

EDNA'S LOVE LETTERS

EDNA'S LOVE LETTERS AN IMPORTANT LIFE

By

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**This is a tribute to my mother, Edna Ketchum Conover Serle,
who died young. It is written for the generations who did not have the
privilege of knowing her.**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

EARLY DAYS.....	1
1920'S.....	9
1930'S.....	49
1940'S.....	113
1950'S.....	139
EDNA'S LEGACY	161

PREFACE

EDNA WILL SPEAK FOR HERSELF FOR THE BEST PARTS OF THIS BOOK

T'was about 1975 when I received a beautiful gift from my Aunt, Virginia Conover Roets. It was a box of letters from my mother that she had saved. There were about 40 letters dated from 1923 through 1955. Half were handwritten and half typewritten. I am going to share them with you here.

Where her scanned letters are readable, they may simply be included in the pages. Where my technology won't let me show the actual words she wrote, I have transcribed them for clarity.

The comments I add will all be in this font to clarify that they are not Mom's words.

The precious, too few, photographs are arranged according to the timeline established by the letters' dates.

I was restless and did not sleep very well that December 1988 night. My mind wandered over a range of matters and I suddenly realized that my 52nd birthday was at hand. I had earlier noticed some wrinkles on the back of my arm and had the feeling that old age was catching up.

My mom, Edna Ketchum Conover Serle died at the age of fifty-two, after years of declining health. Was my time about up I wondered? Would I too share her fate - never to know my grandchildren? Would I fade from the scene of life as my friends and contemporaries moved along?

Friends tell me of similar ruminations about their own ages, and that they too were surprised to have outlived their parents. My birthdays have continued to accumulate and I can now claim to be elderly. Phew!

Now, approaching eighty, I realize that the end of life can be very sweet. I have been lucky. My dear wife Daisy and I have been retired for over 15 years, have 13 grandchildren, the resources to travel widely, and the great fortune to be close to our families and many new and old friends.

Edna missed the long life but she left something of herself in the way she raised my sister, Janice Rita Serle Newburg, and me. We have in turn passed that something on to our children and see it in the faces of our grandchildren - love of family, willingness to see the good in mankind, and preference for negotiation rather than confrontation. She was a wonderful woman and I think I underappreciated her during her lifetime.

So I offer this in her praise, to share with other generations.

Daisy, my wife of 4 decades, never met Edna. But she knows her good heart because of Aunt Virginia's gift. Virginia was one of Mom's older sisters and they corresponded by "Snail-mail" letters for many years because they lived in an era when long distance calls were expensive, inconvenient, and reserved for important business, people and family emergencies. No email, texting, Twitter or Facebook for them – not yet invented.

Don't read this all at once. A little at a time would be good. Maybe read one a day to note how our lives have changed since her days. Mom would marvel at the comforts and gadgets we take for granted in 2015 - 109 years after her birth. She would be astonished by the number of her direct descendants, and by the many other family members that are today being rewarded by her good-natured spirit.

The most abundant take-away for me is her loving way of speaking to Aunt Virginia in these letters. And the sweet words she uses when speaking about kin, friends, and acquaintances.

My sister Janice Serle Newburg commented that Mom had a hard life filled with the cares of work, limited funds, few conveniences, fast growing children, and the absence of my father, William T. Serle, Sr.

Bill, my dad, joined the U.S. Merchant Marine in 1942, during World War II. He first sailed as a Third Engineer. This was a scary time for Edna for she knew that this was hazardous war service and she had no communication with him when he was at sea.

He was at sea most of the time until 1954 when he had to leave his job as chief engineer with the A. H. Bull Company. There was some difficulty about spilling oil into New York City's harbor during a refueling. As Chief Engineer he was held accountable. Sigh. He went from earning a high salary to starting again in the up-and-coming air conditioning business. Lots of things changed then.

Let me say now, lest I forget later, my mother was a cheerful, fun-loving woman. She played a lively piano, loved to sing, could yodel and wiggle her ears.

Read on to hear her story.

(Note that my transcription is not perfect, and also, sometimes, I was torn between correcting her, sometimes, fanciful spelling and punctuation, and maintaining the spontaneous spirit of the letters without writing (sic) on every page. Sorry. I was not consistent. I often changed punctuation to perfect my own understanding.)