



Toronto



DEAR HILDA + TRUSTY,  
well here's a card from  
YOUR GRANDSON, THIS IS THE  
NICEST CARD I COULD FIND!!  
TORONTO'S VERY NICE, A LITTLE  
BIT COLD!! ALTHOUGH I HEAR  
THAT YOU HAVEN'T BEEN TO  
LUCKY WITH THE WEATHER?  
I'VE BEEN WORKING IN  
THE BAR OF THE RIVOLI (THAT'S  
ANWILSON'S RESTAURANT, SHE'S MY  
AUNT IN LAW?) THEY HAVE BANDS  
ON THERE SO AS YOU CAN  
IMAGINE THAT'S RIGHT DOWN  
MY STREET! Lots of Love Mark

HILDA + TRUSTY  
BERNSTEIN,  
OLD HOUSE FARM,  
DORSTONE,  
HERTFORD,  
ENGLAND



25<sup>th</sup> AUGUST 1998

DEAR HILDA + RUSTY

I JUST WANTED TO SAY HOW SORRY I AM TO HEAR THAT VERA PASSED AWAY, TOM TOLD ME YESTERDAY. VERA WAS DEFINITELY ONE OF MY ALL TIME FAVORITE RELATIVES, AND I HAVE SUCH FOND MEMORIES OF GOING TO VISIT HER AND MORGAN. AND PLAYING WITH THEIR DALMATION, AND LOOKING AT THE FOSSILS WITH MORGAN. I AM GLAD THAT HEIDI AND FREYA HAD THE CHANCE TO MEET HER, AND WILL ALWAYS APPRECIATE THE IDEAS ON CHILD EDUCATION THAT SHE HAD.

AS YOU CAN SEE FROM THE PHOTOS FREYA IS QUITE THE ARTIST!! SHE IS GROWING UP SO FAST! SHE IS NOT POTTY TRAINED YET, BUT IS WORKING ON IT, SHE TALKS ABOUT IT A LOT BUT SO FAR NO ACTION. SHE LOVES HER BOOKS, ESPECIALLY ONES WITH ANIMALS AND HAS TO READ 2-3 BEFORE GOING TO BED EVERY NIGHT →

TODAY SHE PUT 3 WORDS TOGETHER  
AND IS ALSO STILL TALKING LOTS  
OF SPANISH.

HEIDI IS DOING WELL, THE BABY IS  
DUE IN 5-6 WEEKS (SEPT 30<sup>th</sup>)  
ALTHOUGH THE DOCTOR SAYS IT WILL  
PROBABLY BE EARLY IE. LESS THAN  
4 WEEKS.

I AM BUSY WORKING AWAY AND FINALLY  
SEEM TO BE DOING WELL, WORK WISE  
I AM HAVING MY BEST YEAR SINCE  
1986!

I MISS YOU BOTH TERRIBLY  
THINK OF YOU ALL THE TIME,  
LOTS AND LOTS OF LOVE

Marta xoxoxo

*Textile: Cover*

Embroidery, 117.6 x 82.9 cm.

India, Delhi, 17th c.

© The Cleveland Museum of Art  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Wade. 16.1278

Published by Galison Books  
36 West 44th Street, New York, NY 10036  
3441/150

Printed in Hong Kong

24 September 1998

My dear Heidi and Mark

How good to hear that number two has arrived, and as far as I am ~~concerned~~ concerned, delightful that you have another daughter. Seven grandsons seemed to me to be some sort of malicious trick; but now we have two great-granddaughters, and that compensates. How is little Tess (Is it to be Tess?)

Mark, I did appreciate you writing to me about Vera. We went to the Edinburgh Festival (on your airmiles) and did see some really good shows. We stayed with a friend - Moussa - (ex South African) and so it was a good trip, and didn't cost much. Until I phoned to hear how Vera was and I learned that she had just died. We managed to get a plane back the next morning and I went to Hemel and stayed with Glenda, who had so many things to see to. We went together to identify the body. I didn't really feel anything when I saw her, because it seemed to me that it was a stone effigy of my sister, that she was not there. I do realise that she was old - 87 - but her mind was still young. She went into hospital for an operation on her knee, but it seemed she never really recovered from the operation.

So I am sad that I am the last of us three sisters, but then, having lost that part of my own family, I now have a much larger family and feel fortunate to have so many people close to me that I love - and that have, somewhere in themselves, at least a part of my genes. It gives me a sense of continuity in this disrupted and disturbing world.

Rusty and I went with two friends on a short trip to France - just pottering around Normandy for a few days. The weather was rather depressing - rain, cold; but we did have some really marvellous meals, which was one of the things we went for. We went to Govenchy - that is to Monet's house, where he lived until he died and painted the famous pictures of the water-lilies and the bridge. The gardens were really beautiful with a great variety of flowers, and the lake and lilies just like his paintings. It was a Sunday morning, and coach-loads of tourists trailed around under dripping umbrellas, with the Japanese inexorably ~~taking~~ taking pictures of each other, under dripping umbrellas, with the famous bridge behind them. We went to Rouen - wonderful old city with an amazing amount of the old part still intact, and a splendid cathedral. It made a good break, and I felt better for having been away.

Now we're back in boring old Kidlington, two aging people pottering around and waiting for new of their books. Rusty's memoirs will be published by Penguin in South Africa, but they've had the manuscript for some time, and don't let him know when they intend publication. Mine is doing the round of publishers, who to my astonishment keep turning it down. I thought the first one who read it would grab it. Don't they know a good book? But actually, of course, I know about all the factors that influence publishers' choice, only one being the merit of the book itself. My agent is keen on it, so he is keeping on trying.

Freya is approaching 'the terrible twos' - I suppose you have heard of them. We went to Brighton to see Keith and Hugh - Julie had gone on holiday with some friends. Hugh is really adorable, trotting around all over the house. He eats anything, and when he has finished says: 'Aw gone.' A different temperament to Freya - not so inquisitive, more placid; but also loves his picture books. His hair was dark when he was born - now it is fair.

Nothing more to tell you. Hope the new baby will give you some rest - you are experienced parents now.

Much love

To Mark Strasburg. Los Angeles. 11.5.95

Dear Mark,

A belated -very belated - note to say thank you for finding my war medal ribbons, and sending them on to me. I had long forgotten that you ever had them, or that they had been preserved for history through your school project. It was very nice of you to send them on so quickly. It saved me from the shameful fate of being the only one of a delegation of about thirty "veterans" who had neither a row of medals or even - very second rate - some rather shabby ribbons to show. The whole trip to Bologna and thereabouts was rather fun for a short time - full of marches past war memorials, visits to war cemeteries and official receptions etc. Not really my thing. And three days were about as much as could take. Most of our group of about thirty veterans - no one under the age of sixty-eight! - were comrades of a single regiment, the "Capetown Highlanders" can you believe it? They have spent the intervening fifty years with regular old-boy evenings together living over their war adventures, and every few years making pages to the scenes of battles they relive. Very convivial they were, but ordinary non-political white South Africans, never quite tune with us five or six "political" veterans, black and white, who had been hastily scrambled together by Ronnie Kasrils - and never quite sure who we were or why we were there among them. I suppose we were there to represent the anti-fascist anti-imperialist echoes of the war, and counterbalance the spirit of "the-best-time-of-our-life and military triumphalism represented by the war-lovers in the group and by our Army 'minders.'

The reason for the whole Kasrils/Ministry of Defence extravaganza was this: Bologna was always a red stronghold. And when (1944) Mussolini was overthrown by the Italians, his successor Marshal Badoglio made peace with the Allied armies. Without any recognisable command, the Italian army just dissolved. Conscripts simply took off from the front and went home. They had a pretty deep hatred for the Germans, and no intention of being dragooned back into some reorganised fascist army. Many of those who returned to homes in the Bologna area began to organise against the German occupiers. They saw themselves as soldiers out of uniform, but patriots. Gradually, they got together the most successful and powerful partisan movement in Italy. They harassed and sabotaged the German armies which still held the whole of Northern Italy. Fifty years on, it was these partisans - or their surviving families and political representatives - who issued the invitation for South Africa to join the official celebrations of the anniversary of Bologna's liberation. (The South African 6th Division had occupied a key sector of the front immediately south of Bologna, and been in the forefront of the assault which finally liberated the city in 1945.) The SA Army brass tried to treat the celebrations as just another military occasion. Partly for reasons of professional pride and partly for reasons of political prejudice, they tended to play down the anti-fascist and anti-imperialist angles as much as possible, and play up the military triumphalism and expertise. So our contribution to the event combined full spit-and-polish army stuff from the 'official' quarters, with political declarations in favour of solidarity, world peace, brotherhood and liberty from us 'unofficials'. End result, a sort of comic opera, whose highlight (low-light?) turned out to be an interminable ceremony at a military cemetery in Bologna - three hours of Catholic Church ritual, overlaid with Polish nationalist ritual, and surmounted by endless army ritual of gun-fire salutes, last post trumpet calls. And then climaxed with communion - holy wafers and all - administered by a troupe (bevy? chorus?) of arch-bishops in full panoply. I am happy to think I won't be around for the next half-century celebrations!.



In your school project you quote me as saying that war was just bloody boring. So it was. But something interesting came up out of this trip, which gave even my boring bit of war an interesting turn. We revisited the actual site where our Division had spent some six months in 1944/5, walking around and reminiscing that here such and such happened, and here so and so was shot etc etc. The scene was on the lower slopes of the Appenines some 30 kilometres south of Bologna. That range cuts across the 'leg' of Italy virtually from coast to coast, separating the wide upper plains of the North from the southern approach. The German army had retreated to the tops of the mountains, and the very steep slopes behind them - at the foot of which lay Bologna. On our side - the South side, there were only two strategic North South roads through the mountains. Our heavily motorised and armoured divisions could only cross the mountain divide by way of these roads - which the Germans controlled absolutely from their positions on the heights, with - I believe - a fairly small number of men and heavy artillery. Their command of the area lasted through the winter of 44 and until the spring of 45. My unit spent the entire winter in a farm house at the foot of the slopes, occasionally firing rather pointlessly at unseen targets beyond the ridge, and occasionally being shot at - equally pointlessly - from the other side. The front didn't move a single yard; the whole place was snow-bound; both sides were conserving ammunition and petrol, preparing stock-piles (on our side at least) for the great spring day when the snow and ice would melt, and a full frontal assault on the ridge could be made. War WAS bloody boring.

Or so it seemed to us. But what we didn't know - in fact it is now said that virtually no one on the our side knew - was that a hideous slaughter of Italian partisans and civilians was taking place just on the other side of the ridge, in places only three or four miles away. We did occasionally meet up with a partisan or two, operating on foot in the mountains. But what was going on just over the ridge remained totally unknown. In the spring, our armies finally took the ridge after a tremendous barrage of artillery accompanied by an unbroken air bombardment for several days. Even then, when we passed through and past Bologna and out towards the Po valley, none of us knew anything of what had gone up. Perhaps those higher-up did; but nothing was said. And to me - and to the others in our party who had been scattered about various places in the front lines, it remained a closed book until we returned last month. This is the part of our war that we never heard about. The Italian partisans had created havoc for the Germans in the area beyond the ridge, blowing bridges and rail tracks, ambushing convoys etc. Finally General Kesselring, the German commander in Italy, realised that when spring came his position would be untenable unless he could eliminate the partisans operating behind his lines. He entrusted the task to one Major Reder. He ordered Reder to wipe out the partisans by all means possible, adding words to the effect that "... evn if this means going beyond normal military limits."

Reder took the command literally. He had a force of 1500 men, which went beyond normal military limits. It moved systematically from village to village in the region between the ridge and Bologna, seeking to wipe out partisans, who generally evaded them because they were at home in the mountain terrain. Reder took to terrorising the civilian population, through a real reign of terror, massacring civilians - men, women and children - in ways reminiscent of MyLai, destroying homes and villages. Whole populationns were assembled in cemeteries and simply machine gunned where they stood. Where villagers took to the sanctuary of the church, the churches were simply dynamited or set alight, and those fleeing were shot down. It became the most frightful series of atrocities of the whole Italian campaign. In the rural peasant district of Marzabotto, where we were housed in our

recent jaunt, there were 1830 dead. Scarcely a family in the area hasn't any relatives or even whole generations of family listed on the memorials to the martyred dead. So in that area, the partisan spirit and the history of a fight for life and liberty is still alive. For them it is as immediate and close as if it happened quite recently. Everyone has a story of a father, an uncle, a mother, and tells it as though they died last year. And we were so close by, almost within shouting distance of it all, and knew nothing of it whatsoever!

So for the local people, the celebration was less about the capture of Bologna from the German armies than about the heroism of the partisans and the liberation of their villages. The liberation was not what the military and the political establishment tried to make it - a triumph of Allied arms. It was the working out of simultaneous but complementary operations by Partisans and Allied armies. Hence their enthusiasm for the South African army, which happened to be there unknowing, when all the partisan operations were going on. And happened also to be in the spearhead of the armed force which finally stormed and overran the German strongholds on the ridge in what he became known as the battle of Monte Sole.

To finish the story: Major Reder was arrested after the war and tried as a war criminal, I think in the Nuremberg trials. He was found guilty of war crimes for these events, and sentenced to life imprisonment. Twenty years later, from prison he petitioned the Italian President to grant his release as an act of clemency. I think he was suffering from cancer. The President - probably realising that this would be a political hot potato - passed the buck to the Provincial governor; who in due course passed it to the mayor of Mazarbotto. He decided - cowardice or democratic principle? - to refer the matter to the people of the District. A referendum was held. And the local population voted - by something like 1700 to nil - against clemency. They attached a very moving little statement to their resolution - I don't unfortunately have a copy of it - but it is to this effect: Clemency is an act of humanity, applicable only to other human beings. Reder has shown himself to be less than human, and thus undeserving of human clemency. So Reder died in prison a few years ago. End of story.

I tell all this to you because I know you have an interest in mediaeval history. This is not quite mediaeval, but so long ago now that it seems not far off. And you see, I now have to amend the remarks you say I made as recorded in your school project: War IS boring. But only when one's view and memory of it is limited to one's own experiences and horizons. There is real history, real drama. But often - and certainly in my case - only over there, only out of view beyond the mountains. And sometimes it takes all of fifty years to realise it!

So: your project -with ribbons attached - has been returned to Tony for you to do what you like with it. Again my many thanks, and love to you and Heidi. Hope you are both keeping well, enjoying life, and busy. But not so busy that you don't find time to make it over here again, so that we can see you again before long.

**Collection Number: A3299**

**Collection Name: Hilda and Rusty BERNSTEIN Papers, 1931-2006**

***PUBLISHER:***

*Publisher:* **Historical Papers Research Archive**

*Collection Funder:* **Bernstein family**

*Location:* **Johannesburg**

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