

## *Introduction*

In May of 1943, when World War II was raging thousands of miles away, my parents, Lenny and Diana Miller, a young couple from Brooklyn, embarked on a remarkable daily correspondence that would last until 1946. Lenny, age 28, was an infantryman with a passion for historical research; Diana, age 26, worked in the milling department of a machine shop in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, making periscopes for the war effort.

They began writing to each other, as Lenny entered his year of basic training for the infantry, in Mississippi. They continued through his shipment to Europe in June of 1944, and his service in England, France, Belgium, Holland, and Germany. Lenny fought with the 30th Infantry Division, in some of the most critical battles of the war: at Saint-Lô, in the recapture of Fort Eben-Emael, in Aachen, the first major action on German soil, and finally, in the Battle of the Bulge around Malmédy, Belgium.

Because of Lenny's knowledge of foreign languages (he knew Yiddish, some German and French, and later taught himself some Flemish and Dutch), he became a scout in the infantry. He wrote of making contact with local underground forces and interrogating German prisoners of war as they were captured. He recorded the life-threatening injuries he suffered during the Battle of the Bulge, and his long and arduous convalescence in England, and later, America.

There are many collections of letters from soldiers, but it is rare to have access to both sides of the correspondence. Under the most difficult circumstances, my father saved my mother's letters, sometimes in his gas mask, in small packets, and from time to time sent them home to preserve



along with his. My parents wrote to each other sometimes more than once a day for three years. There were nearly 2,500 letters, many up to ten handwritten pages long, covering a wide variety of subjects.

The letters track the couple's decision to have a child, Diana's pregnancy, the birth of their daughter, and the joys and anxieties of raising a baby in the cramped two-bedroom walk-up in East New York, Brooklyn, where Diana lived with her parents after Lenny enlisted.

The letters include nuts-and-bolts details of Lenny's lengthy training, the skills and teamwork needed to survive in combat, and the experiences of a woman engaged in community war work. They contain reflections on the political and social conditions of the time, particularly with regard to economic and racial injustice. They deal with such timely matters as rationing and financial problems, along with the mundane details of life—Sabbath dinners, health concerns, difficult bosses, and cramped living quarters. Many were love letters.

In these tens of thousands of pages, Lenny and Diana poured out their deepest feelings, and in the process left a remarkable portrait of two people full of hope for the future in a world engulfed in fear and turmoil.



Lenny and Diana were first-generation Americans. Their parents came to America to escape persecution and poverty. Lenny's family came from a Galician shtetl, Dobromil, in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Lenny's father, Saul, was apprenticed to a tailor in Galicia and spent several years in Berlin, where he perfected the needle trade. He made his way to New York, where he reconnected with Lenny's mother, Ida, whose family had also emigrated. They were married in New York. Saul was a garment worker all his life. He was a union organizer and leader in the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. For a time, the family tried their luck in business, opening a dry cleaning/alterations store in Rockville Center, Long Island.

Most of Lenny's years growing up were in East New York, Brooklyn, surrounded by his extended family of aunts, uncles, and cousins. He was the eldest of four children, followed by Rose, three years later, Harriet, three years later, and Eddie, four years later. He grew up in an Orthodox Jewish home where his mother kept kosher. Lenny never ate anything non-kosher until the army. A favorite family story was that Lenny tasted corn on the cob for the first time in basic training, and all the "farm boys" from the Midwest in his outfit made fun of him for eating "cow" grub.



In 1935, Lenny was the first in his family to graduate from college, taking advantage of free tuition at the City College of New York. His strong interest in history and political science led him to a PhD program at Columbia University. He never completed his dissertation after his mentor passed away unexpectedly, but this passion stayed with him. His brother, Eddie, also graduated from City College after the war, and became an art teacher in Queens, in a junior high school.

Diana's family came from Sokolievka/Justingrad, a shtetl in the Ukraine. Her parents knew each other growing up. Her father, David, was eight years older, and came to New York as a young man. He returned home to marry his childhood sweetheart Adele, and together they immigrated to America. They also found work in garment sweatshops. Their children, Diana and Lucy, five years younger, grew up in Brooklyn, in a culturally, but not religious, Jewish home. Eventually, others in their family came to America.

Diana graduated from Hunter College, and Lucy from Brooklyn College. In many families at that time it was unusual for girls to attend college, but their parents believed in education for girls, and it was possible with free tuition. Diana went on to earn a master's degree as a dietician at Columbia University, and Lucy earned a master's degree in social work at Washington University in St. Louis.

After graduating, both Lenny and Diana struggled to find employment in the aftermath of the Great Depression. Both were idealistic and politically active, as was common in their generation. Having grown up in poor immigrant families, they were deeply committed to racial equality and improving economic conditions for all people. Lenny found employment as a caseworker for the New York City Welfare Department, and rose through the ranks as a union leader. Diana worked as a dietician in hospitals. It was a family joke that Diana's recipes could serve hundreds of people and weren't easily adapted for a family of four. Lenny also participated in the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps), a public works relief program, over two summers. Here, he first experienced organized discipline and physically demanding outdoor work.

In 1938, Lenny and Diana met at a party. Lenny often shared the story that he told a close friend that night that he had found the woman he would marry. They lived only a few blocks apart, and during their courtship, Lenny's brother, Eddie, often carried notes back and forth, since neither had a telephone at home. They were married in April 1940 and moved into a tiny one-bedroom apartment in Brooklyn.



During this time, Lenny was encouraged to continue his union leadership rather than enlist in the armed forces, but by 1943, although older than the typical soldier, he knew he had to do his part to stop Hitler. Both the threat of Hitler's advancement and increasing concern for their many family members still in Europe and Ukraine, convinced him. With Lenny away, Diana, now working for the war effort, became more active as a union organizer, and volunteered as a community organizer and teacher of night classes. Diana and her sister, Lucy, moved back in with their parents because they could no longer afford their own apartments.

Diana and Lucy's situation was common, as it seemed "everyone" went to war. All of the young adult males, unless they had a medical exemption, did. In Lenny and Diana's immediate family, Lucy's husband, Babe, served in the Navy on a destroyer, his brother, Paul, served in the Navy on a submarine, Lenny's brother, Eddie, served in the Marines and was at Iwo Jima, and Lenny's brother-in-law Mike served in the Army until he received a medical discharge. The support and love from their extended families at home, who all lived locally then, was key to keeping up morale and courage, whether through frequent visits to those at home, or ongoing care packages sent to those away.

Writing letters was the only way for a soldier and his loved ones to communicate. Time was set aside each day to write. Waiting for letters, often delayed weeks at a time, added tension to their already strained daily lives.



There are fewer and fewer survivors of my parents' generation, and it is increasingly important to tell their stories. I hope this collection will inspire others, as it has inspired my own family. In today's world of email and social media, it is hard to imagine a father waiting every day for several weeks to receive the letter announcing that his child has been born.

It is my hope that readers will see not only a glimpse of their parents or grandparents, but a piece of themselves in this record of the triumphs and sacrifices of ordinary people in an extraordinary time.

It is the story of two people who were deeply in love, who survived one of the most harrowing eras in American history, and who were passionately committed to making the world a better place.

*We Are Going to Be Lucky: A World War II Love Story in Letters* is a story of wartime. It is my parents' story.