to write a

letter to his bride in Chicago.

Sixty-nine years later, I slip that letter out of the envelope and unfold it. It isn't delicate, old, or frail, as you might expect. It's made of sturdy stuff, durable and sure. And the penmanship is calm and deliberate.

8 May 1945  
Philippine Islands.

My Beloved:

Rumors of peace in Europe have been running wild around here for the last 2 days, however tonight they were confirmed - Peace and Victory has at last come to half the world. Let us hope that this time it is a lasting peace -

It's rather late in the evening now, I've just finished listening to the announcements of victory by Pres. Truman and Churchill - Do you suppose Sweetheart that this time the world has learned a lesson? I wonder - The memories of men are short - Perhaps this peace will be a lasting one, where all men will learn of the dignity and brotherhood of man. Perhaps they will now try to understand and help each other - To learn to know each other and understand each other and in that way not fear and hate. Maybe we will begin to educate ourselves and others - The world should be sufficiently purged and

## AN EXCERPT:

My Beloved,

Rumors of peace in Europe have been running wild around here for the last 2 days, however tonight they were confirmed. Peace and Victory have at last come to half the world. Perhaps this peace will be a lasting one. Do you suppose, Sweetheart, that this time the world has learned a lesson? I wonder. The memories of men are short.

There is probably great joy and rejoicing in the States now. And I guess that is all right. But it is surprising the apathy and lack of demonstra-

and tempered now - Let us hope and pray that a firm and understanding peace will be established.

There is probably great joy and rejoicing in the States now - And I guess that is all right - But it is surprising the apathy and lack of demonstration here - There are no wild cheers or celebrations - Everything continues as before - Out here, naturally the soldier is concerned with this war and his main thought is how long before this one really starts - ?

It is my opinion Honey that Japan will not last very long now - She probably sees the handwriting on the wall very clearly - Perhaps she may even ask for peace once she really starts to get hit - It won't be long Darling before we begin to live again -

I Love You -  
Your Al.

tion here. There are no wild cheers or celebrations. Everything continues as before. Out here, naturally the soldier is concerned with this war. And his main thought is how long before this one really starts?

It is my opinion Honey that Japan will not last very long now. It won't be long Darling before we begin to live again.

I love you.

Your Al

*He dreams in words, visualizing their future. My mother is the flipside of that coin.*

That doctor became my father. The bride became my mother. And the letter is one of nearly 1,100 they wrote back and forth to each other during the first two-and-a-half years of their marriage.

The collection is unofficially called the “Overseas Letters” by the family, stored in a medium-size cardboard box with those two words scrawled across the side in my mother’s penmanship. It’s important to tell you, with mellowed sadness, that my mother died 17 years ago and my father is gone eight now. So these letters are one of the ways I still connect with them on a regular basis.

Nearly every week I’m drawn to unfolding the crisscrossed box flaps and pulling out one or two to read. I can hear their 25- and 26-year-old voices. Funny, because by the time I was born those voices had matured into 40- and

41-year-old parents. My father is poetic, romantic, and often profound. He dreams in words, visualizing their future. My mother is the flipside of that coin. She might playfully include lyrics from the latest radio love song, but mostly she sends sunny and sensible farm-girl minutiae about her day back home.

And it’s mysterious, but every time I read one, this correspondence that was never meant for me corresponds to something in my day. The letters are my familial self-help book in 1,076 chapters.

So I was curious to see how my practical mother greeted the news of the victory in Europe in her letter. Did she raise a glass of champagne or take a front seat at the Michigan Avenue parade? No. She didn’t even gush with emotion. She canned. That’s right, she canned pickles and corn.

today. You will be sure to tell me how many joints  
 you have once the quota is released want you.  
 But I've heard all censorship was lifted. It so  
 can't you tell me more about where you are now -  
 all about the unit - Is your still at home when  
 they expect to return etc. There seems to be  
 so many unanswered questions. I suppose there  
 are many answers in the 12 letters I should have  
 maybe they will come tomorrow. It will be Sat.  
~~the~~ I'll have two deliveries - In the am. from the  
 mailman and in the PM when Mary comes from  
 Chicago. She will be here overhahn Day so maybe  
 I'll get a letter there from you that shall bring  
 and you baby I'll have some in either. I'd like  
 my fingers crossed - and for you too dear. It will  
 be Sat. Sun & Mon I am not out.  
 Today we canned 12 quarts of dill pickles and  
 14 quarts of sweet corn. It was late at home - will  
 you help me can someday? I'm getting very domes-  
 tic. I also started crocheting an edge on some pillow  
 slips.  
 Time to get Larry off to bed - less bothering  
 more than usual.  
 Write Al. I love you very much. There's another  
 new song you'd like Larry - "I'll be the end of yours"  
 just your  
 Mamma

AN EXCERPT FROM MY MOTHER'S LETTERS:

My darling—

On the news the commentator said the state of emergency would last another year. Oh Al, I want you home so very much, but it seems that it will still be quite far away. Maybe we won't have this Christmas yet darling, but no one can rob us of the next.

Today I canned 12 quarts of dill pickles and 14 quarts of sweet corn. It was lots of fun. Will you help me can someday? I'm getting very domestic. I also started crocheting an edge on some pillowslips.

What will it be like when you get back? Will everyday things bore you? I wonder, so many times, how much it will have changed you....

Bread & Butter Pickles  
 scrub cuc. until clean  
 Slice 25 med. cuc. & 12  
 onions. Add 1/2 c salt  
 & ice water to cover.  
 Soak 3 hrs in order to  
 make pickles crisp  
 Drain - Heat 2 min in  
 syrup made of 2 qts  
 vinegar, 4 c sugar, 4  
 tsp mustard seed  
 celery seed, turmeric  
 Pickles must not boil.  
 Fill thoroughly washed, scalded  
 jar & hot pickles &  
 syrup, seal, & store away  
 for use next winter.

I almost laugh when I read it—her unabashed personal realism framed against my father's epic worry about the state of humanity. Even so, deep down they're both talking about hope in their own way.

And what is canning vegetables except hope in a jar? How could she help but wonder while she sliced the cucumbers or added the spice if her new husband would be home to eat those pickles that winter? Was the act of putting 12 and 14 quarts of canned pickles and corn on the shelf her own

little way of defiantly saying, "Yes, he will"?

And what about me? It is spring 69 springs later. I'm planting heirloom seeds from some of the same plants she grew in her victory garden. I'm examining what survived this last cold winter. I'm considering what to grow anew.

Pickles and corn it will be—in the hope that I'll be canning big bushelfulls come fall. **R**

## BREAD & BUTTER PICKLES

MAKES 4 QUARTS

*For the pickles:*

**25 cucumbers, scrubbed and sliced**

**12 onions, sliced**

**1/2 cup salt**

**Ice water**

*For the syrup:*

**2 quarts vinegar**

**4 cups sugar**

**4 tsp mustard seed**

**4 tsp celery seed**

**4 tsp turmeric**

1. Put the cucumbers and onions in a large pot. Add the salt and enough ice water to cover the vegetables. Soak for 3 hours or until the cucumbers are crisp.
2. Drain the vegetables and put them back into the pot.

*To make the syrup:*

3. Combine the vinegar, sugar, mustard seeds, celery seeds, and turmeric. Add to the cucumbers and onions.
4. Heat for 2 minutes, but do not boil.
5. Fill thoroughly washed and scalded mason jars with the hot pickles and syrup.
6. Seal and store away for next winter.