

Letter to Mrs. Mitzi Lenz

Schruns, 10/25/1960

My dear Mrs. Lenz,

after a long drive, we now have come to a rest and I want to tell you exactly everything what we have experienced.

When we said goodbye to you and drove along the beautiful coastal road, the sky covered with black clouds, it was raining a little, but still the whole landscape was of great and strange beauty, actually just as beautiful as I remembered. Magnificent the gulf - you could actually say the fjord – nestled deep in the barren karst landscape, then Albana, on the top of the hill, as ever. We slowly approached the west coast, first the Hrsakanal, just as dark as in my childhood days, then Borbona, the black cloud cover still above us, only on the horizon there appeared some brightness. Suddenly we arrived in Pola, at the very edge of the city. You could see the arena, but we were in a hurry to get on. The good old road to Fasana, how many times did I drive it along as a child and later! Everything seemed so unchanged, only the surface of the road was modified - no more holes and dust, everything was smooth and paved. – Driving into Fasana with a pounding heart, suddenly, the much beloved island lay before us in the bright sunshine. A large motor ship like the Mia von Ottos was there and three men were awaiting us. The professor (state curator), the hotel director and the boat captain. Everything seemed so unreal to me. Fasana, the old little fishing village, even poorer than before. At the Marinkowitsch, only laundry hung to dry, otherwise decayed and poor. There were no fishermen either, a few old people who were looking astonished, nothing else. Now it went on to Brioni. Through a veil of tears I first saw the little beacon, then the good old doctor's house, and behind tall trees you could see one eye of the castle tower, as if it seemed as unreal to it as it did to me.

A lot has changed in in the port of Brioni. A large new hotel has been built where the *Carmen* hotel once stood. Dining room, old hotel, walkway, dance floor and red house are all gone and gardens with pine and bushes all the way down to the Riva. The villa had just been restored and rebuilt (everything was much better adapted to the landscape than before). The annex is still intact. Half of *Neptune I* removed and under renovation. *Neptune II* and *III* still exist, but the facades also changed and partly covered with marble. As a result, it has lost its concrete character, which is not a disadvantage. The entrance to the hotel is now on the *Neptune III* side next to the old hall, which is still standing but empty.

Now we were taken to the hotel, to the 2nd floor frontside, a large room with bathroom and salon, all newly furnished. There was even a huge pink English bath soap in the bathroom and a large radio in the salon. Then a carriage (an old one, still from our time) with two beautiful Lipizzaners harnessed was waiting for us. It was only 4 o'clock in the afternoon and so we could still visit some of the island.

First we went up to the grave - everything there in indescribable order, the calm and the view to the saline, some deer on the meadow, the island was green and bright, the strawberry trees in fruit and blossom. Even more, the sun was shining and a silence beyond words enveloped the whole island. Everything seemed like a dream I was afraid to wake up from.

Then we were led (always by the professor and the director) again along the forest path via Punta Naso back to the fort, passing the old tennis court and the very old chapel, where we played robbers and gendarmes as children. A lot has changed since then. The terrace above our red kitchen entrance is all gone, only the beautiful old fountain is still standing and a porch-like loggia like the one of the sacristy leads into our former cellar and the magazine (under our former kitchen and the children's rooms). There you have built a very pretty, small restaurant with a large oven and very pretty Istrian jugs, two very small pretty colorful windows, with Hubertus and wild boar, which the professor is not pleased either and he hopes to make this disappear again.

I now had to take a look at the small courtyard. In the middle is the large magnolia, the whole floor is covered with plates. The fort has also been completely restored, the plaster removed, so that only raw stones remain, which is much more beautiful and authentic. Our antechamber (green) and bathroom were also removed and only a small curtain is left between the annex and the tower, where now a Kupelwieser museum is. The excavations can be seen neatly labeled in beautiful glass boxes. On the old fireplace they show the bust of aunt Mausi. There are also two boxes, apparently still from the villa, with many copies of grandfather's memoirs. On the first floor you find pictures of Robert Koch and Cuffar painted by the professor, and a terrible picture of old Janofski, if you can still remember him. I promised to send a picture of grandpa and also try to find a photograph of Professor Gnirs. - What touched me so deeply was the feeling that time had stopped in 18 .. when there were no strangers on the island as well - only military. The sailors look just like our old ones, the faces are so familiar. Even the type of writing on the cap straps is the same. It seems as if all of Italian period of time has been wiped out and grandpa is somehow back and is planting a lot of new trees, building new houses and all this is really happening just to beautify the island.

Then I also experience very strange moments. We are always promised that we will be introduced to the highest director of the island, he lets us tell a lot - we are treated like royalty - and yet you never get to see him. Everything seems so incredibly unreal.

The next morning the car was ready again (they never let us go out alone) and passing again the grave we drove down to the salina and to Peneda by passing the Monte (it used to be a forest path, now it is an asphalt road that crosses the woods). There we visited the new horse- and cowshed and a large orchard where the vineyard used to be. Everything was very spacious and planned with a lot of understanding. Then we went on to Punta Naso (the big villa is no longer there, but the small one is very much expanded and embellished as well as the bungalow from Spoleto). We were not allowed to go to Roncon as there was no road and walking was not allowed. For that we get out in Catenan and walked through the excavations with the professor, which are again well cleaned and well prepared - the good Professor Gnirs would be delighted with that. All in all, also grandfather would be happy if he could see all of this.

Everything is a paradise beyond words, many trees have grown enormously and many new ones have been planted. As long as they are small, they are surrounded by a grid so that the deer can't get close to damage them. The herds of wild animals have been enormously increased and, since nothing can be decimated by shooting, they are not shy, you can get close to the large herds of deer, fallow deer and mouflon that graze in all meadows. There are pheasants more than ever and the birds sing all day long as if it was spring.

In the evening (at 4 p.m. all workers leave the island) it is very quiet, there is a dead silence in the night. Nothing moves, no human voice can be heard - very strange when you think of the lively hustle and bustle of yore. Apart from us there were no strangers on the island and so they served us always

excellent in the small restaurant in the cellar and we got almost too much food and beverage. I can only emphasize again and again that they have always treated us particularly gracious and courteous manner and that the name Kupelwieser still enjoys a high reputation, not as it was during the Italian occupation when our name was they symbol for the evil "Austriaci". So it is not an empty delusion that we once were a great empire and that we all belonged together. You can still feel a certain togetherness and therefore you don't feel strange at all.

As far as old friends are concerned, there were only the hotel porter, a lift boy and a caddy (now an old gray-haired, serious man) who all welcomed us warmly and dearly. And last but not least Tedi's brother, who runs the laundry with his wife, Anna. Tedi himself is now employed in Pola.

Brioni has got a second water pipe from Pervi. It leads across the breakwater, and the electric light also is delivered from the mainland. There is no longer any machine house on the island, everything behind the Hotel Carmen has been blasted away. Now, there are trees and plants where the workshops and the shop used to be. The church is structurally intact, but only a museum. All paintings, the altar and choir are gone. Some very nice old frescoes on the walls, a stone table with stone seats around in the middle, nothing more. No more bell and no more mosaic outside. On the outside of the fort you still find the two coats of arms walled in by papa, and the Bocca di Leone, which was on the cellar window, is now walled in on the inside. In the garden there is a fruit tree culture and the big old cypress, on which we measured our height as children, is still standing, completely overgrown with wisteria.

New to the zoo there are three huge glass houses in which wonderful flowers are grown. There are 4 big brown bears in the former monkey gorge and at the small polo square there is an enormous artesian fountain decorated with all kinds of figures - the only one that really does not fit into the landscape. The water from the well, which is 1,000 meters deep, is collected and conducted to a reservoir on Tegethoff and used from there. It tastes excellent and sweet, I tried it myself.

The last evening, when we had dinner back in the cellar of the fort, three men were sitting at the table next to us. A general, adjutant to the president, the secretary, and a councilor from the foreign office. All of them young and very friendly. After dinner, they invited us to go to the bath with them. Of course we accepted with joy, because we wanted to see as much as possible from before.

Well, it has changed a bit there. The middle staircase is no longer there and the bathroom is painted completely blue, but the bougainvillea is still growing indoors. The entire bathroom is heated with electric heaters all around and the water apparently is also heated electrically. Manfred was floating in the water, I was too chilled and stayed outside as a spectator. Afterwards, we sat together for a while, communicated with each other partly in German and partly in English, and the court councilor proudly told that his grandfather still worked for the old Kupelwieser and that his father, as a boy in the vineyard, also helped to hit the tin hanger to drive out birds. He was very proud of it and I was moved to tears - like all the time. Before we drove to Borbona the next morning, I quickly picked small tribes from each bush and the good porter handed me a large bouquet of cloves to say goodbye - then it was gone with all the reluctance and me crying like a silly little child. After 25 years back in my childhood home and finding memories at every corner, tree and shrub, that really touched my heart.

How heavenly beautiful this island is and how enchanted everything that is there. You will surely remember the strange feeling that made everything outside this place seem completely unimportant. You never wanted to leave, so enchanted you were there yourself.

We were very warmly invited to come there whenever we wanted and to stay there as long as we wanted, but I don't want to think about whether it will ever happen again, as I can't stop the tears. - But at least this time the farewell was not as bitter as in 1935.

Now I've written such a long letter from my soul. I hope that you can now imagine a little bit what it looks like there.

I really hope you have received good news about Gerhard in the meantime. I can feel with you what it means to be worried about your child. So hopefully everything will go well and we'll see you in Vienna in spring.

Many greetings from Manfred and especially from

your good old

Pussy