



Welcome back to the final episode in **The Love Letter Project**. I want to thank you all for tuning in twice a week to **Podcast from the Home Front** it has been a wonderful experience for me, which I enjoyed immensely. Admittedly, at first I was terrified because, let's face it, it's scary putting yourself out there in uncharted waters, but it was high time I came out of my safe space and tried something out of my writer's box. What started as just a one-month project turned into two months and who knows maybe I'll be back after August's re-enacting experience at D-Day Conneaut Ohio to tell you all about the visit and the hopeful success of my impression in the House That Jack Built! If you near Conneaut, which is the northeast corner of Ohio right on Lake Erie and near the border of Pennsylvania, please stop by the event and say hello to me in the home front section from August 17 and 18. It's really a fabulous event and I'd love to meet you!

Well, today's episode will bring you the final letter of our separated couple, Annette and James. I don't know much about their story, but they sure make me consider the impact of the written word and how feelings or information can be misconstrued from their intent – or not, as in the case of our last fella's emotional pleas to his girl. I wonder about this couple. In the age of social networking, we've had to insert

emoticons into the lexicon to substitute for body language and emotions. If only we could read the letters of our recipients to know how they interpreted the meaning behind words.

Let's check in on this last letter from Annette to James and learn a bit about what happened to them.

(Letters, including misspellings/punctuation are exactly as written in prints)

Saturday, March 13, 1943

Dearest Jim,

I know, honey, it's about time I wrote, especially after getting three letters in a row from you, and such nice ones, too. You don't know how near you came to being bombarded with telegrams, night letters, etc. You called me last Thursday night and said you would write the following day. Wednesday came and I still hadn't heard. Thursday night I got the first letter. You wrote that letter Sunday, the 7th, and it wasn't postmarked until March 9th. 9:00 A.M. Then you wrote E. 89th Street in the address on the envelope. You must have been still suffering from a hangover. After all I've told you about taking care of yourself and watching those colds, you still have to get sick. Shame on you! And you tell me to watch out for colds. You're just a bad boy. This isn't a model '08, either, but a streamlined '42 model. The next letter I got Friday morning you wrote Monday. That was the day you went into town to see Stephen Brackley. Don't worry, honey, we'll be just as happy and maybe even happier than anyone you know. That application for a date was very cute but I won't bother to fill it out and send it back. All this time I was waiting to hear what you would say when you got the letters from me about coming out and about your coming here. That bothered me more than anything. I was afraid that you wouldn't understand about my mother not letting me go out there and that you might get all excited and queer things. I really should have known better but everything went wrong this week. That doesn't seem to be unusual anymore so it must be me and not anyone else. I was disturbed about not hearing from you and I knew you were sick somehow. Then Thursday I had a row with my boss — again — and what a row. About my coming in late, and going home early, etc.; threatened to have me transferred, etc. What got me so gosh darn mad is that she picked on me when I certainly haven't been the instigator of all this and I wasn't the only one but she had to take it out on me for everything. I was going when I got out of the office. I didn't even care if she fired me because if she did, I would have told her off right there and then, and that's what she needs. I was determined that I wasn't going to worry about it and get sick over it. Robbie called up and asked me to take a ride up to Pelham with him while he delivered some watches. I thought it would be a good opportunity to relax and then where do you think we were going? To Dom's, of course. Robbie knew that if he had told me I would never have gone. We only stayed a little while. Clara is expecting shortly and looks a mess. I told Dom about National City charging me \$7 extra and he thought that was terrible. Regina isn't working in [Savarin's](#) anymore. Seems she took a civil service test about a year ago and they just called her so she thought she would make out better in a government job.

Last night I went out with the girls from the office. It was pay-day and one of the kids is going on vacation so they were celebrating. Didn't get home until pretty late and was too tired to write. I've had such a bad cold all week I should have been home in bed but we had no idea when we were being paid and I wanted the money to pay my income tax and stuff so I went to work every day thinking "this might be the day." The boss didn't even know I had a cold.

That's the appreciation I got. We are short in the office and she would never have gotten the work done. I thought I was doing her a favor and was getting pushed around for it instead. When I cough, they expect to me fall to pieces. I think maybe you sent me yours through the mail. Friday finally came and I was still working. We got our pay and our bonus together yesterday. My mother took most of it to pay for the dentist because I had borrowed from her in the beginning of the week to pay him. I'm glad we won't have that to worry about later.

I was going to write to you yesterday and tell you about the nice spring weather we are – or were – having here. Just like May in the air. This morning about a quarter to eleven it started to snow and when I came from work at twelve, I had to take a cab from the station. Maybe we are in for another blizzard.

I got another letter from Bette and Gene is being transferred back to Rhode Island. Maybe she will be in New York in June. I'll get around to straightening the picture situation out soon. I don't know what you are worrying about: you'll have them all soon. I'll bring them all with me.

This morning I got your letter of Wednesday, the 10th, telling me you had received both of my letters about coming out, etc. I'm glad you agree with me about the whole thing. I sure hope you come home in June as we have it figured out Ahem. You'd better say your prayers every night like a good little boy. I'd like to see Eddy Cook down for the wedding. Maybe if we both ask him when the time comes he will be able to manage it somehow. I guess I will have Elsa stand up for me. Since you don't care for Jane I wouldn't want to spoil the whole thing for you. I'm not a bit fussy about the precise date. Anytime will do as long as it is soon. I'm saving all I can. \$300 seems like a steep goal but I'll try hard.

Darling, I have some shopping to do now and there doesn't seem to be much more to say. We just have to wait now and be patient and see how things work out. Be good, and take care now. I don't want to have to go out there and nurse you and see that you don't go astray. And that's enough celebrating now for a while, don't you think?

*Bye for now.
Love, as always,
Your
Annette*

What do you think? I loved the fact that she's bringing him up-to-date on all their friends and we do have a glimpse of their plans to marry in June when he comes home. When I read of her difficulties at work and her fight with her boss, I can't help but to remind myself that she is only 18. Louise sounds a bit petulant to me but someone who stands up for her convictions.

All our fellas in The Love Letter Project thankfully survived their military service and yes, *all* went on to marry the girl of their correspondence – including Louise and

James. They married on June 20, 1943 and while I'd love more than anything to tell you dear readers that they were a match made in heaven – they weren't.

When searching on Fold 3 for our fella's military history to share with you, I came upon a rabbit hole that eventually led me to Ancestry dot com, would-be detective that I am. Since there are no surviving descendents I'll share with you the sad mystery that leads one to question – having listened to only three of their letters – what happened and does James's military experience have anything to do with it?

I learned that he served in the Army Air Forces from February 1942 to January 1946. Boy, that was quite a separation between the lovers. For three of the four years that he served, they were husband and wife – and maybe they were apart, or maybe she did go out to where he was stationed as they had planned.

But, let's go back a little to the 1940s Census. It tells us that our fella was a *ward* with a family on E. 89th Street. That's sorta odd – a 22 year old, not a border, is a ward of another family? James's past before and after the war is a historical mystery that even escaped the vast data bases of Ancestry.

What I did learn is in 1946 Louise lived in the apartment building she grew up in on E. 86th Street as Mrs. J. So-and-so up until 1949 when she moved to 63rd Street, living there until the 1960s. The address is listed under *her full* name, not her husband's, in the NYC Directory. By today's standards that's not unusual – but believe me when I tell you that 70 years ago it was not the norm, especially at a time when women referred to themselves as Mrs. James So and so, as evident in the 1946 directory. That's sort of telling. Why the change? And why is it relevant? It takes us back to the rabbit hole opened by a comment on James's military page on Fold 3 – a comment made by Annette and James' bachelor son before his untimely death seven years ago:

I did not know my father as he left us when I was a very young child. What I do know is that he traveled all across the USA to take surviving B-17 crew members from the European theatre of operations into reassembly and retraining.

Wow, just wow. I have an immense amount of respect for Louise – a single mom from 1954 when her son was born. How did she do it by herself?! And what on earth happened? Perhaps, the ten years that James was with her was magical or maybe he was a some-time husband, bouncing in and out of her life after the war. Maybe he found himself either unable financially to care for his family (as she once cautioned) – or unhappy or maybe ill-equipped at being a father. Maybe the weight of family life and responsibility was too much. Maybe all along, he was meant to be a loner.

As you can tell, I love a good mystery – sad as it may be.

What's further perplexing is that either Louise didn't know where he was after he abandoned them or she hoped he'd come back. She finally filed for divorce in 1979. We can speculate but what does remain true is the convex of this couple's wedding vow – til death do us part. Years later when James, an accountant passed away in a Coney Island, Brooklyn nursing home Louise and their son buried him near to where they lived in Hope, New Jersey – today all three rest together as a family. I can't help but reflect on how they lived in Hope. Til death did we reunite.

It's odd isn't it – how we want to romanticize wartime couples of the era, believe that everything worked out in a happily ever after scenario for everyone after the war ended. We scratch our heads as to why the Greatest Generation never spoke about their wartime experiences, and today many deliberately ignore the stark reality that their silence may well have been necessary. We call it PTSD today, but the after-effects of WWIIs battle fatigue resulted in broken marriages and alcoholism, and not just that war but every war before and after. My own grandfather suffered the physical effects of shell shock after The Great War – a permanent tremor to his arm and a notably changed personality when he returned home. War is hell, no matter the generation, and in my humble opinion it may have had its hand – in some manner – to Louise and James's broken story. That hurts my heart but it's real life, isn't it.

I suppose it fitting that we end the podcast series with their letters for they are a reminder that what our men and women of the Armed Services and their civilian families face today are no different. In fact, I think the three couples we heard from are an exact representation some 75 years later. Yearning, deep love, confusion, sadness, hopefulness, optimism, miscommunication, a connection to home life, financial challenges, worries over constancy and the most important of all things we heard in these letters is the joy from just receiving correspondence from the one they loved across the miles separating them.

So, kids, I would love to hear from you! Thank you for being a part of **The Love Letter Project**, and don't forget to subscribe to **The 1940s Experience** at cgardiner1940s.com. I'm still sharing fabulous images of couples in Their 1940s Romance photo project – and next month will focus on some of the WWII veterans in another 1940s Experience Photo Project. Visit my publisher at Vanityandpridepress.com for free stories and all kinds of book updates And also keep your eyes peeled for my next WWII romance *Flying with the Swallows* coming at the end of the year – hopefully – and follow my fun tweets at 40sExperience.

Keep 'em Flying, friends!



Savarin – NYC Restaurant in Pennsylvania Railroad Station

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