

Dear Family,

On the most wonderful trip to Italy.....
APRIL 7th left Paris at the Gare de Lyon, second class at 9:00 P.M.. Was able to get reservations through the Company of Italian tourisme CIT..only because Sonny Mitchell in our group cancelled hers and so I had them adapt her reservations to what I wanted to see which caused some minor confusion but was finally arranged. Left with Nancy Galbreath, Helen Messires, Pat Carry and Peggy Gilliam of our group. Dee saw me off at the train. His mother arrived in Cherbourg with his first cousin Medelle that same night but there was such a storm that no one arrived in Paris until the following evening as I found out later.. Dee was all upset, I was to have gone to meet them and to have had dinner with them before leaving but it was obviously impossible. About one hour out of Paris we had to stop and change cars and then what an hour while they detached the first car since something went wrong with the which caused a fire....Fortunately we had our reservations and so they had to arrange us another compartment.. couldn't possibly have stood up for 24 hours to Milan. Had breakfast and lunch the next morning on the train.. The ride was especially beautiful through the Swiss alps and the Simplon tunnel down along Lake Maggiore. That lake, that one with Lake Como is one of the most beautiful sites I have ever seen.. a blue-green almost turquoise in color, it is surrounded by pine trees, speckled with tiny islands on which are peach roofed houses and set in background of snow capped pink and violet mountains. If I were to paint the colors no one would believe that I had actually seen them. It is indescribable.

APRIL 8th Arrived in Milan at 12:30 midday, and were transferred in taxi to the hotel Rosa. Went straight out to change our money at 600 lire per dollar and then to arrange with CIT to pay the rest of the expenses for which we had arranged. After this they finished making my plans which were different from the rest. Then went to see the famous cathedral of Milan..I don't know whether it is worthwhile to go into the architecture and history of everything I saw. That would take a lot of time and mean very little to you. I can show you pictures of everything when I get home and you could look up what really interests you. Therefore will only mention special differences. This is one of the largest churches in the world..high gothic with Greek influence in the facade. After seeing the church the girls made me go back to the hotel to rest. You see the Friday before I left had an attack of appendicitis and spent the afternoon of my birthday in the hospital getting xrays and all kinds of examinations. It still was rather grim the day before leaving and on the train but the doctor gave me names of doctors all over Italy and cheerfully told me that he didn't expect me to come back to France with the offending organ!!! So I had to go easily and rest a lot of the time....At any rate not to worry....Started back to the hotel and walked in the Roma, but realising I had made a mistake, I beat a fast retreat and continued down what I was sure was the street. Could not recall the name of the hotel and had no way of finding out since Man had taken my book and all my identification not wanting me to carry anything....Well I wandered for all of an hour and a half and finally approached one of those picturesque Italian policemen. He could understand neither French nor English, but with my French and the little Italian I know made him understand that I was lost and wanted to telephone. He took me to a bar of all places and after about twenty minutes a man took me back to the hotel where I got the desk clerk to telephone CIT..Of course they laughed and then looked up the itinerary and told me it was the Rosa which was next door just off the main street. It took me from 5:00 until 7:15 to get back to the hotel which was just two blocks from where I had left the girls. They got in about 15 minutes after and I was so exhaust and ill they had my dinner brought up before they went out to eat. That was the first day and the succeeding were just as venturesome

April 9th: Spent most of the morning arranging my itinerary with Cit and then went to see the church of Santa Maria della Grazie with Nan and Peggy. Met the other two and had lunch then went to see the "Last Supper" of Leonardo da Vinci. Was disappointed in a close up view of the mural because the time has worn away all details and destroyed quite a lot of the color it must once have had. But from the other end of the refectory it is really a masterpiece. The others headed off then to do some shopping and I went to see the church Saint Ambrogio alone. This is one of the oldest churches in the world and has a perfectly lovely Byzantine mosaic in the arch back and above the altar. Then tried to see the Brera art Gallery but the paintings were put away while repairs were being made. That was a disappointment but I walked through the oldest section of the city which was interesting and a little pitiful. I really didn't like Milan very much because it was so modern and so commercial. All practically rebuilt since the war as it was the city where the most rooms were destroyed during the war. On some of the streets however one could still look at a whole row of buildings and then discover that it was just the facade that remained and that the interiors had been all destroyed. Went to bed right after dinner while the others went off to see an opera at the famous Milan opera. But I just couldn't have managed that and as it turned out the opera was given by a Paris company and was so awful that everyone slept and it was only seeing the Scala itself that made the evening worthwhile.

April 10: Up at seven and since it was Sunday Pat and I went off to the cathedral for church. Coming out saw all the rows of Palm and got a piece for Grandma worked in a cross. The bus came to meet us at the hotel at 8:30 A.M. promptly and by a miracle we were all ready. The first part of the ride to Venice was across the southern side of the Italian Alps and very interesting to be riding along an almost flat plane and then have a range of mountains rising to the left and stretching for miles in either direction. The sensation for me to even see snow-capped mountains is still astonishing even after Switzerland. Wonder if American mountains are as lovely? Then we went through Spetzia and across to lake Gardone where we stopped at the small town Riviere Gardone for about an hour. That is just breathlessly beautiful in color. The same turquoise and as clear as the water we drink, so that one could see the pattern made by the patches of sand and deep green sea weed in the places where the depth was not too great. Then we headed off to Verona of Shakespeare fame, had lunch and then a tour of the city where we saw the villa, garden and tomb of Romeo and Juliet. It is a most romantic spot with an interior columned patio, a well in the center balconies and a melancholy weeping willow tree. All heavily scented with the perfume of wisteria and the many other flowers planted there, it was bathed in the noonday sun! Went through Padua and Venetia stopping to see the churches along the way. Arrived in Venice at about 7:30 P.M. rode along the beginning of the Grand Canal on arriving and then out over the water itself. The sun was just setting into the Adriatic when we arrived and it was lovely. Our hotel was right on the Grand Canal. The Principe. and very nice. You know I think I could very easily become a travel bureau myself. Had dinner at the hotel and then walked for awhile before going to bed. Venice, now that I have finished the trip was really the most romantic city in Italy. At night you thought you could touch the stars they were so close and in the day the sea seemed to reflect and even melt into the sky. It's no city to be alone in however and I guess I liked it least of all the ones I saw perhaps for that very reason...

April 11: In Venice this day as well as the 12th and 13th. Will list what I did here in approximate sequence but not go into it day by day. The first day however the group was still there and we took a gondola to St. Marks Square where we saw St. Marks, the cameneilli, the palace of the Doges and then had lunch at which time I ate the most weird and yet delicious assortment of fish you could possibly imagine, all from the Adriatic I gathered. Then cassetta for desert which is an Easter season specialty of three flavors of ice-cream molded with sugared fruit and cake. I never found better in the whole rest of Italy and I must comment here that it was the first time I had had really enjoyable ice cream since leaving the farm. For that reason some of my comments may seem a little incomprehensible; but in the past year many things which we take so for granted at home have become a luxury for me. It's funny but a good cold glass of spring water is one of the first things I want at the farm. As I've already mentioned we had to drink bottled or seltzer water all through Italy and because of some sort of epidemic not so long ago in London the Paris water has been even more unsuitable than in September. Well, to go on... in the afternoon Peg and I took a Cook's tour through some of the old canals and then saw the Franciscan church where all the famous tombs are to be found and one of Bellini's Madonna tryglyphs. And then we got the guide to take us to the glass factory where the owner, a graduate of Oxford showed us through and explained the process. He had the precise diagrams for a series of champagne wine, water and cognac glasses with a gold bulb in a delicately greenly tinted stem. The master had three assistants and was one of 14 at their big factory in Murano. But at this office one can follow the process through because there isn't such confusion and then the whole museum is there. This isn't open to the public but the director showed us through and you have never seen such magnificent crystal and old goblets. The company collects priceless museum pieces and has been adding to this collection for a century. Then in making designs for their sets they are inspired by the original masterpieces. They also copy exact details from old mosaics an art which is almost eternal since the colors being in stone can never fade.

The next day saw the girls off and headed back by ferry to St. Marks. Started from there to send you all the cable as they had made me promise and then to walk through the back streets behind the square crossing bridges of every description at the end of about every block (if you can call the division of distance in Venice, blocks). Saw the Rialto bridge and had bacon and eggs on a quai right in site of it! The bridge when we saw it from the outside the day before was quite a disappointment, but I went up on top and it is lined with colorful, awninged shops and goes up by steps. I'm sure you've seen pictures of it in books or in the movies so I won't mess up the paper with an inaccurate sketch! On the street to the left is the vegetable market, a brilliant, crowded yet very picturesque part of the city. After lunch took a boat out through the Lagoon to Lido's, famous bathing resort but not officially in season when I was there... a little too cold for swimming. Walked along the wide sandy beach and collected shells, a star fish from a beach-comber and a seahorse (wicked looking little monster.. don't know if they'll even give me a passport for him into the states! He's definately too ferocious and could never be naturalised, ..might even participate in some un-American activities if he weren't watched carefully! How crazy is this Europe making me.. is that what you're thinking?)

Next day spent the morning going through the Arti Belle something or other Gallery. It wouldn't be very interesting for me to list the paintings I saw or even the one's I liked. Suffice to say that I have the book and can show you when I get home. Spent the afternoon walking again through the back streets and down the wharves and through the fish market (Needless to say the latter appealed, or rather repelled the nose element!) Sketched for a while and some children taught me to count to ten.

To be continued ... Much love, Jean.