



“Her Last Christmas Letter” (Photo: Pinterest; public domain)

“The holidays always stir up so many memories of good friends.”

Her Last Christmas Letter

Dear Abigail,
The holidays always stir up so many memories of good friends . . . good times as well as gratitude, and looking ahead, too. At 94—Frank is 96—we’re fortunate to be together for 69 years, mostly happy, and yes, a fortunate life. Still, as Frank Sinatra sang: “Regrets, I’ve had a few.”

For one, we’ve lost contact with our beloved granddaughter, with whom we were once so close and shared much happiness. She has a delightful little son whom we see occasionally at family dinners, so for whatever reason, we must content ourselves with old photos and our memories, and be grateful for that much.

The loss of old friends, and some new, weighs heavily on my mind, especially at this time of year. I’m remembering Jim McGarrity, Nelly Templar, Bud Harrington—remember me telling you about him? He was the submarine sailor we had lunch with. And, of course dear Barbara. They’ve gone on to their rewards. Dear people, all. Friends to the end.

And who can forget it was a dreadful election year? You will recall I wrote you earlier I was denied my vote because the county clerk neglected to send me an absentee ballot. I simply don't understand what is wrong with some people.

This year we had to give up our car because of Frank's dimming eyesight, which put an end to our days by the river, restoring our souls. There are two bus trips a week from here to stores, but many kind residents drive, so we are able to food shop for the microwave on days when we do not wish to eat in our dining room. Barb and Ray, who live nearby, always are there for us, for doctor visits, or whathaveyou, and her delicious dinners at the holidays are out of this world.

Estelle has moved from NYC to a nice house in Connecticut, so she finally escaped the problems of the Big City. She is teaching ballet again, and her husband still sings tenor in the NY Met. She travels with him whenever possible.

Pennsylvania is like a foreign country to us; it's either Penn State or Pitt football; hunting; and one-room schoolhouses. Harrisburg is like Trenton—some old buildings, government buildings, some crime and corruption, but slowly improving, with nice museums, restaurants, and so forth. We are a mixed bag here at the senior living center, with former tennis stars, a pastor, teachers, farmers, business men, some Germans, and Pennsylvania Dutch, each of us with a long story of happiness and tears. But we all get along, trying to help each other and to laugh as much as possible.

I have no nostalgia for our old house in New York City, with its unfriendly, hostile neighbors, peeling wallpaper, and a total dependence on cabs. Do, however, miss our walks around the city's streets and the shore. Alas, there does come a time. After my brain tumor and surgery, my balance was completely destroyed, and now, I must use a walker. Don't get me wrong; I'm grateful to be able to get around at all! Frank is in better condition, taking long walks each day and helping me or anyone else he can.

I'm sorry if this isn't one of those glossy Christmas letters you're getting from others, full of color photographs of the family posing atop Mt. Everest after a successful climb or of a gathering on a beach somewhere in the South Pacific, sent to taunt you as we freeze in our sub-zero weather while the temperature of the water in which they were standing was somewhere north of 85F. But this is life. Or at least this is my life.

Frank and I are doing the best we can, as we always have for almost 70 years. After all, life doesn't come with an instruction manual. You have to make up a lot as you go along. When you think about it, it's amazing we survived this long.

Merry Christmas, Abigail, and if the New Year brings you anything, may it be good health and happiness.

Love,

Joan