

Camp Holmes Internment Camp
Baguio, Phillipines [sic]

August 19, 1943

Mother Darling

Today is my birthday and we celebrated by having a dinner party. We had beef stabonough [sic] and French fried potatoes, avocado salad, cake and coffee. I received the following gifts which are expensive and hard to get: 2 cans of milk, one bar of face soap, lipstick, earrings, a small pork roast, a can of guava jelly, linen hankie, a side of bacon.

We are all in good health. The children have been very well; growing nicely. Cecile is at the head of her grade. Mary Ann has skipped a grade and Marie keeps average in school, but 100% in health. She has never been ill, but Mary Ann and Cecile have been sick at times.

Sam and I have been fortunate in having a business. We run the community butcher's shop, and also sell groceries to the people who have not contacts outside. We are noted for our hamburgers and Sam has earned the nickname of "Sam the Hamburger man." We have been in business over a year which has provided means to buy extra food and clothing for the family. It has also kept our outlook bright. Sam and I have been the busiest ones in camp, and haven't noticed the passing of time. We all have community duties and Sam is one of 6 cooks. I scrub stairs.

About a year ago we brought in a root called camote cajo, and by cutting, drying and fine grinding we make a flour called cassaya. I made a cake out of the first batch and it tasted exactly like wheat flour. Everyone has been using it since for cakes, pies, bread and so forth, and now we sell all we can make.

We used good judgment in remaining in Baguio where the climate is cool and healthful. We have been getting fruits and vegetables the year round.

As always, we think of you at home, pray for you and hope for you. Special love from Sam, the children and myself to you, Sister Robertus, Catherine, Malachy, Anna Teresa, Joseph, Marge, Bill, Peggy, Catherine Anna, Joan, John, & Kathleen, Marie and Bob, the Henrys Grogans, Smith, Sullivans, Park's Abrams, Harrigan's and all the relatives and friends. Also the Sisters at Rosary, Visitation and the Mound.

Yours,
Cecilia McCrave Ladic

Copy-----

Typed letter

Received December 8—last

Left Manila and censored by Japs Sept 25, 1943.

Signed in Cecilia's hand; addressed to my dear mother. Evidently Celia did not receive the mail that has been sent during the past year.

Sister Robertus

Copy of letter to Rev. Mother M. Samnel, O.P.
St. Clara Convent, Sinsinawa, Wis.

Manila, P. I.
Feb. 20, 1945.

Reverend and dear Mother:

This is my first attempt at writing in over three years. It is difficult to form the letters.

Thank you for your kind words of sympathy. Mother's death was, and is a blow. It seemed to envelope me, closed up as we were. Even now, with chances of home going, the one to whom I wanted to go to, is gone. I can only look to heaven and say "Mother you are there, and I shall try to join you."

I trust time has been good to you, and that you are well. I have followed your army of Sisters and progress in Sister Robertus's letters. There are your casualties, even wounded, but you trust ahead. It is a great cause and I see your achievements [sic] out here back of the lines. Soldiers with medals, rosaries; nurses, the same. Mass at any hour of the day with the most sublime attention and reverence.

I just returned from Army Headquarters' Hospital. There I attended Mass at three o'clock in the afternoon, from the highest to lowest in army and nursing, the attendance was profound. Oh Mother, this is a sad world! The inhumanity of humanity! Your hearts must be broken at home, but your souls are beautiful. Body and soul have suffered these past three years.

The Japanese had a planned systematic system of slowly starving us while demanding every item of our strength. That more of us are not stark mad is merciful on God's part. Their dogs had food that we would have gladly enjoyed. On the civilian side, we cannot complain. It was our soldiers who survived the atrocities [sic] at the beginning of the war and were put into various prisons, who paid with another various systematic flow torture. By all that is just in the sight of Almighty God, Japan will be crawling until the world's end. Often, I thought of God's admonish to the children of Adam, "You will toil by the sweat of your brow." We did, and were given yellow and white corn (meal) that worms had eaten the germ out, and destroyed the food value. I mean, corn, not meal! We were given the kernels. Someone gave us a grinder, fortunately. The soldiers who survived and were in this prison, when we were taken from Baguio, never had a grinder. It takes days to bail this Philippine corn. When dysentery came, there was nothing but the corn – whole – to go through their bodies. We are surrounded with graves. The average is about ten deaths a month; six died one night, shortly after we moved in.

Our family kept well, though we lost heavily in weight. I was down to 105 lbs. the week we left Baguio, but strong enough. We were suddenly told on the feast of Holy Innocence, Dec. 28th, that we were to go to Manila. We moved about Baguio previously three times. Each time, we had to give up money and clothes, and what little food. Orders came for Manila, and although it is an even five hour drive from Bauio, it took us over 14 hours. As we were punished ferociously from time to time for contact with natives or sympathetic

Belgian Fathers, we had no idea of what was going on. We innocently, were driven in open trucks with few of our possessions from the city. We were only a short way, when we had to pull to the side, to allow the stream of Japanese Army, their nurses, supplies and ammunition that were passing on the opposite side. We soon began to see every square inch was occupied by a soldier. We saw every house being occupied by soldiers. We saw our Red Cross boxes of food and medicine being carried in their trucks. (In three years we only received one Red Cross box) We realized war was at hand. Here was actual mobilization. Finally dirty from dust and a light tropical rain that settled it on our weary bodies, we were thrown into prison (Bilibid) condemned years ago by the government. It is full of germs and vermine.

I caught amoebic and bacillus dysentery. I was deep in fever two weeks the night the American Army arrived. We heard the armored cars, thought they were Japanese. Next morning, the Japanese officials and sentinels left. Thanks to God, we were saved. Our soldiers are God's own elect. We were spared a horrible death. (It is dark – I shall finish tomorrow.)

I am at this again. Sorry to use pencil, but the only bit of ink and pen in camp is being used by someone else.

The army came in slowly and we hear the fighting over our prison walls. We saw the air corpse [sic] come in and dive bomb the Japanese anti-craft positions. One day one was caught by the aircraft. [H]orrified, we saw the plane burst into flames, we looked for the parachutes, only three might have made it – a chute or two burst into flame. Prayers – pleading to Almighty God for them! And now it is constantly. The heavy guns are near us, in fact, everything in warfare is uncessingly [sic] in action about us. Since the Americans arrived on Feb. 4th, we have a city engaged in fire, destruction of every kind. To add to the heat of the tropics the dire, noise and lack of water is indeed wearing. Yet, we have been through deprivation and are in a state of not minding; those, who do, believe me, have gone insane.

Let me be selfish in calling attention to myself a moment. There have been moments in my life where I doubted the existence of God. May He grant, I shall never suffer that again, because at present I believe in Him, with nothing short of immensity! Toward the end of our days in Baguio, I nearly moved into Baguio City for failing health. One and many a one was permitted to live in town by herself under certain conditions, if she were ill. The Japanese officials took a fancy to my three daughters, who are so near an age and so blonde they look like triplets. They very kindly and privately told me to try to content myself, as it would be dangerous. I did not know they even knew us, but they apparently were using their magnifying glasses my way. Now, the folks in Baguio are not accounted for, including "Maryknoll Sisters" and Americans boarding there. The Japanese did not bother to take them down to Manila. We know that Baguio is burned and bombed to the ground, including the Belgian Fathers' beautiful cathedral on a hill commanding the city. Previously, in the business our family were running, we did some contacting for the camp with the guerillas for our soldiers who lived in the woods. The Igarots who was permitted to talk to us and who was a native guerilla himself was caught, fortunately at the time not in a deal for us. He never divulged our name. Others were taken by the Japanese Intelligence and strung (with their arms back) of them by the thumbs – feet off the ground. Meantime, all the ignominies of the

Crucifixion. One was given the water cure, - water forced down the lungs and abdomen by a hose until insanity or death entered in; the latter was one of our campus' fate. We never heard of where he was buried. His wife and child, a son, will be going home soon.

Finally, in my illness to date, God is sparing me. Shortly after the army came in, I was in the hospital running temperatures, vomiting and eliminating blood. One night this end of town was in fire. I had only a robe and bed-room slippers in the hospital with me. Two soldiers put me on a stretcher, drove me in an ambulance to a shoe factory; everyone finally got there and we spent the night. Meantime, the Philipines [sic] robbed us, - nothing was left. All the sick had to be taken to Santa Tomas, the rest of my family went back to the prison. I was taken to Santa Tomas University – our Dominican foundation. My temperature rose to 104 degrees, and I was dying amidst shrapnel flying all around me, while Japanese shelled us constantly for a week. Women died beside me daily. I had asked for a priest, but none came. I was about to lose my mind, when a Doctor Aaron of New York City, came and took an interest in me. He ordered blood and glucose transfusions; with them, came life and normalcy. Then I was transferred to Quezon City. I picked up enough to get home to my family, though even this had a hand of God in it.

Mother, all we know is the wonderful army we have. The boys are cheerful, brave and kind. One would feel like a traitor to fall short of their example. Beyond this, we are among shelling, bombs, machine guns, artillery, infantry, tank corpse, - wounded, dead, and sadness galore. Our best friends are dying daily. I was very weak. If I live to get home, God will have fulfilled his answer to your prayers.

My cousin, Francis Callaghan, is in the engineers, (*a fold in the paper hid several words here*) about 80 lbs. The Army is freeing us and most of the people are responding to the food. I take highly diluted milk and toast – as a baby, and I feel a little stronger each day.

The fighting is terrific, day and night. Last night I dreamed I was back in school at the Mound with Sister Mary teaching art up in the attic corner beside Father Cavanaugh's house. That is, because I began writing to you yesterday. I stopped at dusk. Our eyesights are ruined with lack of vitamins. I dreamed amidst heavy shells whizzing over our heads and bursting about five hundred yards distant.

We sleep (three of us only) on canvas army cots. I am so thin the canvas cuts my flesh, so sit in a chair is painful. The rest of the family sleep on boards. We have the skeletons of each other, nothing else, but we thank God that we are [alive].

Word is now that we leave for home. Please share this with my family. I may not have an opportunity to write them.

Continue to pray ____ Mother. ____ me _____ written or ____ing our Jesus. Remember, I am under or for ____ have me future it will help you forgive.

Closing is not readable.
Cecilia McCrave Ladic

