

"Well here we are at last. It is all so wonderful! My mind is filled with the most vivid impressions - thousands of them. What before was thousands of miles away is now all around us. I have not time to describe anything now. I must just say that the houses are knocked to pieces quite as effectively as the Sunday papers picture them. Once again I beg you not to worry about me. Just remember that I am enjoying life to the fullest. What may be hardships to others are to me just wonderfully interesting experiences. It is perhaps not right to write in such a light vein of such a terrible war, but I do find it wonderfully interesting and am having a bang up good time and that is all there is to it."



By EILEEN MARX

family matters

Great-grandfather Carl as he wrote such tender words to his "dearest little sweetheart" in 1899. As we read my grandfather's words on the white parchment paper discussing his malaria, his anxiety when the train didn't bring a letter from his "sweet and pretty wife" and his "dearest wish and happiest dream to wake my sweetheart with a kiss each morning and to have you always content by my side," we were touched beyond words. There is something absolutely revealing about a person writing during a time of uncertainty. A latter day reader not only gets a look into a time in history, but also a look into the writer's soul.

I've thought about this recently as friends, editors and acquaintances have told me that I must start communicating by e-mail. I'm told that it's so quick, so easy and in the words of one friend, "It's great, you hardly have to think what you're writing."

I understand how practical and effective e-mail is, both inside and outside of the workplace. But as e-mail grows in popularity, it's important to celebrate the power and beauty of the handwritten word as well.

I'm not opposed to technology, and most days I'm not nostalgic for the days of legal pads and ink pens. We're equipped with a computer, a printer and fax machine in our home office, and my children already seem more at home with computers than I ever will be. Still, we have a responsibility to use

God's gift of technology in ways that educate and enlighten people. Ultimately, what is most important is not *how* we communicate but *what* we communicate.

The art of letter writing has played a profound role in our own faith. More than half of the books of the New Testament are letters. And St. Paul, one of the greatest letter writers ever, used the written word to instruct, persuade and admonish the people of the churches he ministered to, and to all who continue to read his letters centuries later. I wonder if St. Paul's epistles would be as compelling if they had been composed on an electronic laptop rather than on papyrus. I have no doubt that St. Paul would have taken full advantage of technologies that could instantly reach large audiences. But would his eloquence be lost on the crowded e-mail thoroughfares?

I wonder too if Lt. Madison Lewis' letters from France or Great-grandfather Carl's letters of love would have been as poignant if their writers could have communicated so directly and instantly. Through occasional visits and a pen that wouldn't quit, Great-grandfather Carl worked out the difficulties of distance with his young bride by taking a job as an inventor and engineer at Ingersoll Rand in Easton, Pa. Ultimately he was awarded more than 300 patents, including one for the underwater rock drill, which was instrumental in the building of the Panama Canal. Most important to me, Great-grandfather Carl and Great-grandma Jeanette had a daughter who would one day be my Grandma Jean.

And what of Lt. Madison Lewis? Four months after arriving in France, quite taken by the "bang up good time" he was experiencing, the lieutenant was promoted to captain and received the Distinguished Service Cross. The citation reads: "Captain Madison H. Lewis, 302nd Engineers for extraordinary heroism in action near Ville-Savoy, France, on August 18, 1918. Under enemy fire, high explosives and gas, Captain Lewis plunged into the Vesle River to rescue some soldiers who had fallen into the water with full pack while crossing a footbridge and were in danger of drowning. In order to do this he removed his gas mask and as a result was severely gassed." The wide-eyed soldier who began a thrilling journey across the Atlantic to fight in World War I started an inward journey just months later after experiencing the devastation and human suffering caused by war. How do I know? It's all in the letters left behind.

Marx lives in Lawrenceville, N.J., with her husband and two children.

press reprints pastor's tales

By Lee Strong
Associate editor

Like many a children's story, it all began as a dare.

Father Gerald T. Brennan, pastor of St. Bridget's Parish, Rochester, from 1957 to 1961, was known for his story-based children's homilies. Shortly after he arrived at St. Bridget's, a friend dared him to try to get them published.

He took up the dare, and *Angel Food* appeared in 1958. He went on to produce more than a dozen children's books before his death in 1962. Those books included more children's homilies, the diary of an eighth-grade boy, a ghost story and a child's biography of St. John Fisher.

All told, they sold more than 500,000 copies, earning him critical acclaim. The books had been out of print for many years. But Father Brennan's fans — and parents looking for faith-based children's stories — can now find them again.

The Neumann Press of Long Prairie, Minn., has printed two collections of Father Brennan stories under the new title, *Angel Food for Boys & Girls*. Volume I was originally published in 1950 as *Angel Food for Jack and Jill*. Volume II was originally titled *Angel Food Time* (1953).

Dennis McCoy, Neumann's publisher, had heard of the books through customers. He checked with used-book stores, which reported a steady demand for the Father Brennan books.

The books impressed him as well. "He personally talks to children," McCoy noted.

He added that the books also contain messages of faith that continue to inspire children.

Despite little publicity, nearly 1,000 copies of the books have been sold since their release in the fall of 1997, McCoy said. He plans to bring out two more volumes this fall, and may reprint more of his works.

"If it goes quite well, we'll do more," McCoy declared.

For information about the Father Brennan books, call The Neumann Press at 1-800-746-2521.

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