

48 Cranley Gardens
Palmer's Green
London N13
November 26, 1940

My dear Cousin Emma,

You will not mind me addressing you in this way as it must have been a very cousinly feeling which prompted you to write to us and thinking of us in these dreadful days of war.

I hope you have received the p.c. which I sent a few days ago & will know how much we appreciated your letter.

From the papers you will know more about the raids that I can write & there has been plenty of damage around here – two houses opposite my daughter's, Pops, and another one where some very old friends lived, amongst many.

One young wife in the family, by marriage, was killed instantly & the mother-in-law, who was sleeping there, seriously injured; that is the very sad part of it all, the distress it causes & the breaking up of homes.

We have been very lucky so far & have only a few shell holes in the roof; we have a deep shelter, built just before war started; we all felt that nothing could prevent it & better to have it even if never used; the shelter is only just over 6 ft. and 4 ft. in width but for the last three months Charlie, my son (who is 32 now) and I have slept there; he in a bunk & I in a deckchair as being more comfortable; for the last few years I have had heart & head trouble & my bedroom on the ground floor to avoid stairs; I am nearly 64 & still active in many ways although I do not go out to the shops except in a bathchair; this is rather a hilly district; I spend a lot of time in knitting for the troops & my two grandchildren, Joan & Marian.

Pops, Claude, her husband & they also sleep in a similar shelter, in bunks; you must not picture us in absolute discomfort even in such close quarters; one can adapt oneself, in war, to most things & we feel so much safer there than in the house; we have plenty of rugs & an electric heater; a tall one on which I can keep a meal hot for Charlie; naturally, we shall enjoy sleeping in our own beds again but must make the best of things as long as the war lasts. The end may be sooner than we think. The time passes so very quickly now so we can only pray for the strength & courage to face & stand up to it all.

The democratic nations must be victorious in the end; if Britain were to lose, which no one thinks likely, the others would have to get together; the world could not be left to be governed by a set of common gangsters looting every country like locusts – the people themselves will revolt one day feeling it better to be dead than remain as slaves.

Pops & Claude are always busy as he is a head warden & she helps him a lot with mask testing, typing, etc. Charlie had over a year's fire training but is now a Home Guard for his firm & is a roof spotter, with others during the day, & on night duty every sixth night; it is a very tough time for all the young people. He is engaged & hopes to be married in the New Year.

Joan, 15, & Marian, 10, are really darling girls & have very sweet ways. I wish I could send you their pictures but it is not allowed now. I am so very lucky in my family. They have always been so kind and thoughtful & Pop's husband [is] like another son; Pop's real name is Mabel Jeanie, after my sister & Chip's mother who died within a few days of each other. We could not call her either without upsetting my mother or Chip's Dad, so decided on Pops & it has always stuck to her except in school days.

I have a dear sister who lives right in the country, near Taunton, Somerset & she would like me to go there but I feel I would rather be near my children & should worry far more away from them & if either house here were bombed, we could use the remaining one.

Then my only brother lives in America, Oak Lane, Philadelphia; he manufactures Christmas cards. His name is Sidney J. Burgoyne. You may have come across his name. He has travelled many thousands of miles on business; some of his sons also who are in the business.

He is missing his trips over here & is very anxious about us all & wanted to have Joan & Marian go there but the risk from torpedoes was too great & Pops & Claude felt it might be years without seeing them.

It must be over forty years since Sid went to America; his wife is one of the sweetest women & a wonderful mother to her big family; nine boys & two girls, & about 22 or more grandchildren.

How about your own family; how many grandchildren have you?

Did you ever meet Clara Gerhardi? She usually comes to see me for a few hours when she is staying at Willie's, her son's flat. She has a charming personality & is so affectionate. The granddaughter from Russia, who lived with her for some time, was married last year. I have not heard for some time but we shall be writing to each other before Christmas.

My brother was worrying about the food question over here. I tell him there is no need; a few things are rationed & a scarcity of others, but there are so many other foods of all kinds to replace them that no one can complain – butter is really the only miss but [we] are getting used to the good margarine.

This is my third attempt at writing this – twice for sirens & just now Pops & Joan came in – always a pleasant visit as you can imagine – then they went to fetch Marian from school; it is a perfect afternoon – lovely blue sky & sun shining.

One more thanking you so much for your letter & with love from us all.

Yours affectionately,
Alice M. Gerhardi

I forgot to tell you that we have become quite used to the guns, etc. & except for the damage they do, do not worry us at all; everybody takes it all calmly.

[The envelope has a large sticker to one side: EXAMINER 4045, indicating which censor approved it. It was addressed to Mrs. CF Witzel, 576 17th Ave., San Francisco, California, U.S.A.]