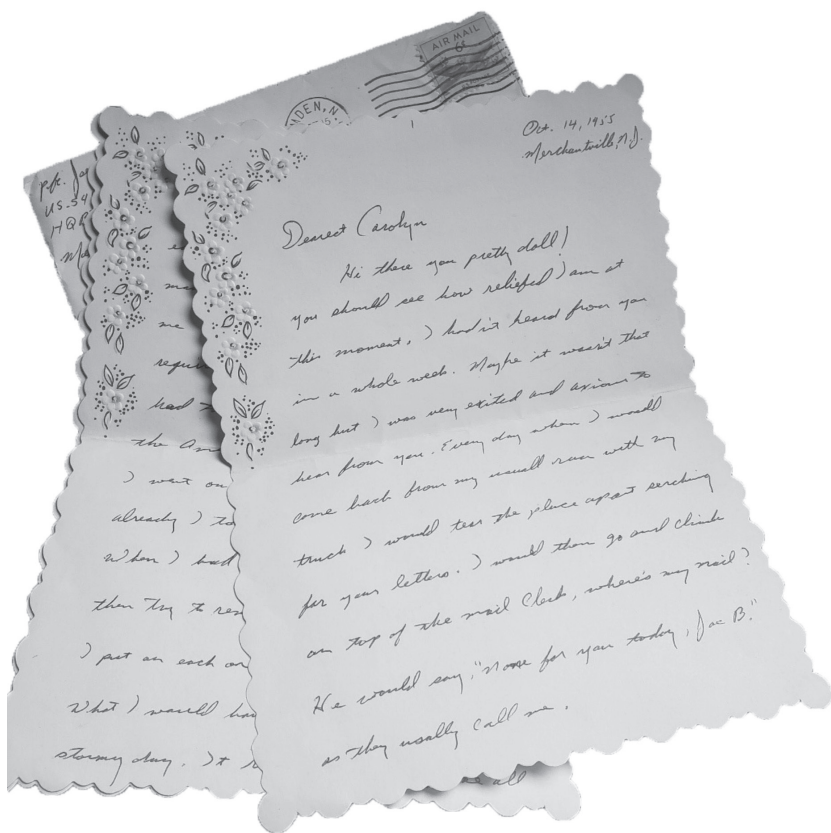


# Wallflower Pen Pals

## The Ultimate Love Story

K. L. Estrada



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What I would have  
stormy day. It is

He would say, "None for  
as they usually call me.

## Preface

I have always been proud of my heritage. When I was only sixteen years old, my mother shared with me her most precious possessions. Initially, I thought she was attempting to show me a piece of jewelry, a cookbook, or something brilliant. My mother pulled out a midsize box. It looked fairly old as the exterior had signs of wear and tear. When she opened the top, she uncovered a box full of tattered letters. My first thought was, *Why would she treasure these?*

With such pride, she proceeded to tell me that she wrote to my father when he was in the army before they married.

With delight, I asked many questions. "Why? When? How long?"

She proceeded to tell me that one day, when I am more mature, I can read each letter. Even though I felt old enough to appreciate my parents' personal history, I knew immediately that this was something very treasured. I realized that this meant more to her than gold.

Respectfully, I honored her wishes as I knew there was a good reason for waiting to unveil this most valuable possession. So I didn't inquire any further. Even though I was the curious type, I didn't even attempt to find out on my own secretly. I soon forgot all about it.

Both my parents came from humble beginnings. They were both born and raised in small towns and come from Spanish descent. My mother told me that her great-grandfather was from Barcelona and that my father's ancestors were also from Spain. This piece of information has some significance to this incredible story.

My mother and father were hardworking parents and raised six children. They renewed their vows on their twenty-fifth year of marriage. Another twenty-five years later, their children and grandkids

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celebrated their fiftieth golden anniversary displaying their entire life together from the time they met. We were all undoubtedly proud of this momentous occasion.

Later in life, my father was diagnosed with dementia, and of course, my mother was his caregiver. She cared for him until she became ill with the same disease. Before the diagnosis of both, my mother made us promise that we will never separate them.

We kept that promise.

Today, my parents are buried together at a VA National Cemetery. The headstone reads “Together for Eternity.”

As an avid reader of romantic books, this is the most passionate romance I have ever known. So this epistolary book brings me much pride and honor to finally write about their story.

This book contains factual letters with true-to-life events and dates. But the last names and some places are fictitious to protect the family’s privacy.

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Everyone stood up and clapped as they entered the reception area. "A toast to the groom and his new bride!" shouted Alfonso. Cheers erupted.

"Finally, I have a sister now!" Carolyn told her younger brother with delight.

"So when I get hitched, then you will have two sisters, right?" Alfonso quipped.

Carolyn rolled her eyes. "I don't think you're next in line to get married. You will have another brother before I get a new sister."

Alfonso raised his glass. "Aww, perhaps you're right, sis, but you need a good man to have you first."

Carolyn ignored her brother's comment and gleamed at the newlyweds and sighed. "Carmen and Herman seem so happy now. A new life together as a married couple."

Carolyn started getting into a reverie as she watched the couple greet all the guests.

"Hey, Carolyn, may I sit with you?"

Carolyn suddenly looked up. "Oh, hi, Virginia! Of course you can sit with me."

Carolyn was still in a dream state as Virginia continued to chat away, "You must be proud of your brother. My sister's wedding dress is so lovely. Everyone seems to be having such a good time. Oh, there's Ben and Alice! Hi, there!" After waving at everyone from the table, Virginia redirected her attention to Carolyn. "So what are your plans tonight?"

Carolyn woke from her stupor. "Huh? Oh, sorry, I guess I was daydreaming again. No plans, except to help with the cleanup afterward. What about you?"

Virginia stopped smiling and twisted her lips. "Don't be silly, Carolyn, this is not the time to think about work. This is the time to

celebrate! Why don't you come to my house later? Everyone else will be there," Virginia pleaded. "Please come."

"All right, I'll go if I can get a ride," Carolyn reluctantly responded.

"Fantastic! I'm getting a ride with Alice and Ben. I think there's room for you too." Changing the subject, Virginia asked, "Say, Carolyn, do you still like to write letters?"

It was no surprise that everyone knew Carolyn loved writing to people. "Well, yes, but I don't have anyone to write to right now."

Virginia excitedly pointed to a man dressed in an army uniform. "Well, Carolyn, that man over there would probably like to receive a letter from someone when he goes back to New Jersey. You see, the guys in the service get pretty lonesome."

Carolyn was taken aback. "What?" The thought of writing to someone she didn't even know seemed a bit scary. "Well, who is he? Is he related to your family?" Carolyn asked with trepidation.

Virginia shrugged her shoulders. "Well, I don't think he's related to my family, but I'm sure he's Ben's brother. His name is Joe."

Carolyn felt dumbfounded. "Well, I'll be. I didn't know Ben had a brother. I guess I'm the last person to know things like that." In one way, Carolyn felt trapped. But then she started to think that while she would have an opportunity to write again, she would be able to do something kind for someone in need simultaneously. "Hmm, let me think about that."

Carolyn started to wonder about how Billy would react to her writing to another military guy. Would he be jealous? Or maybe it would be okay since it would be for a good cause. What harm would that do? After all, Billy would understand since he knew what it was like to be lonely in the army as he was stationed at Camp Pendleton before he met Carolyn.

Before heading over to Virginia's house, the gang stopped at a dance hall. Virginia and Carolyn were putting coins into the jukebox when Joe started to approach them.

Virginia whispered, "Carolyn, here he comes—that army guy I mentioned to you."

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Carolyn felt her heart jump. All of a sudden, Carolyn saw her cousin, Amadita, walking toward them too. But Joe interceded Amadita and started talking to her instead. So it appeared Joe was not heading toward Virginia and Carolyn after all.

That surprised Virginia, and she was quickly disappointed. “Well, I’ll be. What got into Joe? He didn’t even see us. And why is he talking to your baby cousin?”

A few people from the wedding showed up at Virginia’s house, and Carolyn spotted Joe talking to her brother and cousin, Moses. Carolyn busied herself purposely as she watched Virginia go up to speak to Joe. Oddly enough, Carolyn was nowhere in sight when Virginia tried to make a proper introduction.

It was a fun evening, and before it was over, Virginia finally found Carolyn. “Oh, there you are! I looked everywhere for you. I wanted to tell you I have Joe’s address. He was happy to give it to me.”

Carolyn gladly took it. “Thanks, sweetie! How did you manage that?”

“It was easy. I just asked him, and he just wrote it all down and handed it to me. I told him that someone wants to send him a letter, but I didn’t give him any details.”

Carolyn smiled and just looked at the address in her hand. “This is amazing, I can’t thank you enough, Virgie!” They both hugged one another and said their pleasantries.

Carolyn was thrilled for this lucky stance and held onto Joe’s address as if it was a piece of jewelry. The next day, when all the chores were done, Carolyn decided it was time to write a letter to that lonely soldier.





July 10, 1955, Sunday

Dear Joe,

I am writing only a few lines as Virginia Gomez, you may already know, asked me to write to you. I don't know if you know me. I don't think you do. Well, I don't know you well enough either—just of what I have heard. I saw you at my sister-in-law Carmen Gomez's wedding. I didn't know who you were until Virginia told me that you are Ben's brother. So now I know a little about you.

Well, so far, for that. I know you guys must get pretty lonesome in the service, and the only thing that cheers you up is receiving letters. So I hope my letter brings a smile to your face. I don't know if I should let you know more about me or not, and I don't know what you'll think of me, but I am going to tell you anyway.

To be honest with you, I have a boyfriend. I met him a few weeks ago. I am going steady, but I don't know how long it will last. That is about all, and I am not writing this letter out of pity or any such thing. I only know that you guys need some correspondence to make up for the loneliness. I hope I am not boring you already. Oh, something else I want to tell you that I like to be honest about things. You probably think that I am deceiving my boyfriend by writing to you. No, I am not. I have told him that I was writing to you in a friendly way since you are from my hometown. I hope we can just be friends, for friendship is a beautiful thing. It's like the saying goes, "A friend in need is a friend indeed." Don't you think so?

Well, let's now go on with something else before I bore you. How's everything down there? I can only imagine what New Jersey is like. It must be beautiful there, huh? Let me know more about this place. As for Riverside, everything is fine, just a little hot. You

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probably already know how hot it gets here. Well, I better be closing, for I am running out of ink—I meant words, ha-ha! I hope this letter leaves you in the very best of health, and may God bless you and keep you safe.

A friend always,  
Carolyn Cortez

PS. Regards from the Riverside gang. You know, Virginia and the whole gang.

PPS. Enjoy yourself and take it easy, will you?

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July 16, 1955, Saturday

Dear Carolyn,

I just received an unexpected letter today. I was shocked to get correspondence from a girl I don't even know. It was sweet of you to make me happy like that. You must be a nice girl if Virginia approves of it. Because some time ago, she used to tease me about the kind of girls I used to run around with. Now I am curious about what you look like. I guess you would expect me to ask you this—to send me a recent picture of you. That is if you don't mind.

I am grateful for your honesty that you have a boyfriend. I am honest too. I also have a girl in Belen. The funny part is that I don't love her. I know she loves me very much, but I never had the heart to tell her that I don't have the same feelings. I hate to break anybody's heart, although mine has been broken many times. I had a girl in California as we were practically engaged. She left me for no reason at all last July—one year ago.

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So much about my troubles. Let's talk about you. Are you still in school? Or where do you work? Or don't you? I might have seen you, but I don't know you.

It was such a sweet wedding, don't you think? I am sorry to hear they had a minor accident on their honeymoon. I found out about it when I was back in New Mexico.

New Jersey is not bad, but I don't like it. There is nothing like being home in Riverside. I sure miss it a lot. I've only got four months and five days to go, and California, here I come! I will get out of the service a little before Christmas.

Yes, friendship is a beautiful thing. I really hope you and I would get to know more about each other. At least, you know what I look like, but I have no idea what you look like, so give me that opportunity and send me that picture. I'd really appreciate it. I've got a saying: "I am nice to the ones who are nice to me." Also, I love people for their character more so than their looks.

I'll close for now as this letter leaves me waiting for an answer from you. Write soon!

Always will be,  
Joe

PS. Regards to Virginia Gomez

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July 21, 1955, Thursday

Dear Joe,

I received your most welcome letter, which I was glad to get. I really didn't expect a response from you. Anyhow, I was so happy to know you're doing fine, for that is my desire. As for me, up to the present, I am fine. Well, I'll start by saying that everything is okay

here, except for the hot weather. It did rain a while back, and the temperature cooled down a bit, but it's back to being warm again.

Say, you must be a very thoughtful person based on your last letter to me. I really appreciated it very much. It makes me feel like a girl, not just a person. The stationery you wrote on was so neatly designed.

Well, so much for that. You stated that you would like to know a little more about me. Well, I will do my best and be as honest as I can. Maybe the reason you don't know me is that I am a bit shy. Well, I am a little bashful until I get to know a person well enough, although my friends tell me it doesn't show through my letters.

As I was saying, I don't go out much and mingle with a lot of people. So that must be why you don't know me. Of course, I didn't know anything about you until the day of the wedding. We were not introduced, but Virginia was the one who told me a little about you that you were in the army and was lonesome for a pen pal.

My parents and I have been in California for about four and a half months. Dad says he knows you well. You probably know him too (Manuel Cortez). I think he said you worked with him some time ago. My home is in Arlington. You probably know about the neighborhood. It seems to me like you are being a detective in gathering information. Anyway, I'd rather not bore you with all the details and let it be more of a mystery.

I admit I am not working. I wish I had a job, but instead, I'm still going to school. I am a little too old to be in high school. I am twenty years old and going to be twenty-one in September. I am in twelfth grade now. I plan to graduate this school year. I'm still in high school at this age because of my dad's job, which has moved us from place to place. This is the first time we are finally settling down. Also, I was absent a lot because Mom was always sick. Dad's mom wants us all to finish school, even if we are a little too old. Besides school, I do a lot of chores at home. When that is done, I read books as that is my favorite pastime. Sometimes I think I want to quit school and get a job, but I hear it's hard to get employment here with little experience.

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It's funny how I find myself telling you all of my troubles. You know, I have never told anyone about my age. Everyone in school and everywhere else thinks I am only fifteen years old, so I feel I can get away with saying I am seventeen instead of my actual age. And, of course, nobody would believe my real age because I am very short. I am teased with different nicknames from "Peewee" to "Shorty." Sometimes I don't know my actual name anymore, ha-ha! I don't mind being called Shorty, for that is how God created me. So I can't do anything about that. I am as tall as Virginia, but she's only fifteen years old! She's a great kid, thinks only of fun—no worries, pretty much carefree. But she is a joy to be with. She makes me forget about my problems, even my shyness. Also, some say she's a knockout. For me, I am not much to look at.

In June, for the prom, a friend of mine, Rosie, and I went to the dance at Ebo's. I've been there about four times. We usually have fun when we go out, but we don't do that too often. We only go out once in a while, just to have a good time.

As I mentioned earlier, I met up with this guy, a soldier from Camp Pendleton. He seems to like me. I am not too sure how I really feel about him yet. Dad says you can't trust guys like him, especially from someplace other than your hometown. You see, he's from Michigan, and I get a little confused when it comes to dating guys from afar.

Gee, I shouldn't be pouring my troubles to you. Instead, I should be cheering you up, for that's my reason for writing to you. Besides, you may say, "Why tell me? I am not a detective, police, or priest. Why bore me with your problems? I have enough of my own to take care of." Believe me, even if you say all that, sometimes it does a lot of good to share your thoughts instead of bottling it up. Even though the person on the receiving end doesn't understand, it helps you sort out things better in your mind. But knowing you're an honest friend, I feel confident to share my thoughts with you.

Loyal friends like you can help a person in need. Of course, we should be careful of the so-called friends that just want to cause

trouble. Some people like to gossip, saying things that aren't true and blowing things out of proportion. One thing I don't like to do is judge others. Instead, I want to help others to be their best selves and to be honest. But I am also aware that there is no perfect person in this world. We all have our faults and make mistakes. For me, I do my best to make things right and do better next time. It's like the saying goes, "If at first you don't succeed, try again."

This probably sounds like a lecture, huh? Well, let's go on with you. I know what it's like to have your feelings hurt. I have been hurt many times before too. And I understand how you must be feeling right now about your girl in Belen. I hope you don't mind me asking questions, but I honestly want to help you. You say she loves you, but you don't feel the same for her and you don't have the nerve to tell her. First, let me ask you something. Does she write to you? Do you write to her? Also, do you know much about her character? Will she love you always? Could you learn to love her? How or what will the future be like? There's a lot more to those questions. Ask them in your mind and heart and then pray about it, which helps a lot.

Another thing I want to tell you is I know you have been hurt and afraid to hurt somebody else, but not telling her your true feelings now may hurt more later on. Because later on is more damaging, and not to mention you don't have peace of mind. I know it's better to hurt somebody's feelings when it's still fresh instead of breaking their hearts when they have deepened their love for you. It will cut both ways, but it does get better with time when all is forgiven and forgotten.

One way to make it easier is to imagine putting yourself in her shoes for a while, and you will realize how you would want to be told the truth. But best of all, be honest with yourself as you are with her. Be clear about your feelings, and she will understand. Oh, also think about how she treated you. How did she act around you? Was she kind and considerate of your feelings? If these questions are positive in your mind, then I'd say she is the girl for you. Now, I wish you lots of luck with your thinking.

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If you do your best to work things out, it will pay off later. And, oh, you need to show that you can trust and love Lena too. If you are honest and admit your faults, she will understand. Both of you will be happy, and you will be glad you made the right decision. I thank God for the opportunity to help you. I know He is working through me. Don't ever doubt that God will help you if you ask Him.

Well, I better close now, for I have written a very long letter. I hope it helps and cheers you up a little. Now may God so help you through the day and night at your job as well as your enjoyment.

A true friend,  
Carolyn Cortez

PS. Good luck in the future. Enjoy yourself and be happy and don't work too hard. Yeah, that's the spirit!

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July 25, 1955, Monday

Dearest Friend Carolyn,

I received the most beautiful and exciting letter today! You know I've been waiting for this particular letter of yours? The days sure dragged on until I got your correspondence. It was the best letter I have ever had since I've been in the army. I like to get long and exciting messages like that. I wish I could describe how happy you made me these past few days, just as if I was walking on clouds. As if I was in love or something. Especially today when I got your picture. I think you are pretty. I liked your photo very much. I've looked at it today about a hundred times already. Oh, I wouldn't say you are the glamorous type, but the kind of girl I like. You say you are not much to look at. Well, I surely disagree.

I never thought of Lena (the girl from Belen) as I do of you just from looking at your picture. I regret I didn't meet you sooner before

your boyfriend from Camp Pendleton did. If only I hadn't been so blind at your sister-in-law's wedding.

I think it is my turn to ask you if you are in love with this boyfriend of yours. If you are, are you sure he loves you? You say he is from Michigan. That is pretty far away. Let me tell you something. I am a soldier, I don't know your boyfriend, but I have experienced what it is like to go out with girls far from your hometown. What I mean by experience is that I've seen it done where guys take advantage of the girls as they make promises of marriage, and all that time, they are just having fun. And when they are almost getting out of the army, they quit and forget about their promises.

I've gone out with girls here. I seek to love, not just have fun, and I can't find any signs of romance here. I quit looking here. I'd stick around with hometown girls instead. I don't go out except on weekends, like to go to dances or a show. And sometimes, once a month, I go to a bar or night club for kicks. I'll tell you again, be cautious about any soldier's actions. Take care of yourself. I've told you nothing but the truth, and I will always be honest with you.

Please don't laugh at me, but I've already had dreamed of you, even before I saw your picture. I think I know what type of girl you are. Good-natured, I mean, a friendly family-type. I know your father. I've worked side by side with him for about five years. He is a very respectable man. I've often envied him.

About my girl in Belen, Lena is a sweet girl. She likes to love and be loved, but she is not very bright. Her father gets drunk a lot. Lena is very thin and is always sick and looking sad. For all I know, she might be ill for the rest of her life. I hope not. Also, she's too old for me as she is twenty-six.

Well, Carolyn, do you understand now why I wouldn't be happy with her? But I can't help feeling sorry for her. I've often wanted to tell her that I just want to be friends, not lovers. But I've heard people who are sick a lot take it pretty hard. One day, when she is well enough, I'll make sure to tell her.



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My first steady girl was Mela Gomez. She is Virginia's older sister as I hear she is happily married now and has two little ones already. For me, it was just a summer romance as it only lasted three months in 1951. Next was Adela Perez as you probably know her by now. We only lasted one year going steady. I used to love that girl so much until I received the "Dear John" letter. I felt like going AWOL. I got over it two months later. Now with you writing to me makes me feel like the good old days. I feel like I've known you all my life. As you notice why I say you are my type, Mela and Adela are short and sweet like you. If you have an objection to what I've said in this letter, let me know. I've said just what's in my heart.

One thing I would ask of you is not to forget me. One thing for sure, I would never forget you. As you, so far, have made me the happiest guy in camp. I can hardly wait to meet you. I may have that chance in about four more months.

Well, I've tried to make this letter as long as yours. Not exactly, but just about. I'll close for now and hope to hear from you very soon.

A true friend,  
Joe Cotillo

PS. Regards to your father!

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July 28, 1955, Thursday

Dearest Joe,

I got your most welcome letter, which I was glad to receive, and glad to know you are doing fine. As for me, up to the present, I am fine but just a little confused. Well, I'll start by saying that I have really appreciated your advice. It helped me a little. Not that I didn't know this already, but it encouraged me since you are a soldier too—

you more or less know the score. Well, this guy has said he loves me and has proposed to me, and now he was called to go to Europe. He is going on the tenth of August, and he asked me to wait for him. For all I know, he might be just making a whole bunch of promises like you mentioned. Who knows? Honestly, I have trusted him as I have trust in you. But now I am not sure. I couldn't say I love him because I really don't know him well enough. I am a little confused as we've only known each other for three months. All I know is that time will tell if he really loves me and if I love him. In the meantime, I will give it a try for a few more months. By then, we will find out whether it is love or not.

Well, so far, for that, let's go on with you. I am glad to know that I have made you happy. Thank you for letting me know that, even if it was flattery or by mistake. To me, it was music to my ears. Well, you say that you are going to break up with your girl, Lena, as soon as she is well. Tell me, why is it she's sweet and likes to be loved? Well, I think you're making a mistake in breaking up with her without hardly a good reason. You can learn to love her. Look, boy, I bet that girl's illness isn't something that cannot be cured. Once cured, she will be happy. And about her age, it shouldn't matter at all if love is there. Nothing matters but love.

Now where is your hope and faith in God, Joe? Shame on you, you lack this. Look, go back to her and find out if you really have her. By then, if you are sure, go ahead—everybody likes to love and be loved for themselves too, including me.

Oh, you mentioned that you wished if you hadn't been so blind, you would have met me first before my boyfriend. Also, you said that you have dreamed of me, etc. By mentioning all that, are you hinting that you have fallen in love with me? Just remember something, if you have indeed fallen in love, you are probably in love with a picture and letters. You still have not seen me in person yet. You might not feel the same when you meet me. The real person is what counts. I hope you know what I mean.

Writing to each other is not the same as you and Lena because you know each other's personal touch. And about me, you know me

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only by curiosity. But really, I too wished in some way that everything might have been different. Now I only have hope. How could I ever forget such a wonderful friend like you? After being pen pals and sharing each other's faults, troubles, etc., someday, we might build something out of this new friendship. In the meantime, we will always be earnest friends. We must not betray others or get serious with each other too soon please. Really, it's great to trust someone whom you know would never deceive you, like the both of us.

Say, you seem to be the kind of person who looks to the future and not the past. That's nice because I too am that same way, for nothing can be done to change the past. Those should be forgiven, gone, and forgotten.

You know, I just remembered something on the day of the wedding. Before we went to Virginia's house, we stopped at a dance hall. Well, when Virginia and I were putting nickels in the jukebox, I saw my little cousin who's nine years old coming up to us during the time you were walking our way. And that's when Virginia said, "Here comes Joe to talk to us, and I am going to tell him to put some nickels in the jukebox." But you walked up to my cousin instead and asked for her name and age. And boy, was Virginia surprised. She wondered what got into you and why you didn't come up to us.

Oh yeah, I think I saw you talking to my little brother and cousin. My brother, Al, is fifteen, and my cousin, Moses, is nineteen. I'm not sure, though, but all in all, I thought it was a beautiful wedding. I had fun and was happy for my brother's marriage. I was also thrilled to have a sister-in-law. At least, who wouldn't be? Well, that would be me, mostly because I've always wanted a sister. Now I have Carmen as my "sis," my only sister for the moment.

So you see how delighted I must have been at that wedding? I was crazy happy and acted like a kid again. That's what happiness does to you sometimes. It is something you create for yourself. It's not like they say that you need to drink to make you happy or smoke or do drugs. Instead, alcohol and drugs can kill you and your happiness. Some don't see it that way.

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Well, I better be closing. I have said too much already. I will only bore you, yak-yak! Excuse my pen, but it got me bewitched. I can't seem to stop...stop. Hey, stop! Ah, at last, it does!

May God bless you and keep you and may this letter leave and find you in the very best of health.

Always a true friend,  
Carolyn Cortez

PS. Regards from all. Have fun, and don't work too hard. Keep yourself happy. Have faith and hope, and ask God to help. All you have to do is ask, and He will help.

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August 3, 1955, Wednesday

Dearest Carolyn,

I received a letter from you yesterday evening at about 9:00 p.m. as that was about the time I got back to camp. I was on the run driving a truck to the "B" Battalion as it took me all day. Today, they sent me on another run to the "A" Battalion. I thought of you and brought my stationery with me. I know I would be standing by in my truck sometime today—enough time to write you a letter that I didn't have time to write last night. I was so darn tired by the time I got your correspondence. I found it under my pillow this morning. That really made me very happy, you know.

So far, I have received three letters from you, and Lena hasn't written any at all. Either she is trying to forget me or she must be too sick to write. When she writes, she only writes a few words, and that is all. Don't you think I get disappointed in her in that? I hate to tell you this, but you are wrong. Love letters have a lot to do with someone falling in love. Can't you see? You can study someone's thoughts and feelings in writing. Anyway, you'll be surprised how much I've

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learned about you in your letters. And you know something? I think I know you better than Lena, even though I've met her in person and felt her. Sometimes, when you have someone and later change your mind, you don't need a reason. Romance comes from feelings and instincts.

I don't know what you meant when you said, "To me, it was music to my ears." I think you still don't believe a thing I say. I wouldn't care if it was just someone else, but I believe in you. At least you can try to have faith in me.

It all came back to me. I remember now. I saw you after the wedding at Virginia's house. You were with her the entire time. But God help me if I didn't think you were even younger than Virginia. I thought of you then as I would of Virginia. When I went to speak to your cousin Amadita, it was because I hadn't seen her in ten years. You see, once upon a time, she was my adopted sister for only three months when her real mother, my aunt Wadalupe, died. I don't really know what happened when they took Amadita away from us. I didn't recognize her at first until my older brother pointed her out to me. I had to walk up to her at that time just to ask her how old she was. I know it is rude to ask a girl how old she is, but I was curious about her. I think she is pretty and is going to be quite a lady.

Tell me, Carolyn, are you surprised to hear this from me? Or did you already know that Moses, your cousin, is also my cousin? Well, I gave you a lot more information about myself so you would know me better. And hear this, I never walk up to a girl to talk to her unless I knew her. For example, I didn't know you.

Yes, it was a lovely wedding. You said that somehow you wished things would have been different and how you only have hopes for the best, and that someday, we would build something out of our friendship. You know, those are my hopes too. I'm glad that you share part of my wishes.

Boy, I've been sitting in this truck trying to write you a decent letter for two hours, and now I am getting a little tired. It is almost dinnertime as I think I will continue this letter after chow. Then I will tell you what I had to eat. I can smell the food from out here as

K. L. ESTRADA

I am parked outside the mess hall. The "A" Battalion always has tasty meals. I need a break anyway. Or should I say I haven't done a thing but just sit and write? Well, see you later, and don't go away. I might think of something else to write while I eat. Bye!

Hi! Here I am again. I've got a full stomach now. The "A" Battalion's first sergeant just came out and told me I was here for TDY (temporary duty). I like that. I will stay here with my truck for a while, maybe a week or so, and work here. I am glad I brought my stationery with me now. Otherwise, this letter would have been delayed.

Well, let's get back to where I left off. Maybe you are right. I shouldn't fall in love so quickly. But I confess, I fell in love at first sight at your picture. I mostly like your pretty dimples and those bright eyes of yours. Please tell me what color are your eyes and the color of your hair? Can you tell I am crazy? I don't care, but I am not confused like you say you are. I know what I want...you!

Did you promise to wait for your boyfriend? If you did, I wouldn't have to bother to ask you to wait for me. It is up to you too. I wouldn't want to come in between anyone and break anybody's heart.

Well, I guess I'll have to quit for now as I've got to go back to my barracks at the Battalion Headquarters for my clothing and things.

Please think about everything carefully before you decide on anything. Think of yourself first. Another thing, if you don't believe a word I say, you can do me one thing: stop writing. That should prove something to me. God help me if I am wrong. I don't believe in it, especially to a girl I would want for my own. Well, so long for now. I wish you the best of luck always. I will be waiting for your answer soon.

Yours truly,  
Joe Cotillo

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## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

August 6, 1955, Saturday

Dear Joe,

Here I am answering your most welcome letter. As usual, I was more than glad to know you're doing fine. As for me, up to the present, I am fine too. The same goes for my parents. My whole family is doing fine. Ben, Alice, and his family are doing fine also.

Now let's go on with answering your letter. By the way, you forgot to tell me what you ate, ha-ha! Glad you didn't, though. It would have made me hungry again. Say, you really did better on a full stomach. You sure decide on things quickly, don't you? And you really have some imagination. Well, that's the spirit! You sure have me inspired.

Joe, you have helped me wake up to reality. Now I know I have been wasting my time with this guy I'm dating. I guess I was dreaming of something that was not going to come true.

No, I have not promised him that I would wait. I don't make promises I can't keep. I am a girl of my word, if you know what I mean. I am, in a way, like my dad. I don't like to make false statements if I don't mean to say them.

To be honest with you, I actually look forward to receiving your letters. I didn't think letters meant anything, but it's true you learn a lot about a person through correspondence. By the way, my letters aren't "love" ones. I still have not mentioned a word of love yet, you funny boy. I can't believe you have fallen in love with a picture, but I do trust in everything you say. I'll take your word for it. I guess you know what you want. Of course, all of us are after something we want, but sometimes, after having it, you don't want it anymore. I hope that doesn't happen to either one of us.

Really, I am glad I cheer you up with my letters. Yours do too. By "music to my ears," I meant that it made me happy to hear or read the things you mentioned. I couldn't help but take notice.

Gee, I didn't know Amadita and Moses were your cousins. I do know very little about you. Gee, we are almost related, huh? Really,

K. L. ESTRADA

it pays to ask questions sometimes, doesn't it? Or come around some subject where you'll get an answer? Yes, I believe Amadita will turn out to be quite a lady thanks to Molly—she brought her up well. My uncle came and took her back to New Mexico. They stayed with us for two weeks.

Tell me again, do you get discharged in December?

Thanks again for helping me with another decision. When you really have someone, you will wait, even if it's a hundred years. Also, the other person will stay true to the one who's waiting, right?

Well, I better be dropping the pencil for now. Before I do, you asked me about the color of my eyes and hair. They are both dark brown.

Oh, by the way, how about sending me a photo of you? Then we will be even, okay? And let me know your age, height, and weight. Well, I'll be closing now until the next letter. May God bless you, and may this letter find you in good health and not working too hard.

Yours very truly,  
Carolyn C.

PS. Have fun with your friends. Only be careful whom you hang around with or you'll get in trouble. Watch the "patting on the back." It's bound to get you deeper in trouble. Beware.

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August 7, 1955, Sunday

Dear Joe,

Here I am writing a few lines to let you know that the rest of my family and I are fine. Hoping you are doing fine too, for this is my desire. As for the weather, it is hot as usual.

Well, I'm actually writing you another letter as I have something important to tell you that can't wait. It's very personal. I don't know



## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

why, but I have come to trust you so much, and it makes me happy to write to you. Really, I didn't know how much a girl can begin to understand so many things just by letters. Gee, Joe, I don't know how to thank you. I appreciate all your messages and advice you have given me. You have made me see something I hadn't realized before.

Well, I just broke up with that guy. I wanted to do it before he left to Europe. Thanks to you, I realized I didn't love him. I guess it was what you call "puppy love" or false love. Gee, just to think I came so close to saying "yes" to marrying him and promising to wait. I'm glad I didn't.

I gave it a lot of thought and took it step by step. I thought about my future life with him, and I just couldn't see myself with him. Besides, I didn't even love him. It's funny, but you and I are on the same boat with our relationships. I was focusing on you and not looking at my own situation.

Gee, Joe, sorry to hear that Lena has disappointed you or hasn't written to you. Tell me, have you written to her? Maybe she is waiting for a letter from you. Don't get too disappointed. Give her a chance to hear her side. You can approach her about how you feel and ask her how she feels about you right now. That way, you're not really hurting her feelings. You just need to be truthful with her. Girls like honesty. It's better for her to know right now than later on. Also, if you put yourself in her shoes, you will know what to say so she doesn't get too emotional. This is the approach I did with this guy, and it worked.

I did not hurt his feelings. Instead, I made him see my point of view and told him that I still want the best for him as well as for me, and together, we were not complete. I told him he would have a better chance to meet someone from his hometown—someone he can relate to better. He really understood everything I was telling him. Yes, he said that he did love me, but he wasn't looking toward the future. So that's when I told him that there was more to a relationship than just hanging out with someone you're attracted to. There's a future to think about.

K. L. ESTRADA

Well, I better be closing now. Gee, I don't want you to think too much about all of this. I don't want it to interfere with your job. I know it's hard on a working boy like yourself. So just concentrate on work. And pray. Prayers do wonders. Things are possible with God's help. Well, until the next letter, may God bless you and keep you safe.

Sincerely yours,  
Carol C.

PS. Sleep tight. Early to bed, early to rise makes a man healthy and wise.

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August 11, 1955, Thursday

Dearest Carolyn,

I received your letter this evening, which I nervously waited at the mail call, for I was hoping it was a letter from you. I sat down and tried to figure out when I should expect letters from you. I have finally figured it out. Since I didn't get correspondence from you yesterday, I was sure today was the day—and I was right!

Here I am again, sitting in the truck. I am still at the "A" Battalion near a little town called Berlin, NJ. I've been here a week with my truck as temporary duty from the HQ Battalion 738<sup>th</sup>. I have a connection with the mail clerk to get my mail for me. As I said before, they have good chow. I had my supper an hour ago. Right now, I am off duty, sitting in the truck, writing you a letter, and watching the rain pour down like crazy.

You say you've been wasting your time with your boyfriend? So what happened? Did you break up with him?

I am glad you realized how important a letter can be at times. I also like your message about making promises. I know your letters

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

aren't "love" ones, but they are encouraging. And I like the way you say the word *yet*.

Thank you for believing in me. You asked me what I will do when I have you. Well, I will keep you if you will have me.

I don't think a lot about Lena. Why should I? She hasn't written to me for a very long time. I am not saying that just to hand you a line but because it is the truth. I don't expect you to be jealous—I know you are not that type. I am your same type.

By the way, I got a letter from Bennie and Alice the other day. They said good things about you. Especially Alice. She told me you are a nice girl and come from a good family. She said a lot of good things about you. I believe everything she says, for she never tells a lie. She also said that I would like you even more when I see you in person.

Alice is a wonderful person, and my brother is a very fortunate guy. I hope I will be as lucky. They're always trying to find themselves a sister-in-law so they could be godparents.

Well, it's getting dark sitting out here, and I am getting a little hungry. So I'll go down to the corner and get me something to eat in my truck.

About a picture of me, I've promised my best girl ten months ago to send her a picture of myself, and I have never gotten the chance to get my photo taken. I don't think you know my best girl. She is my mother, Nina. I'll try this weekend to have one made.

Oh, you asked me about my age, height, and weight. Well, I am twenty-three years old. I'm 5'7" and weigh 142 pounds. I have blue eyes and blonde hair, and I am a Catholic. My hobbies are photography and carpentry, and I'm very shy with girls.

Well, until the next letter. So long, and I hope to hear from you soon.

Truly,  
Joe B. Cotillo

K. L. ESTRADA

PS. I will keep all your letters or save them so you and I will reread them someday. That is if God will answer my prayers for you and me to be together. I hope you are saving them too and keeping them in a safe place where no one else can read them.

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August 12, 1955, Friday

Dear Carolyn,

I was surprised to hear from you again today and very happy. I just got a letter from you yesterday, answered it, and mailed it out this morning. And now this evening, I got another one from you. Gee, you must care a little bit about me after all. I like that very much.

I think it was a wise decision, especially if you didn't love him. It is the same with me. I didn't love Lena. I guess you are right that we may be on the same boat. Although I wish we were together on a real boat now.

Please don't ever feel sorry that Lena and I were not meant for each other. It is you I am concerned about now. I am not promising but telling you I won't make any other moves with another girl until I know I can't have you.

Since you and I are getting off this same boat, I think we should get together. Don't you think? Or would you like to wait for me and no one else? What I mean is I don't think it would hurt much for you to wait another four more months to meet me. That would be in January of next year because I want to spend Christmas and New Years with my mother.

One thing I forgot to answer from your letter I received yesterday is when I get discharged. I get released on the seventh of December 1955. I should be home around December tenth.

Boy, it feels wonderful to finally be getting out of the army. I've been in the service for twenty months already.

I may be in love with you, and maybe you are falling for me too. But I want the opportunity to tell you in person someday. It is funny,

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

isn't it? But I dream about it all the time now. You were right from the very start that I shouldn't talk about love in a letter until we meet. But I can't help it. Maybe it is because I have never met the right girl until now. You seem to fit the type that I've been searching for. Of course, there may be a few exceptions that I don't know about yet. For now, I just know that I don't want you to slip out of my fingers. Or a better word, my life.

I don't mind listening to your troubles—everybody has them. I tell you my problems too. That is what two people who care about each other should do, right?

Let me tell you something, Carolyn, I may want you more than anything else in this world, but I will never get in your way, so do as you please. It is up to you if you want to wait to meet me first or meet someone else. I will close for now and hope to hear from you very soon.

Very truly yours always,  
Joe

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August 15, 1955, Monday

Dear Joe,

Hi there! Once again, I picked up my pencil to answer your joyful letter, which is a pleasure to receive.

Say, you, too, keep a count of the days to expect a letter in the mail. We have that in common, don't we? I noticed that we seem to think alike. I also thought about saving our letters. I had always wondered what it would be like to keep them and read them later together. Funny, huh? And oh yeah, about being shy too—we seem to have a lot of similarities.

So while you are in your truck writing to me, I am here tossed about on my bed, writing.

The other day, while I was ironing, I noticed the mailman. Boy! I forgot what I was doing before I saw a letter from you. I almost burned the ironing board. I forgot to stand up the iron, something I don't usually do. Mom came in and said, "Watch the iron, girl!" She scared me to death! "Too involved in your letter. Did you get the mail?" she asked.

I said, "Yes, from Joe."

She said, "Oh, him! He must be interesting."

I said, "You bet. You'll be surprised."

Speaking of Mom, she's the most wonderful mom I've ever known. So understanding, just tops. Dad, he's nice in a way but strict and serious, you know? Don't go too much for jokes. Mom is strict also, but not as much as Dad. Another thing about Dad is he's a very jealous type. Mom isn't. Although Dad is the talkative kind and Mom is the quiet type. And you know what? Dad, he doesn't trust others easily. But you, he seems to like. The first time I received a letter from you, I thought he would criticize and lecture me as he usually does. But he did not, to my surprise.

I always tell my dad the truth about everything. Anyway, I told him about your letter, and he said, "That's nice. You see, he is a nice boy and comes from a good family." I knew he was hinting that he didn't like the guy I was going around with. He didn't trust him. I am sure glad I broke up with him. I'd much rather go around with someone whom my parents agree on. That way, I am not at odds with my parents. I like to stay united.

There's nothing like a family that stays together, don't you think so? I believe you do, just the way you talk about your mom as being your best friend. You're right, there's nothing like good parents, the kind that look after you, even when we turn against them. But they do care. They are what you call real friends in need when you have a problem. And it doesn't matter what difficulties we face. They are always there to help, for they know us best. They are wiser than us.

One thing, though. Once we get married, we are pretty much on our own as we are considered independent at that point. We have said our vows and have made the decision as a married couple to solve our own problems and face challenges apart from our parents. We should no longer depend on them for anything.

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

Your mom sounds like a wonderful person. I hope to meet her someday. Gee, sorry to hear about your dad. You were so young when he passed. Ben was telling us about it the other day.

Yes, I agree with you that Ben and Alice are so wonderful and sweet. And their little darling, Helen, is a doll. We went over to visit them Sunday, but they weren't there. So my parents and I went next door to our godparents. That's what we call them, Virginia's parents.

Virginia and I chatted a long time, mostly about you. I bet your ears were burning like crazy, huh? Poor you. We talked about our letters and how much I didn't know about you. Say, do you really think Virginia gave you luck? Well, I think she brought me success too—you! We owe her our thanks.

That guy I was dating from Michigan is gone forever as he flew to Europe and is already forgotten.

There you go again, making me hungry once more—wait, save me a bite, ha-ha! Oh well, that way, I won't get too fat, huh? But I am advising you to not overeat or you won't be able to get through that truck's door, ha-ha! I could see you struggling to get into your truck.

I love to watch the rain too. It makes me want to be a kid again. As kids, we used to love to play in the rain and look for toads. We sure had fun then.

Gee, you didn't have to give me a full description of yourself, but you sure sound like a hunk of a man. I really like your hobbies too. Speaking of which, I enjoy sewing, reading, cooking, and of course, writing (especially to you). The last one is my favorite hobby.

Well, I better be cutting off. May this letter find you in the very best of health. May God be with you always.

Sincerely yours,  
Carolyn C.

PS. I'm sorry for writing such a long letter. It seems like I'm writing you a book instead, ha-ha!

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K. L. ESTRADA

August 16, 1955, Tuesday

Dear Joe,

Hi, I am answering your second letter that I just received today. When I was mailing out a letter to you, the mailman handed me another one. I actually had a feeling I was getting another one from you as I wrote you two letters in a row. Now I am busying myself to answering it.

Guess what I was doing? A nickel you don't guess. I was making a baby garment for my sister-in-law, Carmen. Yes, she is pregnant! It won't be long before I am an aunt. How wonderful!

You silly boy, imagining being on a real boat together. So what kind of boat did you imagine? A submarine? Ha-ha!

I am glad to hear that you are concerned about me. That makes it easy for me to say I'm willing to wait to meet you. That's good to not make promises you are not sure about keeping. I appreciate you telling me, though. I would be more than glad if we were to get together some time. And it sounds like it won't be long. I'm so happy you are being discharged from the army soon. I can only hope and pray for the best.

It seems to me that our friendship is developing into something more unique, right, Joe? But let's not get too serious yet. Maybe we should wait until we get to know more about each other. I know you must be thinking quite a lot of me, and I believe you mean what you say. But speaking for myself, I would never say anything unless I mean it. And I think it would be the same for some people, but not all, for no one is created equal.

I hope this will not offend you in what I'm going to express to you, so please don't think I am doubting or misjudging you. I know that soldiers who are so far away from their hometown get the blues and ache for letters from loved ones, like mothers and girlfriends. But once they are let down by these people, they tend to cling to someone else who will listen to them and cure them of loneliness. Later, when they are back home, they could change their minds and go crazy



## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

when they see the girls in their hometown. They are no longer interested in their writing pals, for they have compared something alive and more real than just letters. They become confused and get themselves into trouble, like getting drunk. But it takes a good-minded person to think the right way.

Well, I think you know, more or less, how someone would act after being discharged from the service as you have already mentioned something similar to this. That's why I genuinely believe you are different than those confused men. The thing I'm still concerned about is Lena.

I know Lena has disappointed you. It was a little hard on you as she let you down by not writing. But I think you shouldn't judge her. Sometimes there are good reasons to look at. Maybe she doesn't know how a guy can feel out there. Or perhaps she's too sick to write or have other issues at home. It's always good to know how one truly feels and thinks of others than just themselves. So give her a chance and some understanding. If you cannot give her love, then maybe just friendship. I would have liked the same, to stay as friends.

There's nothing to lose, even if someday you might change your mind about me or fall in love with someone else. I would be glad to know that you told me the truth instead of keeping it from me. Everyone deserves a chance and to be forgiven. I know God does, so why shouldn't we? God forgives our sins. He even suffered on the cross for us. We don't have to suffer because Christ already did it for us.

I am sure glad that you think of your mom first. For they come first before any lover. That's the spirit, Joe. There's nothing like our moms. I really hope you have the most beautiful and joyous holiday with your mother.

You won't believe this, but I have been hearing your name mentioned everywhere I go. Yesterday, I came across G. I. Joe in a comic book. Funny, huh? It certainly made me smile. I hear your name mentioned on the radio and in songs. There's a song—I don't recall the name—but it's about a girl being in love with a man named Joe,

K. L. ESTRADA

only she calls him Joey. The chorus goes like this: "I remember only Joey. Joey gave his heart to me." You are famous, Joe. Ha-ha!

Well, I better close now for I have to help Mom in the kitchen. As always, it's my wish that this letter finds you in good health and very happy.

Earnestly yours,  
Carolyn C.

PS. I found some fingerprints on the outside of the envelope, ha-ha! I'm not sure if it's ink or grease.

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August 22, 1955, Monday

Dearest Carolyn,

I just got a letter from you this evening. I am glad to hear you are fine. I am okay, except for a bad cold. I was going to go on sick call today, but I had much more important things to do. It's silly, isn't it? I had to work on my truck as it was in bad condition. I sure am tired today. You see, I just got back from being TDY (temporary duty) at the "A" Battalion. Now I am back at the headquarters again as it is good to be back. It is like coming back home. I would sure be glad to be returning to my real home, though, but it won't be very long now.

That was quite a lecture you gave me. I am going to tell you once and for all. I am a one-woman man. I don't like to flirt when I have someone. If you don't believe me, ask Alice. And I won't be like you think that I will forget you when I get out. I am anxious to meet you and keep you if you'll have me. And I don't know why you keep encouraging me to give Lena a chance. She is the one who didn't give me a chance. I gave her all the possibilities in the world. She didn't take them, so I'll forget her.

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

I had a silly dream that you and I were alone in your house or somewhere the other night. Anyway, I dreamed you cooked something delicious for me. I think I was enjoying your cooking. Oh, by the way, how good of a cook are you? Nothing personal, but after that dream, I kept wondering. I sometimes picture you in a kitchen with an apron on. I'd like to see you like that—no kidding. After we learn more about each other and finally meet, I hope that someday, you will cook something I've wanted since I've been in New Jersey. I like hot chili beans and tortillas. I especially love homemade chili. Boy, oh, boy! I'm getting hungry now. I don't like army chow as it is nothing like home.

Yes, I think about you a lot. You don't know how much you mean to me. As I mentioned at the beginning, I am always walking on clouds. It isn't that I am trying to flatter you, but it is how I feel about you. Yes, I've felt like this before toward other girls I've had in my life, but they've all failed me.

I am glad to hear what I've always wanted you to say that you promise to wait to meet me. I will prove to you I am telling you the truth then.

About that song you mentioned, "I remember only Joey. Joey gave his heart to me," well, I will take that as a hint.

I got a letter from Bennie and Alice the other day. They told me that you and your family had been at their house but that they were not there. They said that Virginia had told them that. She also told Alice that you just couldn't wait until December to meet me. I really hope that she wasn't kidding. As for me, I am flattered as that comment made me very happy. They told me a lot of other beautiful things about you too.

About the photo of me you had asked for, well, I went to Philadelphia a week ago and had my picture taken. Now I can promise you a picture of me. Anyway, they were supposed to send me the proofs two days later, but they haven't arrived yet. I am going to see what is wrong. I'll send you one as soon as I get them.

K. L. ESTRADA

So you are making fun of me about leaving fingerprints with grease? Of course, you know how it is after fooling around so much with these greasy trucks. I am bound to get oil on my hands.

Well, I'll close for now, and I will get an answer from you very soon.

As always,  
Joey

PS. Don't read too many G. I. Joe comic books!

PPS. Just curious, why don't you ever put your return address on the envelopes?

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August 25, 1955, Thursday

Dear Joe,

Hello there. Once again, I am answering your most welcome letter, which I was more than glad to receive. Sorry to hear about your lousy cold. I sure hope and pray to God that you will recover quickly. Poor you, working hard and all. Gee, it must be more difficult to work with a bad cold and then have to write to me. I just don't know how you manage it, Joe. Whenever you are too tired, you should rest, and don't feel like you have to answer my letters. I will understand. I know you are trying your best, and that is enough for me.

By the way, I really love the stationery you use. I especially love the embossed flowers—they're so delicate and pretty.

I believe you when you say that you are a one-woman man and not the flirting type. I trust that you are telling me the truth more than anybody else I know. And I don't trust just anyone. Like my dad, I don't like to believe everything people tell me. Of course, I wouldn't say I don't believe what Alice says about you or me, but I would rather learn things from the real person.

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

I am also just as anxious as you are to meet.

Say, you feel the same way as I do of giving people chances. That's what I did for that guy I dated from Michigan, even though he didn't really deserve it. This guy was in an unfortunate accident, which caused a memory lapse. When he recovered, he still had memory problems, which he used as an excuse to drink. I actually pitied him and tried to understand his situation. I gave him many chances as I thought he would change, but he never did. At the time, I didn't really love him. I just felt sorry for him and maybe thought I would learn to love him after he quit drinking. I was crazy, huh?

I am just a caring person, and I was just going through a lot of emotions then. So when I met you, and you asked me about him, that's when I came to my senses. Well, you know the rest of how I broke up without hurting his feelings. And since he wasn't from my hometown, it was easier for me to break it off. Now I thank God that it happened. I set him free and myself at the same time. I figured God has better plans for me. He used you to lead me into a better path.

God gives us so many chances too, even though we do not deserve it sometimes. We just need to make the right choices—the good or evil path. Of course, we take the easier path, which is usually the wrong one. The harder road is often the right path to God.

Well, so far, for that. Let's change the subject. Something more personal, huh? Let's see. Oh, you asked me about my cooking. First, let me ask you what if I was not a good cook? What would happen then? Will you change your mind about me? Well, to be honest, I am not an expert, but I do love to cook. I like it so much that I'm willing to learn to be a better cook. Mom is an excellent cook, and she has taught me everything I know about cooking and baking. Maybe you'll find out for yourself someday. I don't like to brag about myself. And as far as making chili beans and tortillas, I cook that all the time from scratch. Your mom must be a pretty good cook too, right?

I won't deny it, but I have thought quite a lot about you lately. Although I can't say I'm walking on clouds—I would be afraid of falling through as they are too soft to hold a ninety-six-pound girl, ha-ha!

K. L. ESTRADA

Well, I don't mind if you take that song as a hint, which it wasn't. When I first heard the song, I thought of you instantly. I like to sing along with the radio, even though I don't sound terrific. I probably sing like an old crow, but I always like to imagine myself as the singer of any particular song.

It's nice to know that Alice and Ben are saying beautiful things about me, but I hope they don't overdo it. I just don't want them to give you false hope or create an expectation.

How nice of you to send me a picture of you. I am very grateful. But don't you forget your best girl—your mom. If it's just one picture, I would prefer that you send it to her. I can wait for the next snapshot of you.

I am not making fun of your fingerprints. I like it as it reminds me that you're a real working man who always has grease under his fingernails. It's not annoying to me. I am used to it with my brothers and Dad. Well, I am a little particular, but I am no high-class kind of girl. I am just a simple and tidy type of lady.

Well, I will close. I really hope you are better from your cold, and may God be your companion.

Always remember,  
Carol C.

PS. I don't put my return address on the envelope for two reasons. I figured you already have my address, and I would be afraid that someone you share the barracks with might get ahold of it. I realized that this may be difficult for you as you probably have to keep looking up my address every time you write to me. So going forward, I'll go ahead and start adding it. Just be sure to watch out for those wise guys who are the grabbers.

PPS. I was just kidding about walking on clouds. I know feelings are not a laughing matter, and it was an emotional expression. Well, my expression is "I feel like I have been to the moon."

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## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

August 25, 1955, Thursday

Dearest Carolyn,

Here I am, answering the letter I just received from you, but I am writing it in a very unusual way—in bed. I am not sick but just lazy and very sleepy from last night. I have something exciting to share with you that happened to me yesterday.

Yesterday, August 24, I was sent to the “B” Battalion around 6:00 a.m. I ended up spending the entire day driving my truck, moving equipment back and forth. When evening came, I hadn’t finished yet, and the work had to be done that day. I drove until midnight by the time I returned to the headquarters. From that point, I had to tow a trailer carrying a missile, so I had to drive very slowly. By the time I got to my destination, it was 2:30 a.m. this morning. As I got ready for bed, guess what I found under my pillow? A letter from you. Gee, I was so excited about your letter that I forgot about going to sleep. I loved every word you said as I smelled your perfume. I now know how much you care about me. This time, you talked very freely as if we are no longer strangers to each other. To me, we are not—not anymore. This was the most exciting letter I have received from you thus far.

I know we have a lot of things in common. I’ve known that since your first letter and the first glance of your picture.

Oh, I hope you will pay more attention to your ironing. That could have been one of my white shirts you were ironing, ha-ha!

Yes, Virginia is an angel. She brought us both good luck. You and I owe her our gratitude. I will give her a big hug when I see her again, if it is all right with you.

About the little chat with Virginia about me, I hope it was all good, ha-ha!

I don’t know what you meant by a “hunk of a man,” but I am just plain Joe.

After I finished reading your letter, around 3:00 a.m., I tucked your letter under my pillow and fell asleep. When I woke up at 6:00

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a.m., I smiled at the smell of your perfume coming from your letter, which made me want to read it again.

I stayed in bed and took the day off. I didn't even eat a regular breakfast because I had grabbed a cheeseburger and a cup of coffee on my way back to camp. Now my back is hurting from being in bed all morning. I guess I'll just go back to work this afternoon.

Carolyn, it is certainly wonderful to have someone like you to write to. I enjoy every minute of it. Of course, I would rather be with you in person instead of just writing. I hope we'll get to do things together for the rest of our lives. Another thing too is that it's been nice to receive letters from you twice a week. That way, I don't have to wait too long to hear from you.

I guess everyone likes their parents. I bet your mother is as wonderful as mine is. I can't wait for you to meet her someday.

So I make you hungry sometimes, huh? Well, I am not too fond of what they feed us. I sure would like to dig into what you eat every day. And don't worry, I will never get fat as I don't overeat.

I love the way you talked about getting to know each other well. I hope it stays that way.

Well, I guess I'll try to get some more sleep till noon. It is almost 10:00 a.m. So until I hear from you, take care. I will always be thinking of you.

Very truly yours,  
Joe

PS. If you have a camera, take a few snapshots of yourself and send them to me. I will take good care of them. I have a few pictures of myself not developed yet to send to you too.

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## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

August 27, 1955, Saturday

Dear Joe,

Hello, plain Joe, as you say. But to me, you are just plain handsome, if you don't mind me saying. Well, once again, I have the pleasure of answering your most welcome letter.

A little excitement? Well, I would say you worked hard, boy! You deserved to take the day off and be lazy. Besides, you needed that much-needed rest from driving all night. Poor Joe.

Joe, what are you doing to me? I am getting too absent-minded these days. You must have bewitched me, ha-ha! I don't even know what I am doing at times. I'm having to rewrite this letter repeatedly as I'm forgetting words, even misspelling.

Now my family is teasing me. Mainly Al, the big joker. He came into my room, saying, "Carolyn, you're in love."

I got so embarrassed. I usually have something to answer back to my naughty brother, but this time, I was speechless. "Maybe I am in love," I thought to myself.

Oh, Joe, would you have gotten upset if I had burned your shirt with the iron? I wouldn't blame you if you did. Speaking of which, one time, I burned my brother's shirt, and boy, did I get scolded! Since then, I try very hard not to burn anything.

I can just see you smile as you woke up, smelling my perfumed letter. I really love your smile in my imagination.

By the way, do you have dimples, Joe? Silly question, huh? Well, people say I do when I smile.

You know, Joe, I always write to all my relatives and girlfriends, but they rarely ever care to answer them. But you have responded to every one of my letters. You don't know how much I have appreciated them. And knowing how busy you are, you still have time to answer my letters. It really touches my heart. I didn't know anyone could be as nice as you have been to me.

You know, Virginia (our "Angel") has gone to New Mexico for a vacation. You bet we owe her our thanks. Go right ahead and give her a big hug when you see her. I don't mind it a bit.

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Yeah, Virginia and I talked horrible things about you, Joe, ha-ha! How were your ears? I bet they're on fire, ha-ha!

So you like to dig into the food we eat every day, huh? As you know, us Spaniards, we all want to eat chili beans and tortillas as our everyday food.

Say, Joe, do you develop pictures yourself? We have a camera, and when I get the chance, I'll take pictures and send them to you. Well, I guess I better be cutting off here to get something to eat.

Well, I am back from the kitchen, and it is 6:00 p.m. right now, and it's still early enough. I just ate some grapes. I love fruit. Mom says she's never seen any girl eat as much fruit as I do.

Well, I have not much more to say as I have a date tonight. Now, don't get upset, it's with my mom, dad, and brother. We are finally going to the drive-in, which I hadn't been to in about three weeks. I don't really care much about going out for entertainment here, especially dances. I don't like dancing that much. I do go once in a long time, but I have not been since the prom last May. Shows are the only things I enjoy. Although I don't often go because my eyes hurt too much and I get headaches often.

Well, Mom and Dad just got back from town, so I think I'll close for now. I guess Mom is making supper, so that means I need to help her. Then, after supper, I will put up my hair in pin curls for church tomorrow. I'll go with my hair set in pin curls to the drive-in. Like they say, come as you are, so that is how I'll go, ha-ha! If you were to see me now, you would faint. I did not feel like dressing up, so I put on a pair of pedal pushers and a skirt. And my hair is in a ponytail since I did some housecleaning today. After that, I made a shirt for Al as he insisted that I sew one for him. He is such a bug sometimes.

Oh boy! I just heard Mom drop a plate, so I will go now.

May this letter find you in the very best of health. And may God bless and keep you.

With love,  
Carol C.

WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

PS. Good night and pleasant dreams. Sleep tight, handsome, and don't overwork.

PPS. Excuse my mistakes. My pen isn't so good—couldn't write well today.

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September 2, 1955, Friday

Dear Carolyn,

Yesterday, I received a letter from Bennie and Alice, but I was very disappointed that I didn't get one from you. I expected to get one two days ago. Last night, just before bedtime, I opened my footlocker and came across your letter. At first, I thought it was an old letter of yours. Then I noticed it was still sealed. Boy, I was surprised and couldn't believe my eyes. I guess the mail clerk could not reach me yesterday, so he slipped your letter through the crack of my footlocker. It was around midnight when I finished reading it.

The next day, when I was straightening things out in my locker, I found another unopened letter from you! I couldn't believe it. It really cheered me up as I was a little sad and felt miserable for not answering your letter last night. Finally, I am now writing this letter to you.

I just finished chow in the mess hall, but they were serving fish. Yuk! I don't like the way they make it here.

Just last Wednesday, I saw the proofs of the portraits taken of myself. The photos will be ready in a week or so as I already selected one that was fair. I am also going to send you a few snapshots I had taken last Sunday from the Delaware River Bridge. I hope you like them and will not faint from seeing them.

Well, let's start with your first letter. If you told me that you didn't cook, I would teach you how. You see, I never give up easily. In

fact, I don't think you are the type that wouldn't know how to cook. Just remember that a guy never seeks a girl who will cook or slave after him. He mostly wants companionship and someone who will work together as a team. Do you know what I mean? Of course, I was only kidding with you about cooking.

I look forward to trying your tortillas someday. Better yet, I would like to watch you make them.

You've got a good point about someone getting ahold of one of your letters and having your address. I don't think I would like that. Actually, that really happened to me over a year ago. I realize now that that was a silly question. I was told once that when a girl does not put her address on the envelope, it was a hint not to write back to her. Another myth is that if you would see the stamp on the envelope cracked a little meant that she was in love with someone else. Of course, I don't believe in any of it.

Oh, Carolyn, I am not trying to tell you that you have to write your return address on the envelopes. It's just that I am a very curious guy about a lot of things. Anyway, I have your address memorized by heart since the very first letter you wrote to me. Don't write your address on the envelope if you don't want to. As long as I continue to get your cheerful letters, nothing else matters.

I think you are the one who has me bewitched. I am also absent-minded sometimes. I can't even write anymore.

I am glad you appreciate me responding to all your letters. You don't know how sad I would be if you stopped writing to me.

No, I don't think I have any dimples. But if you want me to have them, I can drill them on my face, ha-ha!

You know, this was the most beautiful and exciting letter I have ever received from you. And the way you closed your letter: "With love, Carol C." Or is it just you meant to put something else? Maybe you are getting absent-minded that I had you bewitched. Just kidding again.

Say, I've been meaning to ask you (curious again), are you left-handed? I hope you don't mind me asking. I've got a hunch you are.

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Well, I'll close for now. I couldn't finish your letter at noon, so I am finishing it tonight. You can keep these pictures I am sending you, but please save them, and we'll put them together in our album. So this letter leaves me writing for an answer from you very soon—I hope.

Always thinking of you,  
Joey

PS. I dream of you day and night.

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September 6, 1955, Tuesday

Dear Joe,

Today I received your most welcome letter, which was later than expected. But then, I just realized that yesterday was Labor Day as the mail carriers don't work that day. Today I was sure I would get mail from you, and when I came from school, I only received something with a notice. At first, I didn't look at it, and I asked my mom, "Is that all there was for me?"

Mom said, "Yes."

I was so disappointed until I read the notice. It stated that a letter was held up in the post office for me. And wide-eyed, I looked again and wondered who could have written to me unless it was from Joe. And sure enough! So I sent my brother to go get it, and there it was, a beautiful letter, which I anxiously read, and to my more surprise, I got pictures from you too. I was overjoyed.

Your pictures came out as handsome as expected. I don't understand why you call yourself plain Joe. Anyway, I showed them to Dad and the rest of the family. Dad says you look fatter than you used to be. He said, "They sure must be feeding him well." Then I proceeded

to say that this was the first time I've seen your picture. My brothers and dad said, "What?"

"Yep," I said, "I didn't know what he looked like before."

They then asked, "Well, didn't you get a good look at him at the wedding?"

I told them that I just had a glance at you and didn't remember anything else. They thought I was crazy. You know, I don't usually judge people for their looks. Besides, that day, I was too involved with the wedding.

Well, anyhow, I think you're nice-looking. And guess what? Don't get mad, but I really liked the picture of you in working clothes sitting on the bumper of your truck. When I first saw it, I immediately said, "That is the truck he writes his letters from."

And my family just laughed and said, "It seems you know more about his truck than how Joe looks."

It's true, I know more about your character than what you look like. Now I don't have to pretend and try to picture you in a dream. I can actually dream of the real you. Say, Joe, you don't have to wear your army uniform, do you? I say that because you were wearing just working civilian clothes.

Joe, how dare you beat yourself up just because you were too tired to write to me. You need to take it easy, Joe. Stop killing yourself. I don't want you to ever feel pressured to write in any circumstances. I completely understand.

You are right, Joe, a man and woman should work together as a team, cooperation, fifty-fifty, and an equal basis. Because if it wasn't that way, everything would go haywire where there would be fights that lead to divorces.

I believe you aren't the only curious one, Joe. Everybody has curiosity in this world. For if it wasn't for that, there wouldn't be any inventors. We both have crazy minds.

Boy! You made me laugh when you said you could drill holes on your face to create dimples. Of course, I wouldn't think of allowing you to do that for me, silly! Speaking of which, Mom used to brag to

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everyone I had dimples. That would probably be the first thing she would tell you in describing me.

Well, Mister Curiosity, I am not left-handed. Now I am curious about what made you think that. Is that because my handwriting slants to the left side? Joe, what will you be asking me next? Ha-ha! Well, I don't mind it at all. Go ahead and ask away. I will try to answer all your questions, unless, of course, it's too silly or something I couldn't stand to explain otherwise.

I was looking at your picture again, and you do seem to have dimples near your cheeks. Or it possibly could be a bone sticking out. By the way, Joe, I forgot to ask you about the place you were at in those pictures. Must be a beautiful place, huh? It's interesting to learn about bridges and highways between states. I would like to know more about the other places you have been.

You know, Joe, my parents have encouraged me to attend high school, even though I hate it. I wish I had a job instead. It's so boring otherwise. I'd rather work or stay home doing chores than go to school, although they say you're never too old for education, even if I get married someday as Dad says. I like nursing, but they say that I'm better off with an easy job, like a secretary. They are wrong. I would prefer to be a nurse instead.

Anyhow, I want to please my parents. Sometimes, I get so disappointed, bored, nervous, and even cranky, telling myself I am too old for school. I don't think I really need it. But I can't get a job anyway because I lack experience. That's the first thing they ask for, so I don't stand a chance. I guess I'll stick it out one more year since this is my final grade. Then, God willing, I'll get a diploma. With that, I can apply for a nurse assistant. Also, the teachers do push us a little to succeed.

Oh, I almost forgot to mention that Alice and Ben came over last week. We sure had a good time with them. I enjoy talking to them. Your brother, Ben, shares the most exciting stories. I don't know where or how he gets his stories. It seems like he's been everywhere. I think I've known Ben and Alice for about five years now. It's funny how I never knew about you, huh? I had always seen and heard

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about them. Dad calls Ben “busy ant” since he is still doing something or keeping himself busy with that truck of his. It’s no wonder I’ve seen him moving trailers around from one place to another. He moved Uncle Fin Torrez’s trailer and so many others I know.

Today was the first day of the school season, and boy, was I bored! Then it was too hot. I ended up getting a bloody nose from a heatstroke.

Well, Joe, I’m getting sleepy. So I got to get my beauty sleep for school tomorrow—bah!

I better cut here. May this letter find you in the best of health, and God bless you.

With love,  
Carolyn C.

PS. You know, Joe, because of you, I think I am going to have the most beautiful sleep tonight.

PPS. I was used to writing “With love” at the end of all my letters. I did that out of habit. But I realized how that sounded to my friends and relatives as if I was in love with everyone. Later on, I was taught to write “Sincerely yours” instead as that was universal. But now I put a lot of thought at the end of my letters.

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September 7, 1955, Wednesday

Dearest Carolyn,

I just had to write to you again today as I wanted to tell you what happened last night. I am okay, but I don’t want you to worry. You see, I don’t like to tell my mother everything that happens to me because I don’t want to get her worried, so I hope you are not like my mom.



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As you may remember, I mentioned that I was on TDY (temporary duty) at the "A" Battalion 738<sup>th</sup>. On the eighteenth of August, a civilian car struck me on the rear of my two-and-a-half-ton truck. After the police investigated the accident, he gave us each a ticket to report to the courthouse, which was scheduled on the sixth of September at 8:00 p.m. As I was in court, facing the judge, he asked me to show him my driver's license. As I reached for it, I saw your picture and whispered, "Please, Carolyn, bring me good luck." You did because I was found not at fault, and I was excused without charges. The other guy had to pay a \$10 fine. Plus, he was responsible for the damages to his car, which was pretty bad. Luckily, no one got hurt. My truck was hardly damaged, which I was able to fix myself.

Well, let's change the subject a little. Tell me how you are getting along. Are you still waiting to meet me? I hope so. Say, are you going to start twelfth grade soon this September? Or did you go to summer school? As far as I know, school starts in September everywhere. If you are, I would like to be there for your graduation. That is if you don't quit school like you said you would.

Well, as of today, I have ninety days left in the army. Boy, do the days drag here. Sometimes, it seems like the days will never end.

I had a dream the other night that you, Bennie and Alice, Helen, and I were somewhere in the mountains having a marshmallow roast. We were all having such a good time. That is something we did a lot before I signed up for the army. We would warm up by the campfire.

I'll close for now as I've run out of stationery. Otherwise, I could write to you forever.

Very sincerely yours,  
Joe

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K. L. ESTRADA

September 10, 1955, Saturday

Dear Joe,

Today I received your most welcome letter. Also, I received a beautiful card from you, which I am so appreciative of.

Oops, someone is ringing the bell, so wait while I go and see who it is.

I am back. Sorry about that. It was a salesman selling fruit.

Well, Joe, let me see what I shall tell you. Yes, first of all, I am glad your feelings weren't hurt, which I wouldn't want to happen to you. Also, I am so happy you were found not at fault. Funny, that day—the sixth—was the first day of school. I had a weird feeling about you that very day, like something bad was going to happen to you.

Joe, I wouldn't say that my picture brought you luck. Instead, you just believed it did, but all this time, it was God, for He was the one watching over you as I pray for your safety every night. So, Joe, don't use my picture as a good luck charm. Use your faith in God instead.

By the way, you're the first one that has ever told me that I bring good luck. I've always been told the opposite. For example, every time I go anywhere with my brothers, something always happens. Like it rains, we get stuck, run out of gas, or almost get into a wreck. I don't really believe them, but I just go along with them. Of course, they say it's mind over matter. If you think of good things, it happens, and when you think bad—well, you know, the opposite.

Well, let's go on with something else. I don't mind you telling me everything good or bad. At least I am someone who will understand and can be trusted. Of course, mothers can be dependable too, but they worry, and all they can do is pray. I am a worrier also. One thing I do when I start to worry is to hand it over to the Lord. That is, to pray to God. It is written in the Bible that when you ask God in earnest prayer, He will provide.

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Everyone has their own beliefs, but mine is about small things. To me, it seems the little things have more value and meaning than the bigger things. I leave the more important things to God. Every time I say this, it reminds me of the story of the little angel who gave baby Jesus an old box full of little junk, such as marbles and rocks, but to God, that was more valuable than other treasures, such as jewels.

Well, Joe, I think I better close now because I have some homework that's due on Monday. After that, I have to wash the floors and wax them. I wish I had more time to write more. Well, until the next letter, may God keep you safe and in good health.

As always,  
Carolyn C.

PS. Do be careful, Joe, for the love of God, and don't worry me, okay?

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September 11, 1955, Sunday

Dear Joe,

When I got home from school today, all bored, sad, and miserable, I found something on my dresser drawer. To my amazement, it was a lovely card from you! That made my day, and boy, did it touch me so. I cannot put into words how I felt. I just cried out of joy, something I have not done for so long, but that was the way I felt. How could I ever thank you, Joe, and tell you how much it meant to me? I am sure you know and understand my feelings.

You know, Joe, I wrote to you yesterday, but I decided to write again to tell you how grateful I was for your card. I don't have much to do now, and I am home in peace with no one to disturb me. There's nothing like peace and quiet. Well, I shall start by saying that

I am fine, just a little bored, and hoping you are fine too. I hope you are not working too hard.

I feel lucky that I don't have too much homework to do today. And I would instead be writing to you than doing anything else anyway.

Oh boy! Now there's a lot of noise suddenly because the bathroom pipes broke, and they are fixing it. Water is all over the place—messy, I would say. I'll wait until they are done to go clean and mop up the mess.

Here comes Mom now, and she sees a couple of your cards displayed on my dresser. "My, my," she started to say, "it looks like you're getting letters and cards every day now from Joe. How interesting, hmm, such beautiful cards too."

I pleaded, "Mom, please don't read them, okay?"

She said, "Why not?"

I said, "Because it isn't of any interest, you know." I was just kidding with her, but it's kind of embarrassing for me to let her read them—you know how it is. She talks to me like a sister as she's very encouraging and tells me that this is nothing to be ashamed of.

Sure enough, I let her read them after she told me that Dad used to send her cards all the time. She said, "I like them a lot. Joe is very thoughtful too, just like your dad."

So there goes my peace and quiet! But home is still more peaceful than anywhere else.

Well, I want to say something more personal. Okay, well, all this week, ever since I got those pictures from you, it has been easier for me to see you in my dreams, which has happened all this week. Really, I didn't think that this could actually happen from just a picture.

Every time I wake up, I always forget what happened in all my dreams, except for one. I remembered you standing near one of those bridges in the picture. And when I came walking toward you, I tripped. Silly, huh? I then remembered that I accidentally crossed over the border state line, which was against the law. So you were on the other side of the border. You then tried to help me get up

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and said, “You will be court-martialed if you stay on that side of the bridge.”

I responded, “It’s very kind of you to help me get across the border.”

Then you said, “You aren’t on the other side of the border because you fell on the cracks of the bridge.” You went on to explain about the age and size of the bridge. It was a silly dream, but I seemed to be asking you to help a lot in my dreams. I can’t figure out why.

Speaking of dreams, do you believe that they come true? I do, in a way, because I have had them come true in the past. I wonder if that means I am superstitious.

Well, Joe, it’s getting quite late, and I have a few chores to do now and some homework, but not much. Then I am off to bed. Ah, I enjoy sleeping now. Boy, as soon as I hit the pillow, I am off to sleep—to dreamland.

I believe I have written enough. And what does Joe say? “I will cut off until the next letter.” May God look upon you and guard you.

With love,  
Carolyn C.

PS. Joe, you’re going laugh at me when I tell you where I keep your pictures. Guess where? Under my pillow where I can see them in the morning. Isn’t that silly? Maybe that is why I have crazy dreams.

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September 12, 1955, Monday

Dear Carolyn,

I received your two-part letter. It was a very interesting and exciting letter. It was the longest one so far, although I wish I could read your letters all night long.

How are you? I hope fine. Me? I still have this miserable cold. I went on sick leave last Friday, and the doctor at the health center here gave me some pills and tonic, but it didn't do me any good. Tomorrow, I am going again and will ask for something stronger, maybe a shot this time.

Carolyn, what are you doing to me? I can't sleep at night anymore. I wake up every two to three hours each night thinking of you. What should I do? If I asked you to forget me, I would die. And I don't want to die young. And I know I can't forget you. I don't think I ever will. So far, you have been the best friend I have ever had since I've been in the army. I owe you a lot, and maybe someday, you will let me repay you. Of course, don't think that waking up in the middle of the night thinking of you bothers me. I love it!

I am glad you laugh at my little jokes, although I don't think much of my own jokes.

I'm surprised that you didn't know what I looked like before sending you a picture of me. Now I see why you don't care about the way people look. I guess if you had been curious enough, you would have asked Alice or Bennie to show you some pictures of me. They probably have over a hundred photos of me.

If you hadn't sent me that picture of you, I would have done everything to get one, even if I had to ask Virginia or have Bennie take a sneak snapshot of you. My brothers would do anything for me. And believe me, he would have snuck up on you with his camera. I sometimes call him "Sneaky." So, hurry up, Carolyn. Get yourself a roll of film and have someone take multiple pictures of you. The day after tomorrow, Wednesday, I will pick up the portraits from that studio. I will send you one as soon as I can.

I have a buddy here that lives off the post who is a very happily married man. He is from Texas, and his wife is from Mexico. Well, for a long time, I have been craving homemade Mexican food. Last Tuesday, September 8, this friend of mine invited another soldier and me to his house for a homecooked meal.

He has a beautiful wife and a cute six-month-old baby girl. Watching them both made me feel very homesick. The supper was

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terrific, as I expected. We talked for a long time, and he bragged about how wonderful marriage life has been for them. Then the wife asked me if I was married, engaged, or had a girl. "Well, I have a girlfriend," I said, and I showed her your picture. I told them how you and I started writing to each other. They said to me in Spanish how very pretty you are. I told them I agree!

My mother sent me some New Mexico chili, which was sure delicious. I wanted it all to myself, but I decided to give half of it to my Mexican buddy as a "thank you" for dinner.

Last night, I went to the drive-in theater with this guy who owned a car on the base. It sure reminded me of this drive-in in Riverside I used to go to.

Well, I'll have to close for now as I need to write back to Bennie and Alice.

With love,  
Joe

PS. I don't think it's silly at all to keep my pictures under your pillow.

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September 15, 1955, Thursday

Dear Joe,

Today, I received your most welcome letter. I was glad to know you are fine, except for your lousy cold. Well, I will pray that you will recover fast.

Well, now I will answer your letter. For one thing, Joe, I want to say thanks for flattering me. Really, I have never been one for receiving compliments like that. Whenever someone says something favorable to me, I just brush it off. But coming from you is so very different, if you know what I mean. But I'll tell you something, my cousin, Eloy Perez, whom I used to write to, would flatter me all the

time, but I never took him seriously. In fact, I told him off one time. So you guess the rest, Joe.

Maybe I'm just self-conscious. Or it might be my mother's fault as she always warns me, "Never believe a bunch of sweet talk from boys because they just want to win you over." And I'm sure it's true about most guys, but because of my parents, I have a hard time trusting people anyway. Although, as of now, I have come to trust and believe in you quite a bit. But one thing for sure, Joe, I don't like to judge others.

Well, I want to discuss your case about dying young. I wouldn't want you to die young either just because of me. I am ashamed of myself for getting in your mind. I am sorry, Joe. I guess I'm such a troublemaker. I don't want to get in the way of your sleep as I know you need to feel refreshed the next day, and ready for work. Well, I should figure out a way to repay you for disrupting your sleep.

That was nice of your buddy to invite you over for a Mexican meal. I'm glad you enjoyed yourself. I was very flattered that you referred to me as your girlfriend. I don't know what to say to that, Joe, but it was nice to hear it. I would imagine you felt out of place there, even though you had a good time. I am happy you are getting out more and doing fun things. I wouldn't want you to be such a wall-flower like me. It is also good so you have something to write about.

As for me, the same routine—to school and back home all week long. Although last weekend was eventful. Saturday, my grandma came to visit from New Mexico, and the whole family spent all night talking. Of course, earlier that day, I cleaned the house all morning. The next day, Sunday, I went to church as usual, but after lunch, my parents, grandma, and I went to the Calico mines. That was fun and different, but the only bad thing was I forgot the camera. Afterward, we just rode around, giving Grandma the grand tour of our town. At home, the rest of the week was homework and chores. I'm not sure what I am doing this weekend, but the following week, the Rodeo Days start. I hope I get to go.

Well, Joe, I should cut here. My brother, Al, is going to bed already, and it's barely 8:30 p.m. It's getting too quiet, so I guess the rest of the family has gone to bed, except for Herman and Carmen.



## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

They went to the show with George and Eve. Even though I am sleepy, I still have to do a book report, shower, and set my hair. Boy, sometimes I wish I had curly hair so I don't have to mess with it. I guess I have to accept the way God made me, huh?

Well, Joe, I hate to stop here, but it is a must. When this letter gets to your hands, I hope that it will find you well from your cold. May God send upon you many blessings.

Admirably yours,  
Carolyn C.

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September 17, 1955, Saturday

Dear Joe,

Here I am once again with a pencil and paper. Well, I have just finished my chores. And my parents and grandma have gone downtown. So now I have an opportunity to write you another letter.

Well, Joe, this morning, while eating breakfast, I heard the mailman "click" our box, and in went a letter. I had a feeling it was a letter from you. So off I go from the table, forgetting my breakfast. And to my big surprise, there was the most precious card, which cheered up my heart. Gee, Joe, I am so thankful for it and all the other cards and letters that I just don't know how to express in words how much they mean to me. My family also adores them so. I was in a happy mood all day.

Joe, why are you so thoughtful? I didn't know men could be so considerate as you, Joe. And you say girls fail you? I just don't understand why. Because I think they couldn't have anything against you unless they weren't in love with you, huh, Joe? Well, some girls don't appreciate anything, even if they were given the whole world. Well, Joe, I'll tell you something, I am kind to some people, and to other people, I am not. But in this world, not everyone thinks the way we do. There will always be someone who disapproves the way

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we are—it's only human nature. As they say, "Different strokes for different folks."

Well, shall we change the subject a little? How are you? And are you feeling better? Maybe the reason you haven't gotten rid of your cold is that you have not followed my advice. You should be ashamed of yourself, Joe. I have given you orders to eat healthily and get some rest.

I couldn't sleep last night. I had so many things on my mind, especially of you. When I finally fell asleep, I had so many dreams I can't remember. But I just realized I start to get sleepy just as I'm writing to you.

Well, I better close for now, and like always, may this letter find you rejoicing in good health. And may God always look upon you and bless you for your kindness and help you in your job. May God leave no empty space around you but fill you with many blessings.

Love,  
Carolyn C.

PS. May my prayers be answered for you. I pray that God will keep you guarded against accidents and for your health and to be joyful while at play or work, especially while driving.

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September 18, 1955, Sunday

Dear Carolyn,

I received a letter from you Friday evening and planned to write to you the next day, but I couldn't because I was invited to a party. Then the next day, Saturday, I received another letter from you. Boy, I am flattered to have such a nice girlfriend who writes to me often.

I am glad I made you happy with the cards I've sent to you. After all, you are the only one who lightens my life. The least I can do is try to even things up with you. You made me believe life is worth living for.

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

You know, Carolyn, I worry just like you do. I guess everybody goes through the same worries as we do. Sometimes I'm concerned that you might meet some handsome guy before I get a chance to finally meet you. So, I need to ask you, do I need to worry? Don't get me wrong. I am not a very jealous guy, and you still can do whatever you want. I will never stand in your way. Then again, I know down in my heart that if you did fall for someone else that you would tell me about it. So far, you are the only girl in my dreams. I want to keep it that way all my life, even if things don't work out like we want them to. But I trust God to help us. I go to church every Sunday when I can. As a matter of fact, I just got back from church.

Well, let me tell you about the party last night. My buddy from New Mexico stationed here has a girlfriend in Philadelphia. She is Puerto Rican. She asked him to bring all his friends over. So I tagged along. It was more or less a Puerto Rican dance. They played a few Mexican songs, like mambo. I only danced twice, but it was horrible because I don't really understand the dancers here. I've never danced the mambo before. At least I tried, but I could use more practice. I did like the tacos and tamales they had there—that was the best part! The party was over by midnight, and I came back to camp.

Thank you for the picture you sent me—your brother, Virginia, and you—it's lovely! Let's call Virginia "Angel" for bringing us together, okay, Carolyn? I think it is just the right name for her after what she did for us. Well, how is she, by the way? Who does she hang around with these days? Who is the lucky guy? I have always wanted a picture of her, and now, I have one because of you. You look very cheerful in that picture. Your brother must be proud to have a sister like you. You all look very cute together. I wish your face wasn't so blurry, or I guess, when the picture was taken, you may have moved or something. But I keep hoping you would send me a few snapshots of the present. So I understand this picture was taken last year?

Oh yeah, I got the studio portraits I had taken of myself last Wednesday. I've got three all wrapped up to be sent out. One is for you, another to my mother, and the third to my brother and sister-in-law. I'll try to mail them out tomorrow, Monday. I hope you'll like it.

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I forgot to answer your question about wearing army uniforms. We can wear civilian clothes on base. I hardly wear the uniform, except when I'm required to. I'm glad because I dislike wearing army uniforms as much as I hate the army. The sooner I get out, the better. And tell your father that the meals are nothing to write home about. They are not good at all. I strongly do not like what they feed us here. I am starving to death. And I've only gained ten pounds in the twenty-three months I've been in the army.

Well, I better sign off now as my buddies are waiting for me. We are going to a show we heard about in Philadelphia. So long and cheer up. I can't wait to see you in eighty-one days.

Always thinking of you,  
Joey

PS. I hope you don't brush me off if I tell you how pretty you are.

PPS. I have a little secret to share—I enjoy having you in my mind a lot.

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September 21, 1955, Wednesday

Dear Joe,

Here I am writing a few lines to let you know how things are going. Well, up to the present, I am fine and hope you are the same as that is my greatest desire. Guess where I am right now? You're right! I'm at school in my English class. I just finished my test and had time to write to you. Only let's hope the teacher will not catch me. Oh, speaking of the devil, here he comes. Whew! That was close. I pretended I was studying my work.

Oh, Joe, I didn't mail you my last letter because I was out of envelopes. So I owe you an apology. I am going downtown today to buy envelopes and airmail stamps so it can get to you quickly.

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

Boy, the school makes me feel like a prisoner because they only let you out at noon. Then I have to wait until the end of the school day to be let out again. Then, some of us who ride the bus home have to stay on campus until it arrives. But today, after school, my friend and I are going to take a chance and go downtown. So wish me luck.

Some of the kids leave early or ditch school unnoticed. This usually happens at the beginning of the school year. But it seems like the rules are stricter this year. Oh! There goes the bell, Joe, so I'll close for now and maybe write again tonight if I have time.

Love,  
Carolyn C.

PS. Tomorrow, I'll mail the letters (with God's help!).

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September 22, 1955, Thursday

Dear Joe,

Hi there. Well, it was such a coincidence today. I just mailed you a letter, and today I received one from you. I'm listening to a sweet song on the radio as I'm writing this letter. I love listening to music at any time of the day—while I sleep, dress, do homework, home chores, and write.

My, my, Joe, don't flatter me so much as I'm bound to take it for granted one day. I love hearing it from you, though, especially when you call me your girlfriend. Really, I can't get over the fact that we just started as pen pals, and now I am your girlfriend. I can't help it, but I actually love hearing that from you.

I worry about you all the time now, like you said about me. First, let me tell you that someday soon, when we finally get together, we will have a chance to know how we feel about each other. But Joe, so far you have made me very happy like no other has. I am a sincere

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person and will never mislead you regarding my feelings. As far as promises, whatever I say, I will keep my word.

Well, Joe, what do you think of the Puerto Ricans and the way they talk? They certainly have a different accent than the rest of us, and they love to dance a lot. They always fill the dance halls. I see a lot of them whenever I go there. So you say you're a horrible dancer when it comes to mambo, huh? Well, I bet you are better than you think you are. That is if you were to practice more dancing and learn the steps. That way, you can teach me how to dance, ha-ha! That is funny, though, that you enjoyed the food more than the party itself.

About the picture that looked fuzzy, well, I did move because I was being tickled. I guess I was too serious at the time. So everyone tried to make me smile but made me laugh instead. Everyone was frustrated with me. I don't really like getting my picture taken.

Well, "Angel" is doing fine. She's back from New Mexico and now in school. She is going around with Andrew J. I believe you know him—he's their neighbor. And his sister, Frances, is now married. Well, Andrew and Virginia are going steady. So she says he has decided to skip school this year.

Well, there was a knock at the door. This always seems to happen when I'm writing you a letter. Anyway, guess who was at the door? It was Mela and her husband who came to visit Carmen and Herman. Oh, the kids are such little darlings. There is one kid that kept coming into my room to talk to me—he's a cutie. Mela is nice. I have known her for two years now. Last year, Carmen and I would go to visit her quite a bit.

Well, I better be closing now. My hopes and prayers will be with you. I'll close, wishing you well and in the best of health when you receive this letter. And may God guard and protect you wherever you go.

Love,  
Carolyn C.

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## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

September 24, 1955, Saturday

Dear Carolyn,

I received a letter from you today, which was such a relief! I was restless all week, pacing back and forth every night, nervously biting my fingernails. I was so worried because I hadn't received a letter from you. Of course, I know what happened now, but I was so scared that you had forgotten about me. I also thought that maybe something terrible happened to you. I am as happy as can be right now. But you know, this made me realize how much you mean to me. You don't owe me an apology for running out of envelopes and stamps—these things happen to me too all the time.

Yes, I do think of you as “my girlfriend,” even if you don't think you are. I feel like you have been my girl for many years.

Say, how long is your grandma going to stay with you? I hope she is still around by the time I get out to meet her too. It must be wonderful to have a grandma. I never got to see any of my grandparents as I am the youngest in my family. They passed away before I was born or when I was too young to remember. Also, I hardly remember my father as I was only four years old when he died.

It sure is sweet of you to even bother to write to me while you are in class. You shouldn't do that or try to take chances like that. Because I can still remember my old school days when the teacher would catch someone writing letters or notes. He or she would take them away and share it with the class. Wouldn't you be embarrassed?

I know exactly how you feel about being like a prisoner in school. Well, don't feel like the Lone Ranger. I have felt like a prisoner for almost two years in the army. Well, soon it will be all over in seventy-four more days. So far, I've kept my nose clean, and I do my best to be a good soldier. I have an excellent record. As far as rank is concerned, I am technically a PFC, but I am an “acting corporal,” also called a Specialist Third class. Of course, I don't care about being an SP3 anymore. All I want is my release from the army, which is scheduled for December 7.

When I am discharged, I will go home to New Mexico and stay there for thirty days. And around January 2 or so, I will head for California—or bust! I expect to meet you then. I'll try to prove to you that the things I say in my letters are not just about talking or making myself feel better about my loneliness in the army. And there you are, Carolyn, my plans for the next few months—nothing else.

Carolyn, some time ago, you asked me if I believe that dreams can come true. Yes, I do, as long as I am patient and stay focused on them. I've had dreams come true in the past, but some not. I never lose hope, though. I know you pray a lot, which is very helpful. I sometimes pray too, but not often enough. I do go to church on Sundays, though. In fact, I am planning on going tomorrow.

It sure has been raining here a lot. I haven't seen the sun in a month. It sure is sad. That is why I like California where the sun shines most of the time. I plan to live in California for the rest of my life, and I never want to come back to New Jersey ever again.

Well, I'm finally cured of my cold, and I think God answered your prayers. I heard a verse: God says, "Take care of yourself, and I shall look after you." I went in for shots three times in a row. Each day, the doc gave me a shot in my...well, um...rear. I am now as good as new. Now my tooth hurts. I am going to the dentist Monday. Seems to me I am telling you all my problems without realizing it. I guess we do trust each other with our troubles. Funny, huh?

Well, I guess by now you should have received my portrait. I told my mother I was finally going to send her one. Obviously, she says she is anxious to get it. I would imagine she received hers by now too. She is one person I love the most in this world. And yet, I've been a heel for not sending her my portrait until now. Of course, since I've been in the army, I've been sending her several snapshots taken from my own camera. I've sent her close to two hundred pictures in the two years I've been here. I thought that was enough. But then you came into my life as you also asked me for a photo. You were the one who helped me make up my mind to finally grant my mother her wish.



## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

It is getting late now, and I am sleepy. I usually like to go out on a Saturday night to a show or something, but tonight, I just didn't feel like going out. Of course, I had a shortage of dough as payday is a week off. I'll cut the letter short by signing off now. Here's hoping to hear from you always.

Always yours,  
Joey

PS. Good luck with hiding your letter-writing from your teachers—I hope they won't catch you!

PPS. Have you heard the song called "We Met in a Dream" by Eddie Fisher? It reminds me of you and me.

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September 25, 1955, Sunday

Dear Joe,

Hello there. I received your beautiful portrait Thursday. I was expecting a photo of you, but not that large. Wow! It made me very happy. It shows me how much you care. I am deeply grateful for that, Joe. There aren't enough words to express how I feel.

The day I received your photo was the day I missed school. I stayed home to help Mom clean the house since we were expecting people from New Mexico. That day, I was up to my neck with work, which left me very tired. But after seeing your picture, it was a sight for sore eyes. I get the same excitement whenever I receive a letter or a card from you—it really cheers me up. It seems like that is the only thing that keeps me going nowadays.

I didn't go to school on Friday either. I stayed home to help with the ironing, and then I ended up getting sick in the afternoon—an awful headache. I couldn't stand it, I had to lay in bed for the rest of

the day. I get headaches all the time, but not bad enough to send me to bed like that day. I felt better by noon on Saturday. My aunt and uncle got here from New Mexico and came here for a very short visit. They left today at 3:00 p.m. and now I have a chance to write to you.

My family really likes your portrait. I put it on my dresser so I can look at it every day. Your photo looks so alive that it scares me sometimes. The first day I received it, my brother came into my room, which was dark. When he turned on the light, your picture scared him. I guess from a glance, he thought someone was standing there. It's funny the way he says it, "I jumped up and started to run."

Jokingly, I asked him why he was such a coward over a picture. Oh, Joe, did I mention that you came out really nice in that picture and so realistic? And you really look sharp in your uniform. I wish I could be photographed like that. I think I would end up breaking the camera every time the picture was snapped.

Well, remember I mentioned I might go to the rodeo? Well, I didn't end up going. I just went to see the parade. Although, by the time we got there, we had already missed some of it. I may still have a chance to go, but I would need someone to take me. I doubt Mom and Dad are willing to go because they hate noisy places. Herman and Carmen have gone somewhere, but not sure where. I would be too bashful to ask them anyway unless they invited me. And my other brother took off with his friends. And I wouldn't even think of tagging along with him anyway. Some sisters like to tag along with their brothers, but I don't want to because I believe they have more fun without me. So I just stay at home. I'm better off, and I always find something else to do—like writing a letter to you.

I can also do a little sewing, take a bath, and read. Of course, I always have some homework to do (a report is due on Monday). Then visitors sometimes come on Sundays. So, anyhow, I enjoy myself at home. The radio cheers me up too.

On Thursday night, my brother, Dad and Mom, and I got ourselves some refreshments, turned on the radio, and listened to the boxing matches—R. Marciano versus A. Moore. Of course, it wasn't like watching it on television, but I enjoyed hearing it. On the first

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

few rounds, Marciano let himself be hit, like always, and Moore was very good. Sure to win—that was his ego. But the very last series, Marciano was up, and sure enough, he won. He's still on top. It was believed that Moore had about forty-eight boxing matches and lost only a few. But Marciano had less, and none lost. He's a champ. Most boxers aren't as smart as him. He lets himself get hit first so he could pick up techniques from his opponents. He takes it easy at first, unlike the rest of them who jump in so quickly and tire themselves out. By the last round, they are too tired, and Marciano saves his energy for the end. Marciano takes it calmly and thoughtfully. The rest of the boxers get too excited and anxious to win.

Did I ever tell you that I like parades? Here, there are four different kinds of bands: The Marine Base band, the Senior and Junior High School bands, and the Airforce band. Then, of course, the usual floats and people riding horses (my favorite part).

I used to ride horses when I was younger, but I haven't been on one for five years. The only thing was that I could never stay on the saddle. If I were to ride one today, I would fall off or be very sore the next day. I did have fun riding them, though. We used to have two horses. The one I liked was named "Baby." My brother and I used to fight over him.

Well, Joe, that was a little something from the past and a bit of the modern times. Now I believe I better be cutting off because I think I have said more than enough. Besides, I wouldn't want you to stay up all night reading it. You must get your rest. So I believe the lights will be going off soon. So, for now, I will say good night, pleasant dreams, and may God bless you while you sleep. May He bring you joy, comfort, and glorious days ahead.

Love,  
Carolyn

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K. L. ESTRADA

September 26, 1955, Monday

Dearest Carolyn,

Today, around noon, I had a truck run to make, and I only had fifteen minutes to get to the “A” Battalion. But when I saw the mail clerk distributing the mail, since he’s a buddy of mine, I called out to him to get close enough to that stack to sniff out your letter. And sure enough, I right away recognized the smell of your letter. Your letters always smell so pretty. Anyway, I just had to get your letter, even though it caused a delay. My first sergeant was not happy with me. He then asked me what in the heck was I waiting for. I put your letter under his nose. And I said, “This is what I was waiting for—a letter from my girl.”

He then smiled and said, “That smells nice, but you better be on your way.”

I put your letter in my shirt pocket and drove off. I could smell the perfume coming from your letter during the whole trip. I read it when I got to the battalion, and I made it in twenty minutes, which is twenty-nine miles away from the HQ Battalion 778<sup>th</sup>.

Golly, I guess I am just like you when I begin to tell a story, I can’t stop my ballpoint pen. So, enough about me, let’s talk about you. How are you? I hope fine and enjoying yourself. Of course, I wouldn’t say in school as I know it is almost as bad as the army.

It was a wonderful letter I got from you today. Sending me all those blessings and good luck wishes made me feel good and comforted as my mother does. You see? You are also thoughtful to say these things to me. How dare you say that your brain doesn’t work well. It seems all right from where I am—at 2,800 miles away! I’ll tell you one thing, though, you are much sweeter than me. Being thoughtful to you is my way of appreciating your kindness.

So why have other girls failed me in the past? Maybe, as you said, they really didn’t love me. I hope you will have me someday, though.

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

Long ago, I used to seek girls for love and companionship, not for good looks. But the girls I dated would stay until I could no longer give them what they wanted. Whenever a girl got everything she needed, like go places or meet people and be spoiled with everything, she would turn her back on me and go with someone else. What do you think happened with Adela Perez after I was in the army for only six months? She was no longer interested because I wasn't there to give her what she wanted. Why do you think Lena stopped writing to me? It was obvious to me that Lena found another guy to pamper her. I can't say all girls are like that. There should be some peaches among the lemons.

I don't like to brag, but I try my very best to be kind to people who are nice to me. I don't want to have enemies.

It's like you said, some people just don't appreciate you.

Well, I guess my "thoughtful" brain has stopped working. I can't think of anything else to write.

I was just counting all the letters I've received from you so far—fourteen wonderful letters. I guess I read each one about a hundred times, which I enjoyed very much. And each letter I get from you, I tuck it under my pillow and go to sleep smiling, thinking of you. That makes me dream of you a lot more. I dreamed of you the other night that the day had come then. I was supposed to meet you. I could see you in church, smiling down as I slipped behind you to say hi.

Well, I hate to close now, but I've got very little time left as I've got to write to my mother and to Bennie and Alice.

Respectfully yours,  
Joey

PS. How about those snapshots!

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K. L. ESTRADA

September 26, 1955, Monday

Dear Joe,

Hi there. I got another beautiful card from you this afternoon, which gives me praise and love. This is a short letter just to thank you, although words can't express my sincere gratitude. How in the world could I ever thank you, Joe? I can only do that by words for now until I can express it to you in person.

I don't know how you have the time to answer my letters or even remember to drop a card. Really, it's a surprise to me because I have often heard others say that they don't have time or make a bunch of excuses. This includes my cousins, aunts, and uncles. But really, Joe, you don't have to kill yourself over me. No, Joe, this is something I don't want you to do no matter what just to impress me. I already know how you feel about me, and I want you to know that I owe you more than gratitude.

I know we are both trying to express to each other how we feel. So I'm letting you know how I feel about the letters, cards, and pictures. Then you already know how I feel, yet I still keep telling you why. My reason is to give you an idea that I am not losing interest in you. That what I feel is still there and to keep you encouraged. Because if I stopped writing to you, it would give you the impression that I no longer have an interest. Then you would feel let down. Now I believe you must feel the same.

I don't have much more to say, Joe, so I'll close. I hope that this letter finds you in the very best of health, and God bless and guard you. I remain as always.

Love,  
Carolyn C.

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## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

September 28, 1955, Wednesday

Dear Joe,

Hi there. Here goes the answer to your most welcome letter, dated 9/24, which I was more than glad to receive and glad to know you are better from the cold. Thanks be to God. As for me, up to the present, I am fine. I don't know what else could happen to me, Joe, except to die naturally. Yes, I did realize I skipped writing to you. I goofed, huh, Joe? I'll see that it doesn't happen again. I have prepared myself with a pack of envelopes.

Well, Grandma has gone back home to New Mexico. My aunt and uncle came to pick her up. Well, it is nice to have a grandmother—it is so “grand!” Now I know why they call them grandparents. I'm sorry to hear about your grandma. I wouldn't mind sharing my grandmother—you would love her.

Gee, you were quite young when your grandma died. My great-grandpa died about ten years ago when I was twelve. I can remember very little then. One of my great-grandmas died about six to seven years later. And now, just last year, my other great-grandma died. She was ninety-six years old. I still have two sets of my grandparents alive.

I don't think the teacher would read my letters to the class, but if he ever caught me, boy, I would just die of shame. I do try to be careful when I do write.

I really pity you guys in the army. I hear about all the hardships you go through, especially when taking the basic training. Boy, I really would not want to be in your shoes. Men sure go through a lot while women take it easy. Yet what do we do? We complain and nag, isn't that right, Joe? Sometimes I feel ashamed for being a woman. We are a man's weakness.

So you were quoting a Bible verse, “Take care of yourself, and I shall look after you.” That's a different version without words like “Thy, Thee, and Thou.” By the way, do you read the Bible? I do whenever I find some extra time for reading, sometimes on Sundays. I have come to believe the Bible ever since my uncle, a Protestant,

mentioned many stories and encouragement. I was also inspired by a good friend of mine, Lorraine Madrid. You might know her. She lives in Pénjamo. She's also a Protestant and a nice girl.

So you are good as new, but now your tooth hurts? I better send a prayer your way.

So now that I've answered your letter, I want to tell you what is happening here. Dad got hit on the head by a three-hundred-pound box. He wasn't badly hurt, but this weakened him a lot. I don't know all the details yet. This afternoon, we have had a lot of visitors to see Dad. My two cousins and their husbands came over. I believe you may know them. They were at the wedding. And the other visitors were the Jaramillos. You probably know the Gilberts and Junior's dad and mom. Also, a friend of mine dropped by to invite me to a show. She remembered that I once told her I wanted to go sometime. But of course, I didn't want to go because she was with her boyfriend. I would just be a third wheel, and they wouldn't be able to enjoy themselves with me tagging along. I politely thanked them for considering me, though.

After all the dishes were done, and I did some sewing, I started to write you a letter. But before I did, I needed to do some homework in social studies. I then took a bath and set my hair. With all the visitors, I got behind. This seems to occur a lot whenever I'm answering your letters. It gets me upset, you know. I'm feeling sleepy already, but I can't go to bed until I am done with what I have to do. Even if nothing else is done, I wouldn't care. As long as I answer your letters, I feel so much better. Like something off my chest, then I no longer feel behind. Gee, Joe, I don't know what I would do if you didn't write to me. I would be bored and sad otherwise. In other words, your letters cheer me up so much. I can't describe in so many words, except you make me feel happy. Well, I am signing off. Until your next letter, you have my blessings.

Happily yours,  
Carolyn Cortez

PS. Regards from Angel.



## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

PPS. Yes, I have heard that song. It's wonderful! I think it's called "Song of a Dreamer," but it really does remind me of us. By the way, have you heard of the song, "Haul Away, Joe?" I haven't heard the tune, only the name of it. It's a patriotic song published by Air Force Corps sung in acapella chorus. Speaking of which, I signed up for an acapella course in school this year. I have the opportunity to sing a lot of spiritual hymns and patriotic songs for the school PTA, churches, school programs, and other places.

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September 29, 1955, Thursday

Dear Joe,

Hello, handsome. Well, I'll start by saying that I am laughing at your last letter dated 9/26 where you mentioned calling out to your mail clerk buddy. I imagined you saying, "Let me get my nose close to the pile of letters." What did that guy call you? A nosy man? As funny as that was, I am ashamed of you for being late for duty on purpose. It's no wonder they didn't make you clean the floors with a toothbrush or something. You must be quite a privileged character, huh, Joe?

Oh my, Joe, you never bore me. I could go on hearing your stories forever. You always keep me fascinated. Has anyone ever told you that your letters are very interesting? You write the kind of stories that can be read over and over again and not get tired of reading them. I would rather hear about you than anyone else.

As for me, I am just fine. Well, I do enjoy myself after school when I get together with my friends and chat away our time until the bus comes. Yak, yak, that's all we do. To me, talking is enjoyable, especially when the girls and I don't get to see each other often enough. While in school, we are all scattered and separated in different classrooms. We only see each other at lunchtime and after school. I have a lot of friends but just two best friends who are Emma and Lorraine. Of course, my very best friend of all is "Angel," only I don't

see her all day. I have not seen her since school started, except for one day, but I didn't have enough time to talk to her much. It was just a hi and bye. We have been wanting to go over to see her folks, but they too have been very busy. It's funny how the world is always busy and in a rush to do so many things.

Gee, is that how far we are from each other? I thought it was about 1,600 miles or less, although it is still quite a long way.

Anyhow, you say I am thoughtful, and I think you are too. Well, then, that's settled—we got something in common, right? Well, I also believe that two heads are better than one. And in this case, it seems we both have put our heads together to solve problems, thoughts, and opinions. I feel the same as you do about so many things. For example, as you had mentioned about appreciation and how I think about my ways of appreciating small things. Such as words that have more value to me than a treasure chest, jewelry, or a fur coat. Like they say, "It's the little thoughtful ways and understanding of each other that counts more than anything in the world."

As I mentioned, not many people believe this way. I guess it is because I was brought up to appreciate what little I had. I have learned that we have to be taught on such things we aren't born with, right, Joe? Like the fact that God made me small. I can't make a big deal about that because God didn't intend to, so I came to appreciate what God created. Like Dad says, "You can't change what God made of you, even if you were to put on makeup to change your look." I don't think I am bragging by stretching my beliefs—this is how I was taught.

What's this, Joe, that you tuck my letters under your pillow? Why, it must be quite a pile bursting with letters by now, ha-ha! The way you phrase things in your letters allows me to picture it in my mind.

Well, it's closing time again, so until next letter, at the same answering time and the same "station"—I mean "table." So tune in, won't you? Broadcasting from CCPT writing tablet. In the meantime, goodbye until then. May God bless and look upon you.

Love,  
Carolyn C.

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

PS. I'll try my best, Joe, to take those photos—I promise you. Just pray I get the chance to buy more film this week. Fingers crossed so as not to lose hope.

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September 30, 1955, Friday

Dearest Carolyn,

I got two precious letters at the same time today (dated 9/22 and 9/25). I read part of your letter during my coffee break at the mess hall. After the break time was over, I went back to the motor pool. I climbed onto my truck, which was sitting on top of the grease rack. I sat down comfortably and finished reading your letter. I was supposed to be pulling a “C” maintenance on my truck. Instead, I was reading your correspondence. The mechanic was not happy with me because I didn't want to help him grease my truck. But I was miles away (in my mind). Finally, he left, and I ended up doing the work alone. I hate to pull maintenance on trucks. I'd rather be out driving somewhere.

Let's talk about you now, and then later, I will tell you what “we” did today. How are you feeling? I hope your headache went away fast. It's my wish that everything is okay with you. If not, I hope this letter cheers you up a little, just like your letters do for me.

The best part I like about your letters is that you never say a cross word or insults like most girls. You never send me a message that would leave me disappointed. Instead, your letters leave me in a daze or what I would say, “walking on clouds.” It makes me feel good inside me with joy and longing for the next letter. I think I've told you all this a dozen times before as I hope it isn't “just a line” to you. And believe me, there is more to that, except I can't quite describe my true feelings in words.

You know, I don't blame your brothers to think my picture is scary. I think I break the cameras every time the photo is snapped. I

never come out right in photographs. Or maybe I'm just as self-conscious as you are. But I often look at myself in the mirror and ask myself, "What does Carolyn see in me?" Well, anyway, I am glad you liked my picture. But if it scares you, just throw it out the window, ha-ha!

Carolyn, I hope you don't think I am taking you for granted for calling you "my girl." Really, I thought I should call you something else by now as we are more than just friends. I am glad you don't object to that.

I believe you now that I have no need to worry about us—that was a silly question I asked. You have my word of honor that I will never let you down. There's no need to worry about how I feel about you. There's another thing I want you to know—I will never hide anything from you.

Last week, I forgot to tell you that I wrote a letter to Lena. I know I said I forgot about her a long time ago, but you were right about giving her a chance to explain herself. So I asked her why she quit writing. Well, it turns out that she misunderstood me. Somehow, she thought I told her I had a girlfriend when I mentioned I went to the dances. Naturally, I have to dance with girls as it would be silly to dance with boys. Anyway, I guess Lena got jealous and decided not to write to me anymore. She told me all that in her letter I got last Tuesday. Now I know what kind of a girl Lena is—one that didn't have faith in me. So as far as I am concerned, she is definitely not for me, and she is forgotten. But I am going to save this last letter from her and show it to you one day.

Sure, Carolyn, I can dance some slow dances a little. I always wanted to learn how to do the jitterbug. I hope you know a bit about it, and we can learn it together. If there is anyone who needs proper instructions on how to dance, it would be me.

Well, let me tell you what "we" did today or rather in the afternoon. By "we," I'm talking about the whole platoon. First, we had to dress in class "B" uniforms, equipped with a carbine on the shoulder and helmet all in full uniform. We did this just for the retreat. By that, you have to stand at attention to salute the flag as someone

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

pulls it down. Then we all received a payment and were excused. Me? Well, I am on standby tonight and can't go anywhere until tomorrow. Everyone else was off for the weekend. I will be on KP (kitchen patrol). It is now midnight, and I am sleepy. So I will close for now. I've only got four hours of sleep left. Good night.

Thinking of you,  
Joe

PS. My regards to "Angel."

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October 2, 1955, Sunday

Dear Joe,

Hello! This morning, I got a pen and paper and decided to drop you a few lines since I have nothing else to do for once. This morning, I didn't go to church, which reminds me, I have not done my Sunday prayers. So after I finish writing, I will go about it. In the meantime, up to the moment, I am fine. I am hoping you are the same, for that is my greatest desire.

Here I am, sitting on a chair with a tablet under a table lamp with the radio on. I'm listening to that Sunday soft music. Speaking of taking it easy, I hope you are taking it easy too.

Oh, wow! I'm listening to a song titled "A Thing Called Joe." This is the first time I'm hearing it. It's really nice. I like it. It's about happiness is a thing called Joe. It is so appropriate! Every time I turn on the radio, I always hear something about you, even in the news. You are everywhere, Joe. Whenever I hear your name, I think of you. I have come to pay more attention to the radio and reading, just so I can listen for your name mentioned. Oh, now they are playing a song named "Somewhere There Is Someone." Gee! I better change the subject and go on to what I intended to tell you.

K. L. ESTRADA

Every morning, whenever I get up, I glance at your picture and say, “Good morning, Joe.” Crazy, huh? I must be seeing things, but I actually saw you smile at me. When I took a second glance with wide eyes, that time, nothing happened. It must be my imagination or something.

Now I want to tell you about yesterday, Saturday. I did a little ironing and other chores. During the evening, I went with my parents and little brother, Al, to the drive-in. I call him “little,” a habit of mine, even though he’s way taller than me. I guess it’s because he is younger than me. The movie was good—Davy Crockett and Abbott and Costello in *Meet the Mummy*. It was funny and quite amusing. Then on our way back home, we saw an awful wreck between the highway and the passageway to the drive-in. So we had to go through the other exit and didn’t learn what really happened.

Well, I believe that was all that happened since I last wrote. Now let’s talk about you. I want to know more about your plans and when you will be discharged from the army. I really hope those plans work out well for your benefit. I cannot deny saying that I am as anxious to meet you as you are with me. Also, I would like to say that if you ever have any questions to ask me, feel free to ask away, and I will answer honestly. Well, I guess that will be all for now as I better close. Like always, may God bless you, and may this letter find you well when it reaches you.

Loyally yours,  
Carolyn Cortez

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October 3, 1955, Monday

Dear Joe,

Today I received your most welcomed letter, dated 9/30, which so pleases me. First, I shall begin by saying that I am glad you’re doing fine. As for me, I am much better, thanks to our Lord.

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

Now I shall go about asking you a few questions. What is a motor pool? Is that the same thing as a mechanic shop? And what is “pulling a C maintenance” on a truck? I’m just interested in knowing. That way, I don’t have to be asking questions all the time, which would bore anyone after a while. I believe a mechanic’s job is to work on your car or truck, so I don’t see why you had to help him. And your job is driving and loading the truck, right, Joe? Of course, if you wanted to help the guy, that would be a different story. A good deed for the day, huh, Joe?

Just be sure you concentrate on your work and not be distracted by my letters while driving. That would be a bad habit, and you might be liable to wreck or something. Leave that to when you have time to write, not while on duty. Boy, don’t ever let them catch you writing to me or I may end up not being able to write you again. You wouldn’t want that to happen, would you?

And another thing, Joe, which I have told you time and time again that sleep is important. When you are sleepy, you should sleep instead of writing letters all night. Because the next day, you will feel groggy from lack of sleep. This could cause you to sleep on the job too. Why, I ought to scold you more than I am doing now, but then you will think I am like your mama. So I won’t. Besides, I don’t intend to point an iron stick to the facts but just on what I see fit.

Well, Joe, you say I don’t insult or use cross words with you. But the reason is simple. This is because you have not yet done or said anything to make me upset. I don’t see anything I have against you or why I have a reason to use mean words. Maybe if there were remarks you had mentioned that I missed. As of yet, no one has gotten me to that point. But that doesn’t mean I don’t get mad easily or that I don’t have a bad temper. Of course I do, only I don’t show it much. I just keep it to myself until it’s gone. Even if I get hurt, I don’t stay that way for a long time. So after a minute or so, it would be like it never happened. I know that sounds crazy, but that’s the way I am, even at home with my brother, Al. One minute, I can be irritated with him, and the next minute, I am cheerful—to the point it scares

him, so he says. Wow, that was quite a lot of talk on one subject. Now moving on.

I know exactly what you mean when you can't express your feelings on paper. Well, I can say things that I already know about you or feel I understand so far. I think the more you know someone, the more you'll understand them. You got to know things about me to understand my way of thinking, right, Joe? We still have a lot to learn about each other. Also, I must say that knowing how you feel about yourself gives you an idea of how others would feel about you too. We are all humans and pretty much have similar emotions.

Joe, you should read my letter again where I mentioned my brother who got scared of your picture. It wasn't because you were "scary." It was because your picture looked very realistic. We, including me, thought your picture was marvelous, no lie. And don't say that "you break the cameras" because I am the one that breaks them. I think I'm an ugly duckling. But we are never happy with ourselves. Sometimes I wish there weren't any mirrors so I wouldn't be so concerned about the way I look. Well, that's that, and there I go again. I write a whole paragraph over nonsense.

Joe, I am really glad you wrote to Lena. There's nothing wrong with getting a satisfaction from your curiosity. I'm glad I encouraged you to write her. I thought you needed to give her a chance to explain things. I just think you should have done it sooner, Joe. The quicker things are done, the better. Anyhow, you got the results of the case. As you said that she got jealous when you mentioned dancing with other girls. I agree with you that she lacks understanding and had no faith in you. But the main thing here is that you also lack understanding of the cause of this jealousy.

Let me share a little of what I have learned about this subject. Everyone has a fear of losing someone they care about. Sometimes, you can't help but feel jealous. But those feelings can turn into revenge. You know, whenever you go out with someone else just to spite the other? We want to show that person how it feels. Others lose hope and just give up. Now what does that do to you? Naturally, you feel down and discouraged. Lena took revenge on you by not



writing back to you. And she let jealousy take the best of her. Of course, it was obvious why you danced with girls and did not just sit and watch. If she had faith in you, she should have considered this. And that boys should be able to enjoy themselves, especially when they are lonely.

This is a free country. There's nothing wrong with enjoying the good things in life. Plain fun isn't going to kill anyone—only evil will. No one likes to be tied down or forced to do something that isn't our free will. Jealousy and loneliness almost have something in common. Like you and Lena, for example. Lena got jealous because you were enjoying yourself, so she in turn decided to be untrue to you, thinking you were going out with others. So she had fear and doubt and decided that if you can have a good time, why can't she. So loneliness can also drive you to go out and see other people and do something you'll regret later. But it is better to learn things early than too late. As it is set up in the Bible: "Do it now, don't wait for tomorrow, for tomorrow is too late." Things can be fixed earlier on.

Don't say she wasn't for you. It really is that it just didn't work out well for you. She's human but lacks understanding and faith. We live in a very confused world. Very few people have this understanding and faith. Some people have it at first. Then when there's doubt, they lose it. Remember the man who had faith in God, and when God said to him, "Come walk upon thy water," well, the man started to walk but then thought that was impossible. At that moment, the man lost faith.

I believe I have passed the limit on my writing. Besides, I don't want to bore you with so much of that stuff. And I don't want you to think I am a teacher or something. I just wanted to stress a few things I have learned and believe in.

Well, Joe, I believe we both have to learn how to dance because I am also not good at dancing either. It's funny how some things I don't learn so easily.

What a way to retreat, Joe, with your uniforms and saluting the flag. It sounds official. Too bad you had KP, though. Maybe luck of the draw?

K. L. ESTRADA

Well, Joe, this time I have written quite a lecture or document—whatever you want to call it. I better be closing now. May God be your guidance. I am looking forward to your letters for they bring so much happiness to me more than you will ever know.

Your sincere friend,  
Carolyn Cortez

PS. Get plenty of sleep. More than just four hours as it is healthier to get eight hours of sleep.

PPS. Don't ever feel indebted to me like you owe me something. Your life means more than that to me. If you have something to tell me, go ahead. I'll understand. Don't feel like you will hurt my feelings. I am beyond that.

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October 1, 1955, Saturday

Dearest Carolyn,

I just finished my work here in the mess hall as today I am the only one on KP, which is usually two of us on duty. I had to do all the work alone, but now I am done and ready to write you a letter on the typewriter that I found in the dining room. I am not much of a typist as I can only do two words per minute. Crazy, huh?

Well, it's almost noon, and the cooks are preparing dinner. I will have to quit now as duty calls. I will try to finish typing this letter after I help the cooks set up the chow line.

Well, here I am again. I just finished washing all the trays, cups, and silverware. I also worked in the dining room. I had to clean the tables and set the chairs up on the tables. After that, I swept and mopped the floors. Although this afternoon, I was lucky I had help as he cleaned all the pots and pans.

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

Now that work is done, we are all sitting around the tables, drinking coffee and listening to the radio, for there is a ball game on the World Series. I don't really care too much about ball games, though. How about you? I noticed on the letter from you yesterday, you mentioned you listen to the fights (world events) on the radio. You must be a sports fan. The only thing I like to listen on the radio is music or sometimes stories.

Oh boy, I am getting tired of poking at the typewriter one finger at a time.

There isn't too much excitement today. Everything is so quiet and sad. It is now 3:00 p.m., and the ball game is still on. The score now is 7-5 in favor of the Yankees. Oh no, as if I care. I am going to leave the typewriter for a few minutes. I ran out of Lucky Strike cigarettes. So I will go get some from my locker. Maybe I will think about something more to write about.

I am so sorry I can't type anymore because it is almost supper-time. After that, I don't know when I can get ahold of a typewriter again. So I will close for now. Hoping to hear from you very soon.

Love,  
Joe Cotillo

PS. Excuse my mistakes.

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October 3, 1955, Monday

Dearest Carolyn,

I received a letter from you today thanking me for the card I sent you. You are most welcome, Carolyn! You can also expect more. I am so happy you appreciate them.

Don't ask me how you can thank me. You've thanked me just by writing to me. You just keep it up, Carolyn, you are doing just fine.

K. L. ESTRADA

Isn't it amazing how a person gets so interested in one or another by letters? I have always believed in letters and how dreams come true. This is the one dream I want to come true!

Carolyn, I am not killing myself just to win you over. I am glad to hear that you already know how I feel about you. I've got the same feelings you have. I talked to a lady yesterday as she and her husband invited four of us, soldiers, for dinner at their house. I was talking to her about us. She told me she had the same experience herself. She said that you would know more about a person just by writing letters.

I agreed with her right then. Really, if there were many more sweet women like Mrs. Ryan to treat the soldiers like she does, everyone would like to stay in the service. She always sends us cakes, cookies, magazines, etc. We all appreciate that. Actually, her birthday is next week. So we are all going to collect some money and buy her a gift that she will never forget. She deserves it.

Well, I typed a letter last Saturday while I was on KP, and I still haven't mailed it. So I will slip it in with this letter. I'll close for now. God bless you too and bring you all the happiness in the world.

Always,  
Joe

PS. I am still waiting for those pictures!

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October 5, 1955, Wednesday

Dearest Carolyn,

I received two letters yesterday (9/28 and 9/29), but I should say I found them in my footlocker around 9:00 p.m. when I happened to open it. To my surprise, I found them there! I know I got both of them on the same day. I was a little tired as I thought you wouldn't mind if I answered them the next day.

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

You see, yesterday, I drove the ambulance as I transported nine guys that went on “sick calls” to Fort Dix, New Jersey. And today, I had a similar run. Actually, I enjoy it because I get to go to the main PX (post exchange). They usually offer dinner at the Fort Dix hospital, which the meals there are wonderful—it beats the mess hall at the headquarters. We used to eat with the WAC (Women’s Army Corps) detachment a while back, but they finally put it offline for the 734<sup>th</sup> missile base. Too bad because we used to like to eat there a lot.

Today, after I took care of everybody or shuttled them around, I went to the main PX. I bought myself a new self-winding watch, a new lighter, a pair of boots and socks, stationery, and some reading material. Oh, I forgot to mention, the first thing I did was have my favorite dish: fried eggs and sausage.

You asked me if I read the Bible. No, I don’t, and don’t ask me why. Maybe because I don’t think I would understand it. You say you have an uncle that is a Protestant and reads the Bible to you—that’s nice. He probably makes it easy to understand. A lot of people say that the Bible is read in a lot of different ways, but most people don’t understand it.

You know, this reminds me of my last romance with Adela Perez. Just like you, she also had a Protestant uncle. Adela and I used to have many quarrels over her uncle because I wouldn’t want to listen to him read the Bible. Naturally, I would hurt Adela and her family’s feelings. I couldn’t help it. The only one I listen to is a Catholic priest in the church. Outside of that, I only say my prayers at night before I go to bed.

I know Lorraine Madrid. Has she ever told you about the night that I took her out for a ride? First, we almost got hit by a car just coming out from Pénjamo. Then the battery of my car died. Oh boy! We really hit it off with bad luck all the way home. Something told us we were not meant for each other. Yes, she is a lovely girl. I kind of feel bad for her. I didn’t stay in touch with her because I found out she was Protestant later on as I am a Catholic.

It isn’t that I am prejudiced against other religions. I just think that couples with different religions don’t mix well. The way you

talk, I think you are a very good Catholic. That's good enough for me. Maybe I will become a better Catholic with you. When I am settled in Riverside—you know, my job situation, and a place to stay and all—I will join the Knights of Columbus (Catholic Fraternal Organization). Do you think that sounds good? You are the only one I've mentioned this to as I promised myself a long time ago that I would do this when I get out of the army. It is for one reason, which I will not tell you just yet. I guess that is why I have never told anyone as of yet.

Gee, I am sorry to hear about your dad. I am glad he wasn't badly hurt, though. I hope he will get well soon. Let me know how he's doing in the next letter, okay?

Well, here I am, answering your other letter. There you go again, calling me handsome. I just came back from looking at myself in the mirror. I couldn't see what you see. Or is that your way of kidding with me or flattering me?

You know something, that is what the mail clerk called me: "Nosy." Ha-ha!

Oh, you got me wrong there, Carolyn, I don't put stacks of letters under my pillow. What I meant was, whenever I get a new correspondence from you, I put it under my pillow. After I'm done reading and answering your letters, I put them away. Does that make better sense?

Calling broadcast CCPT, calling broadcast CCPT, over? Please repeat your last transmission. Ha! Ha! You were going too fast for me there. I know what CC stands for, but what do the rest of the letters, PT, stand for? Just curious again, Carolyn C.

I was just figuring out my remaining days here in the army, just a few minutes ago. I came up with sixty-two more days! It will take me three days to get to New Mexico, which I will stay there for only twenty days. And then I will drive eighteen hours to Riverside to meet you! I wish you knew how much that all means to me, especially meeting you. This would be a dream come true.

WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

Well, it's now time to quit. I've got to drive a two-and-a-half-ton truck early tomorrow morning. So good night and have pleasant dreams.

Your admirer,  
Blondie (a.k.a. Joe Cotillo)

PS. Regards to "Angel!"

PPS. My fingers are crossed and waiting for the pictures (I bother you too much, don't I?)

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October 6, 1955, Thursday

Dear Joe,

Hello there! Here I am dropping you a few lines to let you know I am fine and at the same time to let you know that today I received both your letters dated October 1 and 3, which cheered me up. Now, I hope this letter finds you in the very best of health, for that is my greatest desire for you. Next goes the reply to your message. I agree with you that the lady you mentioned is very rare and should be noticed and appreciated for her hospitality toward people. There really should be more people like her. This world would be a very different place. I am glad you are willing to show your appreciation. I believe she is right about learning more about a person's thoughts in letters in more ways than one. May God send upon her many more years of glorious living.

Well, Joe, I have news for you. I am not very good at typing either—so that makes two of us.

Oh my! You sure hit at everything, boy—from corporal to janitor. Man, that's being a good sport. Or should I say *enthusiastic* as a better word, always on the ball. What a character you must be. You must be like Ben. Like they say, "Like father, like son," I'll change

it the other way around and say “like brother, like brother.” That doesn’t really go well, but it will do. Huh, Joe?

Say, by the way, why did they give you KP duty? Did you goof or something to get that job? It just doesn’t sound like your regular job there.

Yeah, man! So the Dodgers won, and the Yankees took it like good sports. That day, almost every school kid had their radios on, and oh brother, there was so much excitement. Some gambled or betted on the teams. Some got disappointed while others were thrilled. The score was 2–7. Finally, things got under control and back to normal. Imagine in New York—I bet the schools weren’t even in session—privileged characters. Well, I don’t care about games or sports, but seeing others interested made me want to get on the ball too, just for kicks. It’s all right, though. I like to participate in sports rather than watch it or hear it.

So, it’s Lucky Strike cigarettes for you, huh?

Oh! Someone is honking outside...oops! Al came in to call me. Someone wants to see me. So won’t you excuse me for a while?

Okay, here I am again, and oh! Guess who it was? Boy, was I surprised! Someone from heaven dropped by whom I haven’t expected—our “Angel.” Yay! Was I glad to see her! It seems like ages since we’ve talked to each other. For a while, we both started yakking away, like two anxious and excited chickens. Knowing Virginia, you need to dedicate a whole day to talk. We had so much to chat about, but we had to cut it short because she had some errands. We didn’t have the time to catch up right then. Also, she was with her boyfriend, so it wasn’t exactly the time to talk. We just had time to converse for a short time on how you and I are getting along. Then it was bye-bye. She and her boyfriend make such a lovely couple. They get along just splendidly. Those few minutes seemed like seconds. I was excited to see Virginia, but she appeared suddenly, then took off in seconds, just like a fleeting angel from heaven.

Now where was I before I went out? Oh, yes, I left off regarding “Lucky Strikes.” So that is your favorite brand of cigarettes. I didn’t know you smoked until now. It certainly doesn’t seem to me that you are the kind of person who smokes.



## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

How about a little of what is happening here? Well, yesterday, I was involved in a program sponsored by my acapella class. We sang for the PTA, which means Parent's Teachers Association. Our group sang three numbers (songs). There are forty-eight students in the class, and we are divided into sections—the base and tenors and the altos and sopranos. Of course, I am a soprano as I have a high-pitched voice.

Anyhow, that night, my parents drove me to school because I didn't have another way of getting there. I felt bad because my dad was feeling ill that day. But he insisted since I was signed up to attend. The trouble was that I didn't know what time it would be over. So they just dropped me at the campus and took off without knowing what time to pick me up.

Anyway, everything went well. Even though I sang with a group of people, I was just a little nervous. There were a lot of people, and I did not want to mess up. Before we sang, there were a few speeches regarding teenage disciplinary organizations and a few other performances. Then we were invited to dinner afterward. Some stayed, but the rest of us, including me, were too shy to participate.

The program was over at 8:00 p.m., so the girls that didn't stay for dinner, took off for home, and left me there all by myself. I waited and waited for Dad, but he didn't show up. I walked a little way when I heard a lot of noise and saw bright lights. I then remembered that the band was having a rehearsal that same night, so I walked up to the field and watched. I thought it was quite interesting how they took careful steps and played their instruments.

I felt funny all by myself for the first time. I was all alone at night and felt a little scared. But little Carolyn got a little courage, so I said to myself, "I am not alone. Look beside you." I had my guardian by my side—God was beside me.

Thirty minutes passed, and I was still waiting. I began to get restless. I couldn't go downtown because I was afraid that I would miss my dad. So I just waited. All of a sudden, I felt peaceful and decided to study my surroundings. It was a calm and clear night. The stars were all shining brightly, and I found the wishing star. I

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even had time to count a few stars, and oh yeah, the moon wasn't full—it was three quarters of a moon. I then wondered what could be beyond that and the stars. I allowed my mind to wander off into deep thoughts and started thinking of you. I wondered what you were doing at that very moment. And as I gazed up into the sky, I said to myself, "Wherever you are, somewhere, far off at a distance, God is watching over you as He is guarding me right now."

Finally, my parents came around 9:30 p.m., and I asked what kept them. And this is what they said, "We had gone off to bed and fell asleep." Luckily, Mom woke up and remembered I was out. So she shook Dad up, and they came for me. And that was that. What a night! I enjoyed it, though, as I had time to think about things. I had time to think about nature and things put there by God. Our heavenly Father created these things for our enjoyment. I also enjoyed thinking about you, which was the best part of all.

Well, Joey, I believe I have talked enough. So I'll come to a conclusion until the next letter. May our Savior look upon you.

She who adores you,  
Carolyn Cortez

PS. I am taking senior class pictures this week in school. As soon as I can, I'll borrow my uncle's camera, and I can take some snapshots. His camera takes better photos. So I hope you'll have a little more patience, Joe.

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October 7, 1955, Friday

Dear Carolyn,

Hi there, my loyal girlfriend! It's so wonderful the way you express things to me—so sweet I could just see you. And to even write to me even if I don't write. I am flattered the way you think my

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name is “important.” For me, I’ve never considered myself important. But I am glad you like music as much as I do. Boy, you are lucky to write your letters on an easy chair, a lamp beside you, and radio on with soft music. But for me, the most comfortable place to write a letter is in my truck where it is peaceful. But now I am writing on my bunk with loud music and about ten guys talking at the same time. How can I concentrate on my writing? Sometimes I can block out all the noise, but other times, I just want to go AWOL.

Shame on you, Carolyn, for not going to church on the second of October. I am surprised at you. Maybe you had a reason. I hope you are not sick. I confess I’ve missed Mass on a few Sundays too. Sometimes I feel ashamed about it, especially when I’m feeling lazy or too sleepy. The other times are because I am on duty, like KP or guard duty.

Carolyn, you have quite an imagination seeing my picture smile at you. Maybe the next thing you’ll tell me is my hand reached out and touched you, ha-ha! Wouldn’t that be something?

You know, Carolyn, all of a sudden, everything went quiet as if everyone heard my thoughts and left me alone. So I decided to play some records I haven’t heard in a long time. I haven’t bought any new vinyl records lately, but I’ve got too many anyway, and it might be a problem to carry them all the way home with me.

Gee, my record player’s music is beautiful as I hadn’t played them in a long time. I got carried away for a while. What did I do today? Oh, yes, I was on a ration run. You know, I bought the food for the battalion. It’s the ready-to-eat meals to be packaged for the field. I actually drove a three-quarter-ton truck as my truck, the two-and-a-half-ton one, was dead-lined today because the brakes went out.

Now it is raining outside. That is not new as it rains here pretty much every day. I hate weather like this. This is why I love Riverside so much. I like hot days and warm nights. Today, they put the stove on again, for it is starting to freeze at night now. How is it down there? I bet it’s not too cold.

You say I can ask you freely any questions I want? Hmmm, let me see, I’ve got a million things to ask you. Wait, let me think. Oh, yes, number one, when is your birthday? I’ve been meaning to ask

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you that but I slipped. I am not as thoughtful as you think. Number two, where is your hometown?

Well, I guess I can't think of anything else to ask you right at this moment. I'll probably think of more things later.

I got tired of playing my records, so I switched to the radio. It's my masterpiece. I first bought the record player. Then I purchased an old radio. I just jerry-rigged a radio inside the record player. So now I've got a combination of a radio and a record player. I can't help but brag about it, but everyone here really likes my invention. Oh, yes, I meant to tell you about the \$10 prize I won by putting in a suggestion I thought up when I was driving my two-and-a-half-ton truck. I figured out how to back up a trailer better and safer. They all liked my idea.

Well, I just can't think of anything else to say. I am making too many mistakes anyway, and I just can't concentrate anymore. Maybe I am just fed up with the army and the people here. Only sixty days to go. Did I say only? To me, it seems like years before I can get out, especially now that someone is waiting to meet me—it makes it seem longer.

I'll close for now. Excuse all the mistakes. I think I'll have to start writing with a pencil so I can erase the errors, ha-ha!

Always yours,  
Joe

PS. I hope you like my little notecard called "Blossom Time."

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October 8, 1955, Saturday

Dear Joe,

Hi, Blondie! Here again, it gives me the pleasure of writing to you. Today is Saturday, and I just received a marvelous letter and your notecard named "Blossom Time." How neat! It reminds me of one of the songs we sang at the PTA.

By the way, you mentioned that you received two of my letters on the same day. I actually meant to tell you that you should be getting a letter one day later but not on the same day. I have been making a point to mail one letter each day. So maybe the mail clerk collects them and then gives them to you altogether. Is it true that the officers have the right to read GI's letters? Perhaps that's the reason for the delays.

Well, Joe, I'll tell you that Bibles are translated into different languages. And you have to be patient to understand the meaning of the scriptures and verses of the Bible. There are two sets of books in the Bible—the Old and New Testament. The Old Testament tells of the beginning of the world—when it all started with Adam and Eve. And if I'm not mistaken, the New Testament starts the beginning of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ—His birth and all the things He did. It also reads about His followers, disciples, and His powers. The powers He gave the saints, His crucifixion, and what He gave His followers to write, such as the visions His followers saw. It also describes the purpose of His coming, why He left, and when He will come again. I believe it's quite easy to read and understand if you can put your mind to it.

All Bibles have the same message, no matter what religion, but it's interpreted differently. I have the English Catholic version but on the New Testament. Dad has a Spanish version. Maybe everyone has their own beliefs, but they all point to one God. We must not judge who is right or wrong as no one really knows. We will understand on judgment day, for God will see us according to our own beliefs. He is the only one that can judge. Of course, it doesn't hurt to listen to what others have to say as long as it comes from the Bible. If you have ears, listen quietly. Besides, there are two sides to the story, and when you put them together, what you have are the same belief but two different approaches. Me? I am a Catholic, but I take no sides with others. In other words, I do not argue my point of view. I just listen to their opinion but do not allow them to change me.

Really, Joe, I am not a good Catholic, but I stick to what God wants of me. I try my best to keep God's commandments. I can only do my best. I don't like to go about asking a lot of questions because

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that leads to gossip. I hate that more than anything, so I just keep things to myself. As you already know, some people just can't keep their mouths shut.

I did not take it wrong when you mentioned that you keep my letters under your pillow. I was just kidding with you, but it just made me laugh to imagine a stack of letters instead.

I think it's good that you are interested in joining the Knights of Columbus.

Well, in sixty-two more days, Joey will come marching home. We will all stand by when you arrive, and we'll cheer for you.

Today, our whole family went for a rabbit hunt. It was sort of fun, but we didn't really catch any. My brothers are not very good hunters, and the rabbits are too fast anyway. We just do it for kicks. My mom, Carmen, and I did nothing but shouted and scared the rabbits away. I took books to study. I didn't even lift a single rifle. Besides, the rifles were too big for my size. If I were to shoot one of them, it would send me flying in the opposite direction.

They call me "sissy" in school. Actually, it is "CC" for my initials. I guess it is easier for them, although they call me by many other nicknames. Sometimes it confuses me, and I don't know my own name sometimes, ha-ha!

Well, Joe, it is getting quite late, and I can't keep my eyes open any longer. So I'll drop my pen now, but I will say a prayer for you before I do. May the Lord help you in your needs and keep you up to your deeds and integrity.

Cordially yours,  
Carolyn Cortez

PS. I was not kidding with you when I mentioned how handsome you are to me.

PPS. Dad is doing much better now.

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WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

October 9, 1955, Sunday

Dearest Carolyn,

I got a very precious letter from you yesterday afternoon. As always, I was glad to hear from you. I hope this letter finds you in good health and enjoying yourself. How are your parents? How's Al? Tell him I said hi as I have already met him at the wedding. I hope he remembers me.

Carolyn, what are you doing to me? You are spoiling me. I don't know what would happen if you didn't write to me. You don't know how grateful I am that you are sending me letters almost every day. In fact, four days in a row, I got some mail from you. I am very thankful, Carolyn. But remember this, I will always answer every one of them. You can rely on that. Except for the times I can't, like when I am sick. It isn't that I owe it to you—it's just that I care. I am interested in learning everything about you.

You know, today I've been feeling guilty about something. I did not follow your suggestion about getting enough sleep. I know you have been telling time and again about going to bed early. I went to bed at five thirty Sunday morning. I should feel ashamed, but I did have a lot of fun. Do you remember that lady I told you about? Mrs. Ryan? Well, she sent me an invitation to her little girl's birthday party. Of course, I wasn't the only soldier invited. There were six of us that showed up. We had everything from coffee to Scotch and all kinds of food. There were quite a lot of people in a tiny living room. They played all different sorts of records, mostly mambo and tango music. "Joe was doing the mambo." What the heck is the mambo? I just think it is a lot of nonsense. I can't understand it well, ha-ha! I learned very little about it, though.

Carolyn, I am not trying to make you jealous as I did to Lena. I don't think you should be. But I don't believe you are the jealous type anyway. In fact, I only danced for the fun of it. Why do I tell you everything I do? It's just that I feel I should be true to you, even if we were not in love. But you are all I've got on my mind. I don't

care what you think of me for saying that. I am still willing to wait to finally meet you as we agreed.

You're right, I never knew what jealousy really meant. I believe every word you said. I realized I was wrong about Lena. I've been wrong about a lot of things. As a matter of fact, I didn't know what love really was. I still don't know it very well. There's a lot of different meanings for many things. It is incredible how much you can learn from someone else. Like the guys here in the barracks when they discuss love. Believe me, I've picked up a few pointers here and there. Things I never knew about. From the way they talk about it, it's now clear that I have never been in love before. But I believe in time, I will learn. Maybe I will get to learn more from you in time. So whenever I need guidance, I know I can go to you. I never cared much for advice in the past from anyone.

You convinced me that you can learn from others. You may know things I don't. But I also know some things you may not. Well, for example, you may not have known about KP, which means kitchen patrol, or what a motor pool is, which is where all the trucks are packed and fixed when needed. You've got a general idea. A shop is where they grease the trucks. "B" maintenance is the driver's job to check the trucks for needed fixes. And this could be every week or twice a week. A "C" maintenance is required every two thousand miles you run your truck. During a "C" maintenance, a mechanic must give you a report on what needs to be checked and worked on. Sometimes they help you.

I hope my explanations are satisfactory for you. And if there is anything you don't understand, just ask me. You don't bore me with any of your questions. You are free to ask me anything. I will answer them truthfully. I am always glad to help you in any way I can.

Carolyn, it seems to me I made a few mistakes in the last letter. I wasn't trying to say your brother didn't like my picture. I think I know what you meant, though. If you ever see anything questionable in my letters, let me know. Maybe I can't seem to focus on my writing because people here start to argue and make a lot of racket over nothing at all. I like to stay clear away from those arguments as much as possible.



## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

Well, let's go back to what happened after the party. We all left around 3:00 a.m., and around that hour, it is hard to catch a bus. Finally, one came around 4:30 a.m. By the time I got in bed, it was around 5:30 a.m. Nobody woke me up for breakfast as I slept until one of the guys woke me up about 11:30 a.m. "It's time for chow," he said.

I asked, "What have they got, eggs for breakfast?"

Then he said, "Breakfast? Hell, it's time for lunch!"

Boy, I was surprised. And then I regretted that I missed church.

Well, after I had lunch, I did my laundry. While the clothes were drying, I sewed some other clothes that had holes in them. When they were dried, I brought them in and borrowed someone's iron. I never ironed anything before in my life, but I managed to do four sets of working clothes and three white shirts. It sure was a tough job. I understand now how hard you women work. But anyway, I learned something new. If you ever need a helper, just call me, and I will give you a hand. Okay, Carolyn?

Well, I am still sleepy, so I will close this letter and give you a chance to answer it. I am glad to hear that my letters do cheer you up.

Please don't forget to give my regards to your family. As much as I am anxious to meet you, I am interested in meeting them too.

Very sincerely,  
Joe

PS. My regards to "Angel."

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October 10, 1955, Monday

Dear Joe,

Hi there, Blondie! Well, here I am back with the pen, answering your most welcomed letter, which is such a pleasure. Well, shall I start by asking what you meant when you said, "even if I don't write

good?” To me, you do write very well! As a matter of fact, you write the most exciting letters. I like them all as they are very special to me.

Poor Joey—no peace or comfort when writing. I can only imagine how you feel. Say, Joe, how about trading places for a while, huh? You can take my comfortable chair and take it easy—just relax and enjoy how it feels when I’m writing to you. Well, just for kicks, let’s pretend we have traded places. Well, right now, the boys are making a lot of noise, and I can’t concentrate on my writing. One guy is asking me questions. Another one is joking and roughing around with me. Then someone asks to borrow some cigarettes or shaving blades. Oh, now I am finally getting a little peace. So where was I before I was interrupted? Well, as I sit on my bunk...oh, well, I can’t go on writing because the lights will be out soon. Maybe tomorrow I can go on to answer your letters.

Well, Joe, how did you like my pretending for a while? You see, I have an idea of what you must go through—how you sit on that hard seat in your truck, where you go for a little peace, and when you’re not driving on duty.

Yes, I am ashamed of myself for not going to church often enough. So I better pick up my heels and start going more often. Well, at least you have a reason, but me, I’m just plain lazy to dress and go through the trouble—quite disgraceful, isn’t it? For that, I ask God to forgive me and make me go next Sunday, even though I don’t deserve it. With God’s help, maybe I’ll be in better spirits and do my best for Him.

Well, Joe, here goes something your way: “Rain, rain, go away, and let Joey do his job in joy, and come back another day.” Gee, Joe, I wouldn’t mind if you sent a little rain our way. Southern California needs it. Isn’t it funny how some places it rains a lot and other areas it doesn’t get enough? Like Riverside, it’s too hot in the summertime! I can’t believe you like hot days. Wow, it’s just like stepping into a burning furnace—plain hell to me. I prefer medium weather—not too hot, not too cold. Here I am complaining again. That’s us all right, always complaining and never satisfied. It’s a wonder why God doesn’t punish us.

Well, my birthday has already passed. It was on September 13. Sometimes my birthday falls on a Friday, which is terrible—you know, Friday the thirteenth. I think that is the reason why I have such bad luck sometimes. This past birthday was a good one because that's the day I received a wonderful card from you. It was more than a gift to me. That day, I also had some ironing to do, but to my surprise, Carmen, my sis, did it for me. No one actually remembered my birthday, but I was appreciative of just being home, receiving a card from you, and having my chores done. That was more than I can ask than simply being remembered.

Don't be silly, Joe, you mean to tell me that you didn't know my hometown was in New Mexico? Why, Joe, I'm surprised you did not know that I was born there. Well, I guess I'm going to have to tell you more about me than expected. As I just mentioned, I was born in Belen, and most of my relatives live there. I have an aunt and uncle and grandparents in Jarales. I have a few more relatives in Albuquerque and Socorro. I have a few of my relatives living in Riverside and a few in Los Angeles and Long Beach. When I lived in Belen, I lived near the old town called La Bolsa. This is where Don Liberato lives. That's about all I have about me for now. Maybe there's something more, but I can't think of anything else at this moment.

Gee, I would like to see your masterpiece. I bet it's wonderful; you have a knack for inventions. Coming up with ideas is very interesting—it's quite a hobby. Well, well, congratulations on winning. So how do you park or back up a trailer? You didn't mention your idea. Here again, this is an original idea, like the radio you put together with your record player—that's really using your head. And then you tell me you don't have brains? I really like guys that come up with ideas, especially if that someone has a very special place in my heart.

Oh, "Angel" was here Sunday, and boy, did we chat all day. We even forgot to eat. My mom called us to eat, but we ignored her. We just talked about the past and the present. You were mentioned, of course—it was about me, her, you, her boyfriend, my friends, her friends, school, church dances, movies, games, pictures, old dates,

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carnivals, etc. We also talked about the trouble she had with a bad cold. She laid on my bed for a while, and we almost fell asleep, but we kept talking. We talked about clothes, jewelry, what we like and dislike—it was fun. Her boyfriend wasn't there—he was on vacation for the weekend, so she just came over to pass the time away. I was glad she came over because I didn't have much to do at home. I had already done the chores, completed my homework, said my Sunday prayers, and answered your letter. Also, this time, I didn't miss Sunday Mass—I went like a good girl.

Well, Joe, I have written more than enough, so I will conclude for the time being. May the Lord be your guidance.

Your most attentive friend,  
Carolyn Cortez

PS. Enjoy yourself and take it easy.

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October 12, 1955, Wednesday

Dear Joe,

This afternoon, I found the most beautiful letter sitting on my dresser drawer. Guess from whom? It's you, of course—my precious and most faithful pen pal whose letters I enjoy receiving almost every day. So here comes my reply to your most admirable letter. First, let me say that I sincerely hope this letter finds you well and happy. I hope this letter cheers you up as your letters do to me.

Well, Joe, as long as you had fun the night before, I don't mind you getting to bed late. I just hope you can catch up on your lack of sleep later. Now about Mrs. Ryan, I am so glad you enjoyed yourself at the party. I'm sure, Joe, this wasn't a "little girls" party, ha-ha! Wow, I wish I was at the party too with all the things you mentioned.

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

Yes, what is mambo? Whatever you learn, I hope you can teach me someday.

Oh, speaking of mambo, today I saw a movie called *Mambo*, a 1954 film. The dances seemed like the dirty type of dancing. Oh, I am so upset, Joe, I am burning mad and jealous that I don't ever want to speak to you again. Why, the way you enjoyed yourself with those girls, I just want to yell at them. Ha-ha! How did you like that act? I really sounded like a mad and jealous girl, huh? I even scared myself for a minute. Gee, I don't think I could ever feel as upset as others get. I wonder if I could ever. I really hope not. I'm actually not the envious type. *Envy* is another word for *jealousy*.

I like the way you feel about being faithful. There's nothing like being honest about things. It's the only way a person can trust what goes on around you by saying something in honesty. You no longer have to doubt or suspect or even guess the truthfulness of a person. That's one person you can trust, even to work for you. You more or less know what I mean, don't you, Joe? How can you tell when they are being truthful or lying to you? You really can't. Only God knows.

Don't ever say you are wrong, Joe. You have good opinions. I view things differently too, and everybody has a different idea. But that doesn't mean that you are wrong—no, sir! Remember, we aren't perfect at anything. We make mistakes all the time—little ones and big ones. But we learn by making errors. We can try to amend them the best way we can. So let's go on learning as we are still young.

Let's look at the case of "love." We know what it is when it's present and when it's not. Our hearts let us know this. Love is a little of everything—it's understanding, affectionate, honesty, charity, companionship, etc. Oh, there's so much more to it than just that. I could just fill up pages and still not get it all. That's what I know so far from others and my own experience, but I'm still learning. They say that it will explain itself when the time comes. Yes, you have been in love, Joe, but there are all kinds of levels when it comes to love. There's puppy love when you are just barely getting the idea of what it means. You feel it, but sometimes it fades away, and the more you experience life, the more you will learn for yourself.

From the ages of seven to twelve, boys and girls are just learning a certain kind of love—one I can't really recall. But between the ages of thirteen to seventeen, based on maturity, some fall in love really early, and some don't. Some finally start realizing it when they are in their early twenties, but all in all, love comes when you least expect it. Really, Joe, the more mature you are, you will have more knowledge. Like our parents, they obviously know more about love because they are older and have had experiences. We are just starting to come out of our shells. We have yet so much to learn about life. Me? I don't know everything out there. I just try to learn from mature adults, like teachers, parents, older relatives, priests, and friends. Well, sometimes, things that I have been taught can slip from my mind. In other words, I didn't let some things sink into my mind well enough.

I like the way you explain things to me. It's interesting. I don't have to guess what they mean now. It's good that you tell me what you know and I can tell you what I know. We can learn from each other, isn't that right, Joe? Pretty soon, we will have a lot of knowledge by putting our two brains together.

I make errors too, Joe, so I don't mind if you make mistakes. There's nothing to be ashamed of. Besides, I can always try to figure it out somehow. But if I don't understand, I will ask you. The same for you. If you don't understand something I write, I hope you will ask me too.

I agree with you about people who make so much racket when you are trying to write. It is hard to concentrate. That happens to me sometimes too.

Like you, I don't like to argue with others either. I only disagree with my brothers sometimes. Even with Dad, which I know I shouldn't. I end up regretting it later. It's especially not fair to argue with the one who started the argument in the first place, even if you disagree. We should come to an agreement or compromise and settle it calmly. Otherwise, it can turn into a fistfight, no longer with words. And that's bad. Oh man, I hate fights. I am a regular coward. I am called yellow, a chicken, wimp, etc., but I don't care. I just let them all be champs.

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

Boy, I remembered when Viola and Lily were always getting into fights. Viola Martinez is the girl who died in that wreck I mentioned to you about. Lily Fernandez, I don't think you know her, but she got married a while back. A few others were always on the warpath with them too. Last year, Lily, Rosie, and I used to hang out together. Toward the end of the school year, three weeks before Lily quit school, she and an American girl, Carol Smith, got into a fight. She and some other girls asked Rosie and me why we didn't defend Lily. After all, we were her friends, but we didn't do anything to help her out. They started calling us chickens. Of course, no one won because a man stopped by and broke up the fight, and he had to do that twice. I'm sure those girls were enemies for a long time.

Well, I shouldn't say anything about those poor girls. I just pity them for having weak minds. May God help them, for they are really nice girls—they just lack self-control. It's a small mistake, and I'm sure God forgives them for having bad tempers. People like that can't help themselves. I'm sure they try, but they can only ask God for strength.

Well, Joe, it looks like you learned something new—how to iron. Who knows, you might be better than me. Sure, man, I'll take you on to help me sometime. Do you mind if I call you whenever I need a hand? Oh, boy, what would I need a "hand" for? I want you to help me iron, not a "hand." Ha-ha! A "hand" won't help much.

Well, Joe, I believe I have written more than enough. So I better come to an end until our next letter, huh? Your regards were well-received from my family and "Angel," and many more blessings from me and God's guidance.

Cordially yours,  
Carolyn Cortez

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October 14, 1955, Friday

Dearest Carolyn,

Hi there, you pretty doll! You should see how relieved I am at this moment. I hadn't heard from you for a whole week. Maybe it wasn't that long, but I was very excited and anxious to hear from you. Every day when I would come back from my usual truck-run, I would tear the place apart, searching for your letters. I would then go and shout to the mail clerk, "Where's my mail?"

He would say, "None for you today, Joe B," as they usually call me.

Yesterday, after a hard day's drive and exhausted, I was so disappointed to find no mail for me. No lie—last night, I went to bed with a headache thinking of you. I kept asking myself, "What did I write so wrong to Carolyn that made her so mad she didn't want to write to me anymore?" Before I went to sleep, I then thought, no, of course not—not Carolyn. She wouldn't do anything like that to me—since she promised me that when something bothered her, she would just tell me.

Well, I finally went to sleep. The next morning, when I woke up, my head still hurt. I felt terrible as if I had a hangover. I didn't eat breakfast. I just made my bed, cleaned my area, and was assigned to a sick call. I was also required to wear a class "A" uniform. I had to drive my two-and-a-half-ton truck because the ambulance was being fixed. Before I went on this run, I was fifteen minutes late already. I decided to take five of your last letters with me. When I had time, I read them over. I would then try to remember how I answered each letter. But I couldn't remember what I would have said. It was such a stormy day too. It rained very heavily all day long. I sure felt sorry for the guys in the back of my truck getting all wet. It was a long day, and I kept thinking, "Will I get a letter from Carolyn?" I had made up my mind to write a letter to you when I got back to ask what was wrong.

When I got back, the first thing they told me was that I had two letters in my footlocker. Sure enough, there they were—two light-



blue envelopes. At first, I couldn't make up my mind which one to open first. I just happened to open the one with two cute little pictures—pictures of you. You look so adorable in both snapshots taken just for me, you sweet doll. That's what I'll call you—"doll." Is that okay with you? My best buddy and I were talking about a lot of things. He would show me his girl's picture, and I would show him yours. He said you looked like a doll—a pretty one. The first chance I get, I will take a picture of him and me together. He works in the motor pool too.

Well, I guess I got carried away telling you how sad I've been that I didn't get a letter from you. Don't worry, Carolyn, it wasn't your fault. I realize now that I was just too anxious and lonely. You are the only one who cheers me up with your beautiful letters. It was silly to ever doubt you, as you've told me time and again that you will never forget about me.

The first letter I read from you today was exciting. It was like reading a storybook that keeps you in suspense until the end of the story. When you told me about being all by yourself at night, dreaming, and looking at the sky in the quiet night, that touched me. But what was more touching was when you said you were thinking of me at the same time. The way you describe it was terrific. I could just picture you in that very spot you described, and it felt very familiar to me. Best of all, I like the way you expressed your faith in God. Men don't really do that. Also, there are quite a few girls that don't think of God as you do. I've had girlfriends that all they think about is fun and good times and never go to church. A man with a girl like you is a lucky guy.

Here I am answering your other letter. It's very funny as you are the first one that has called me "Blondie." I hope you like blonde hair, because that's what I've got all over my head. Although, that's about all that's there—no brains.

About the Bible, you may be right that they are all the same except in different languages. I don't really know more than that. Someday, I will sit down and try to read it. I hope you will teach me more about it.

K. L. ESTRADA

Carolyn, I couldn't finish this letter. I'll write another one tomorrow. I've got to put the lights out now. Good night and pleasant dreams.

Thinking of you,  
Joe

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October 16, 1955, Sunday

Dearest Carolyn,

Hi, Doll! This letter is the continuation of answering the last wonderful letter I got from you yesterday. Hope this letter gets into your little hands with the best of health.

Today is Sunday afternoon as I am also on guard duty. I didn't go anywhere last night like a good boy. I just went to the PX (post exchange) to play some pool all night and thought I'll write to you the next day. I figured that the mail will not go out until Monday anyway. There is not much racket in here today. There are just two radios on at the same time in different languages I don't understand and a few guys dancing to the music.

No, Carolyn, I don't think I would let you trade places with me. It's not that I wouldn't trust you. I just wouldn't trust the guys in here. Just joking, ha-ha! Besides, I don't think you carry any shaving blades or cigarettes, ha-ha!

Carolyn, when I do KP or guard duty, it's part of the service here. We don't get these jobs because we have done anything wrong or like you say, "goofed." I've been doing this since I've been in the army, just like millions of other soldiers. Everyone takes turns as I catch guard or KP once a month. One thing I am proud to say is I have never goofed in the army. I try to do my best to be sharp and a good soldier. I sometimes pass the inspections, and sometimes I don't for little things I've overlooked.

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

I am glad to hear that I'm important to you. We do have many things in common as you, too, are someone very special to me. I think you are someone I could respect. Believe me, I will try my very best.

You know, I wish the world knew about our beautiful friendship. So I was thinking the other day, since I know most of the people in Riverside listen to the station KWTC—that is, if it's all right with you—let me know what program you listen to most on the radio each day. I could dedicate a song to you on the radio. Tell me I'm crazy, I don't care. Maybe I am.

I tried to find a way to describe my prize-winning idea to you, but I just can't. I'm afraid you wouldn't understand it in a letter. But I could easily explain it to you in person. I promise I will someday.

I am sorry I missed your birthday. I know I wouldn't have forgotten, but I am happy to hear you got one of my cards that very day. I guess that happened by fate. I am sure there will be many more birthdays to remember, and I hope I will be around to celebrate them all.

Well, well, what do you know. The sun came out as I hadn't seen it this whole week. It makes me feel happy to see the sun once in a while.

It's almost time to go on guard duty and stand for a couple of hours. I will then be off duty for four hours. So that would be two hours on and four off. I will finish this letter when I get off. Gee, I'm hungry. I guess I'll go to the mess hall and beg for an apple or something. They might kick me out, but I'll give it a try. I've been thrown out of better places before anyway.

Well, here I am again, in the warm barracks. I just finished pulling two long hours on post. It sure was cold as it is a tiny shack—four by four (in square footage) with broken windowpanes. After I got relieved and someone took my place for the next two hours, I took the time to find a few good windowpanes to replace the broken ones. That other guard was grateful. Of course, I didn't do that just for his sake. I had to go on guard for another three more hours. I figured that later on in the evening, it would be even colder.

K. L. ESTRADA

You know, to my surprise, the guys had hot coffee heated on the stove. By the way, remember I told you I was hungry and was going to the mess hall to beg for food? Well, it turns out I wasn't thrown out. I ended up with some coffee and a piece of pie before I went on guard. Nice, huh?

Carolyn, remember you told me that night when you were alone looking at the stars and moon, and you were thinking of me and wondered what I was doing? Well, for kicks, I went to the dispatch office (motor pool) and traced back to the day you mentioned, October 5. They have everything recorded in the army of the soldiers' whereabouts. It was easy for me to do some research and find out where I was that night. Well, since your time zone is three hours difference, I figured around 8:00 to 9:00 p.m. your time would be 11:00 p.m. to midnight my time. So it was recorded that I was doing a run from one battalion to another. I remembered around 11:15 p.m., I had about thirty-five miles to go, and I estimated returning to camp by midnight. So now you know what I was doing at that same time. I often wonder what you are sometimes doing too. It is interesting to know what things you're doing whenever I'm thinking about you.

I'll close now. Seems to me in this letter I talked more about me than of you. I hope I didn't bore you. So until next time, so long, and God bless you.

Truly yours,  
Joe

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WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

*Answer from October 14*

October 17, 1955, Monday

Dear Joe,

Howdy there! Well, once again, it gives me pleasure to write to you. I shall begin by saying that I found a letter waiting for me this afternoon, which was a joy to read.

I am sorry to have disappointed you that my letters were delayed again. I know how you must have felt. I get the “blues” too. I also know what it’s like to feel loneliness or, like you say, a hangover from weariness. I, too, have felt that way this past week. It’s a little hard to explain but in an awful mood. I even felt like crying, and I did after I went to bed so no one would see me cry, ha-ha! Well, after that, I felt much better. Like they say, “There’s nothing like a good cry to make you feel better.” It’s silly, I know.

Well, anyhow, after my little crying, I often ask, “What’s wrong with me, Lord? I’m not sad, yet why did I cry?” God lets me know I am loved because He is here with me. Then I say to God, “Why are a lot of people unhappy?” Some are lonely because they don’t have family or friends. And some are without food and shelter. But the worst part is maybe they don’t even know God is there to help guide them. So I start to pray for those people, which makes me feel so much better. I try to make it a habit to talk to God whenever I feel lonely or sad. He is always there to help everyone, but we all need to call upon Him.

I am glad you enjoyed conversing with this buddy of yours. There’s nothing like having a trusted friend to share your daily thoughts and concerns. This buddy of yours sounds like he is pretty busy at the motor pool. So, you both think I look like a doll, huh? Well, I disagree, but if that is your impression of me, I am okay with it. If you really want to call me that, it’s fine with me because it’s your

opinion of me, and I trust what you say. So I will go along with that as long as you don't overdo it. By that, I mean, don't spoil me.

I've never dated blonde-hair guys in the past. Well, not until now. I can say this much—the color of hair, skin type, height, etc. never made a difference to me. It's the personality and characteristic traits of a person that counts for me.

I can't believe you say you don't have brains. If you can write and share your thoughts and ideas, that tells me you have brains. You can't argue with me on that, right? So, it's settled. You have brains, boy!

You know, you remind me of this kid in school. The other day, this boy told the teacher that he couldn't do this assignment on writing a short story for a report. He told the teacher he doesn't have the brains to do it. "Well," said the teacher, "you do have a brain, but you don't use it. So I will give you more work to exercise your brain. How's that?" Poor boy, but this really got him thinking, though.

I know very little about the Bible, but I am happy to share what I do know so far. And at the same time, I'll be able to learn a little more myself. For it really takes quite a lot to understand the meaning of the scriptures. So as I mentioned before, I believe that if we were to put our heads together, we would be smarter. Two brains are better than one.

I'm not really sure why people don't go to church or believe in God. I do think that people have tried to have faith but give up so easily. They just need to keep trying, and they will succeed. As they say, "If you fail, try again."

Maybe you are right. Who knows that a man could be lucky with me? God is the only one who knows. That could be your way of thinking, and maybe many people think that way too. But everyone has their own opinions. Let's say I hope a guy considers himself lucky with me. I can only do my best and to be what a guy would want me to be. For now, I think you make a mighty good man for a woman.

Well, Joe, I better be cutting off, for I have quite a lot of work to do. I don't really want to be too behind. So, if you wouldn't mind,

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I'll sign off for now. May this letter, when it gets to you, find you in the very best of health. May God be with you.

Love,  
Carolyn C.

PS. I forgot to ask you. When is your birthday?

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October 17, 1955, Monday

Dearest Carolyn,

Today I got another beautiful letter from you and cheered me up as always. I hope this letter finds you in good health. I am okay, thanks to the almighty God! Well, today, I slept until noon, as I was on guard duty last night. Guess who I was dreaming of? You, of course! I was dreaming that I was taking a snapshot of you as you passed in front of your house. I imagined you the same way as one of the pictures you sent me.

You know what? When I woke up, I got a wonderful surprise as I smelled a familiar perfume. I looked down, and there it was—a letter from you. I guess the mail clerk came to deliver the letter to me. But instead of sticking it into my locker, he decided to lay it next to me since he saw me in bed. Believe me, at first, I thought I was still dreaming. I just read your letter in bed. Then it was time for chow. After that, I went to work in the afternoon.

Yes, Carolyn, from now on, I will be a good boy and try to catch up on my sleep. No more parties for me. I just don't quite enjoy myself anywhere on the East Coast as I expected. Maybe it's just that I don't feel at home among strangers. The one and only thing that I enjoy honestly is your letters, nothing else.

Yes, that was a good act you portrayed about jealousy. If it was true, I would hate to be around a girl like that—she might tear my

eyes out. You're a good actress, Carolyn. You should be in the movies, ha-ha!

Yes, I am sure it was a little girl's party, but of course, at that party, there were other bigger girls as I was trying to have fun. Mrs. Ryan is a good mambo dancer.

You say you wonder if you would ever be a jealous type. You never can tell. But I'll let you know one thing: you will never have to worry about me if we were to ever become serious. Oh boy, you must think I am already taking you for granted. No, it's just that I like to dream.

Say, Carolyn, in a letter from you some time ago, you had mentioned something about hunting rabbits. Anyway, you hit the nail right on its head because that is an old sport that I used to enjoy. I hope your brothers like that sport too. It's fun to fire a rifle. I will teach you more later. Although I might have to buy you a tiny rifle. Maybe I can find something that you can handle—well, smaller than you. Just how tall are you? You probably already mentioned it to me before. Be sure you measure yourself before you answer this letter, okay? Hopefully, I am not asking too much.

You know something, Carolyn? A minute ago, I saw a friendly little poker game going on in the barracks. So I left your letter and walked up there to see the game. I got interested as I joined in. A dime was the limit to this game. In no time at all, they cleaned all the little change I had in my pocket. Now I wish I hadn't left your letter. That also means I should never leave you or something more dreadful might happen. I was never good at playing cards anyway.

My ex-girlfriend, Adela Perez, used to tell me about those fights you mentioned in your last letter. She also said that she used to fight with Lily Fernandez. I don't like fights either. When someone picks a fight with me, I try first to prevent it. When I know I can't, well, may the best man win. Most of all, I hate to see women fight as I know that they usually like to pull hair. I know Lily very well. I should because she is my third cousin. She was a sweet kid but was too much of a flirt. At least that was before she was married. As a matter of fact,



## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

we used to correspond for a long time until she got married. She used to talk about her wonderful husband-to-be.

Carolyn, it seems to me you are learning a lot of things about me when you mention your friends. Do you remember if Lily ever talked about me whenever you used to hang out with her?

Well, I'll close for now. And don't worry, I won't go back into that poker game again. No way! Good night!

Very sincerely yours,  
Joe

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October 20, 1955, Thursday

Dearest Carolyn,

I decided to write as I thought I would take advantage of the peaceful guardhouse I found a while ago. It doesn't look like a regular barracks, but it is. It is strange to see it quiet sometimes. Well, how are you? I hope fine. Yesterday and today, I didn't get any mail from you, so I thought I'll write to you as I am not doing anything. It's always a pleasure to write to you.

Boy, I am all excited now that my time in the army is running short—only forty-eight more days to go. The guys here all kid with me whenever they see me writing you a letter every day. They say, "If I were you, I wouldn't write so much every day because you will be seeing her very soon anyway."

I always tell them, "I enjoy writing letters to someone nice to me." And I will never stop, no matter what.

What I really wanted to write to you about was this wonderful dream I had. Anyway, I dreamed that my train was stopped at the Albuquerque depot. I looked out the window and saw you with my whole family. You had Helen, my little niece, in your arms. When I stepped out of the train to meet everyone, you were gone all of a

sudden. I asked my family where you were. They told me you were not with them. Then I looked all over for you, but no Carolyn. Well, when we were heading back home, driving my own car, I looked behind me, and there you were, sitting right next to Alice and my mom. You were just smiling at me.

What do you suppose happened next? Someone woke me up and asked me if I was going to eat breakfast. "Oh, leave me alone!" I said as I turned around to see if I could go back to that dream. But I just couldn't go back to sleep. That was the best dream I've ever had of you. I dream of you every night. Carolyn, have you ever been woken up like that before? I hate to be awakened from a beautiful dream like that. I dream of you at night and think of you during the day. Maybe that is why the days seem so long here. But it won't be long before you and I will meet someday with God's help.

Tell me, do you see much of Bennie and Alice? I suppose you know little Helen. She always sends me kisses and hopes to see me soon. You know, when I was in California, during my leave in April, she used to be my date. She and I would go riding in my car every day. She would say she liked to ride with me because I would buy her ice cream. I liked the way she would cuddle up while standing by my side. She would usually put her little arms around me. I love little girls, especially when they are beginning to walk and talk.

Are you the only girl in your family, Carolyn? You know, I often try to think back to your brother's wedding and see if I could remember seeing you there. But no, I just can't remember anything. The only thing I could remember was seeing Virginia at a distance with someone. That someone could have been you. Were you with her the whole time? Or maybe I can refresh your memory. Don't you remember me taking some pictures beside your sister-in-law, Rosalyn, by the church altar? I also took a few outside photos as I was beside my brother. He also had a camera.

Do you happen to remember after the happy couple was married, I drove a blue '47 Mercury with my older brother in the passenger's seat? If you were with Virginia, then you both were riding in George's car.

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

Well, I guess I'll go and clean up so I can get to bed early. Maybe I can continue that dream, I hope. So I'll say good night, and I'll be waiting for those cheerful letters of yours. Bye!

Admirably yours,  
Joe

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*Answer from October 16*

October 20, 1955, Thursday

Dear Joe,

Hi, my good and sharp soldier. Here I am, back at my pencil and paper, answering your most special letter that I received yesterday afternoon. So this morning, I am responding and hoping you are fine. As for me, up to the present time, I am fine. The same goes for my family.

Well, what can I say to dear Joe? Hmmmm...well, first I'll begin to say that it was fun trading places for a while. Did you enjoy being me? Ha-ha! I'll bet you did with so many girls around me. Well, I had fun, but I did not particularly enjoy being in your place.

Well, Joe, that's good that you have never goofed. You should get a medal. I am very proud of you. I think even the big shots would be even more proud.

Well, I have to go to school now, and the bus is coming. So bye for now...

Here I am, back from school. I think that it would be nice of you to dedicate a song to me, but I'm afraid I might miss it unless we have the same program you have there. Well, I listen to KWTC in the afternoon after I come from school and all weekend. My other

brother, Herman, sleeps during the day, so it's hard to listen most of the time.

What do you mean by “prize-winning idea?” I know what an “idea” is, but maybe you can explain the details so I understand completely.

Joe, why are you apologizing? How could you know when my birthday was when I didn't even tell you? Besides, birthdays are not often remembered, even if it's your own. So you have nothing to be sorry about. But either way, it's okay with me. I had a great day.

That's nice, you are getting sunshine finally. It's actually the opposite here—it's been very cloudy.

What did you mean by “being thrown out of better places before?” That reminded me of a time when someone was kicked out of a girls' restroom or auditorium. So I imagined that was where you were thrown out of, ha-ha!

There you go again, making me hungry. I just decided to get me something to eat just now. And don't ask me what I ate because I will make you hungry. Well, I think I will tell you after all, but don't get hungry, Joe, okay? I just had some meat turnovers. Mom made them deep-fried in lard, just the way I like them. When I make them, I bake instead of frying them. But with Mom's turnovers, I enjoy them by taking tiny bites at a time. I'm always careful not to leave crumbs for the ants.

I am very impressed that you took the time to research your whereabouts on the day and time I was thinking of you. Really, Joe, you have me in your hands. You bet it's exciting and fun to know what each other was doing exactly at the same time. I have come to enjoy imagination now that I have put them into practice.

While I am writing to you now, it's around 8:00 p.m., and you are probably in your bunk if not on duty right now. So I believe within three hours, the lights will be out. By then, I would be on my second dream, ha-ha!

WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

Well, handsome, I better sign off until the next letter. May our heavenly Lord look upon you. I wish you many blessings.

Yours sincerely,  
Carolyn Cortez

PS. Regards from my family.

PPS. Our “Angel” says hi.

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*Answer from October 17*

October 21, 1955, Friday

Dear Joe,

Howdy to my blonde and sharp Joey! Well, this afternoon, I found another letter from you, which I hadn't expected today. I was overjoyed—it's like heaven just dropped a message down to me.

Well, let's start with you. You must get used to people's ways. Like you, I just try to do good by others, even though I might not feel right about them. Thanks to people like Mrs. Ryan who care about others and make them feel at home. She's the kind of person who will treat people right, no matter what race or religion they're in or how poor or rich they are. Like you, soldiers, who travel from place to place, learn to get along with different people.

I used to be very shy and afraid to face people. I could just hide under the bed and never come out. Today, I have not gotten over my shyness. I sometimes get nervous, but I have to be brave and conquer my fears. It's awful to be this shy. I'm trying to overcome it, but I think I will always be this way.

Now, don't make me believe I could be a good actress. Otherwise, I will be bound to get an audition and be in for good. What a mess that would be, ha-ha!

Say, why don't you get Mrs. Ryan to teach you the Eastern mambo dances. That is if Mr. Ryan doesn't get jealous. Speaking of jealousy, you are right. I am not the jealous type. But if I were to ever get jealous, I hope you will remind me that there's nothing to worry about.

Yes, my brothers have enjoyed hunting ever since they were taught how to shoot. I used to tag along with them and go fishing as I like that sport. We have gone to both sports in the past few weeks. You may say I am a little of a tomboy. I used to play cars, cowboys, marbles, and other boy games with my brothers. I had no sisters to play with, so I played with them. Sometimes they would play dolls with me. Nowadays, I'm too old to play with them, so I do adult things like hunting. I can handle a rifle, but I'm not a good shooter. But if I were to be attacked by an enemy, I sure know how to scare them off. Of course, I wouldn't mind it if you were to teach me how to shoot straight.

Well, you're going to have to be a better gambler so you can win your few coins back. As the saying goes, "If you can't beat them, join them." So that makes two losers at cards. I am not that good at cards either. When both my brothers and Carmen were playing cards, I wanted to learn the game. But I ended up regretting it because I lost every time. I called them cheaters. One time, I lost enough money to pay their way to a show. They left me bankrupt. Anyway, whenever they ask me to join them in a card game, I just say, "No thanks." I will refuse until I learn a few tricks. But really, that game isn't for me. The same goes for the Monopoly game—I lose all the time. Now, I always play the banker. That way, I win either way.

Well, I didn't know Lillian Fernandez was your third cousin. What very little I know. I guess I don't ask enough questions, huh? Yeah, she's a sweet kid, but I must admit that she was a little flirt. But when she started hanging around Rosie and me, she changed a little—at least whenever she was with us. After she got married, Rosie and I lost touch with her. Imagine that—Carmen, Rosie, Lily, and I all hung out together. But when Carmen, Lily, and then Rosie got

married, I had to make new friends. Because when your friends get married, the friendship fades away. So I became friends with Loraine and Emma. I sometimes hang out with Loraine's friends at lunchtime, but mostly the three of us. But now Emma is engaged. So until she is married, we will remain friends.

You asked me if Lily has ever talked about you. As far as I can recall, she might have mentioned you, but I didn't know it was you, Joe. Lily talked about going to the post office to get mail. In fact, I used to go with her often to see if she received anything from you, but really, I didn't know it was you. I thought it was some other Joe. She used to say you were her boyfriend. I remember when she wanted to write you a letter to tell you not to write back anymore because she was getting married. She asked me for advice. I advised her to tell the truth the best way she could. But I don't know what she ended up writing. Besides, I don't like to read someone else's letters. When I asked her what she will do after writing that letter, she said, "Maybe I will find someone else to write to him."

And jokingly, I said, "Why not me?" Then I quickly said no because I didn't want to write to someone I didn't know. I would be embarrassed.

So she said, "That's okay, anyhow, he's way too tall for you." Other than that, I can't remember anything else she mentioned about you. Besides, I don't ask a lot of personal questions. Isn't it funny how the world turns? And now, I am really writing to you. Who would ever think this would be happening to us? It's unbelievable.

I think you have become one of the most meaningful pen pals in my life. You are a real person whom I can fully trust. Yes, I have had lots of friends, but I never had faith in them, except for Rose, Virginia, Carmen, and now you. Except for that guy I was dating that didn't work out, you are the only man I trust.

Have I ever mentioned to you about the men in my life? I guess not. I have dated two boys quite steadily. The first one was a boy from California, born in San Diego. I started going out with him in 1953, and it lasted only one year. It was short because I realized I had no reason to date someone I wasn't in love with. So I was without a boyfriend for quite a long time. I became distrusting of guys until I

K. L. ESTRADA

met this other guy. He seemed very friendly and was a gentleman. But he was too much of a kid and a flirt. He actually flirted in front of me, and it was embarrassing. He was girl-crazy and had no sense of responsibility. So I said no to men in my life at that point. I started to hate men because I heard of so many tales about them. I was learning only awful stuff and not focusing on the good side of men. Soon I learned to look for better traits and what I wanted in a man. I just wanted to study them from afar and never get too close. I became a big dreamer of the perfect guy for me.

I was asked on dates for over a year or so, but I turned them down most of the time. I only dated two guys that my brother, Herman, knew very well. But they were nothing more than just a friendly date, nothing serious. Then just this year, when I went to the prom, I met this guy from Camp Pendleton, whom I almost turned down. I wish that I had, but I went against my own standards. I had rules set for myself as I will share with you someday. Thanks to you, I came to my senses as I thought my little crush was love. You were the one that helped me realize that I did not truly love this man. I think it was sympathy I had for him, not love. You encouraged me to face the reality that I didn't really know this guy, and he was from a different state. You also warned me about soldiers from strange places and their state of mind.

So now, up to the present, you are my only true guy friend. I hope you can now see my point of view. I believe I've covered most of my past as far as my love life. It's not much but just about a document long.

Well, I better close for now. May God always look upon you, and may this letter find you in the very best of health.

Cordially yours,  
Carolyn Cortez

PS. You are only eight inches taller than me. So can you guess how tall I am?

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WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

*Answer from October 17*

October 23, 1955, Sunday

Dearest Carolyn,

Hi there, Doll! Here I go again, answering your precious letter that I just received from you yesterday afternoon. It is a pleasure to write to you. How are you? I hope fine and enjoying yourself. I am fine but not enjoying myself—not until I meet you.

Say, do you mean to tell me that my letters I'm sending to you are delayed too? Maybe we are getting too anxious.

Carolyn, you shouldn't feel ashamed about crying. In my opinion, I think it is natural for girls to cry. You know, I really wish I was there to comfort you—I would have given you my handkerchief, ha-ha!

You know, the one thing I've noticed in all your letters is you mention God a lot. I like that, for that is why I believe in you so much. All my life, I wanted to meet a girl like you—religious and kind. I am a Catholic, but not a very good one. And I believe with a girl like you that I could become a better Catholic.

That reminds me of my brother. He is Catholic. And when he married, he became a better Catholic. I am not proposing to you, Carolyn, but I am just stating an example. I just believe you are a very nice person, even though I haven't met you yet.

Carolyn, I hope you do not consider yourself ugly or anything like that. I hope you really do believe that you are beautiful in my eyes. One thing for sure, I really wish you could walk out of the picture and talk to me.

Well, let's talk about what I did yesterday. Well, I used to be in charge of the film projecting at the "C" Battalion for five months before I was transferred to the battalion headquarters in February of this year. Since then, last night was the first time I was able to operate a movie projector again. None of the projectionists here were present, so I volunteered to run the films as I have a license to work a pro-

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jector. Even though it wasn't a good movie to watch, I had fun, and everyone seemed to enjoy the way I operated it. It was an Egyptian movie called *The Barbarian*.

I went on guard the next day at 8:00 a.m., and to my surprise, I saw three cases of beer inside the post shack where I had to stand. I don't know who put them there. But when I got relieved, I carried all three cases of beer to the barracks. The sergeant of the guard asked me what I had there. I told him a white lie and said, "Oh, just trash." Before noon, my buddies and I drank it all as we formed a fairly large party. I took a picture of the party. I hope it comes out okay as I want to remember this day. Please don't get the wrong idea about me. I don't usually drink heavily. I only drink sometimes with my friends, just for kicks. I don't go for that kind of habit. I hate to see anyone drunk.

Tomorrow, we are having a parade in honor of a lieutenant colonel who is leaving us soon. We all hate to see him go as he is a well-respected officer of the army. I think I am going to have to drive some guys down there in my two-and-a-half-ton truck. I don't like to be in parades. I know it's an honor, but I still hate it. I hope I get to take some pictures out there.

Gee, I am running out of words. I can't think what else to write. Oh, yes, you asked me when my birthday is. It was on April 2. I am now twenty-three years old. You know, I celebrated my birthday at home as it was around the time I was on my leave of absence.

Well, sorry to cut it so short, but I can't think of anything else, so I'll close for now and hope to see you soon in January. Bye!

Always,  
Joe

PS. Regards back to your family and Angel!

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## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

*Answer from October 20 and 21*

October 24, 1955, Monday

My Dearest Carolyn,

I received two beautiful letters this afternoon, which always cheers me up. You are the most wonderful friend I have ever had. It is a good feeling to have such a trusting girl like you. I think we know each other very well, each other's feelings and beliefs. You see, I could tell you how serious I am with you, but I won't tell you that until I meet you first. I won't use the "L" word until I meet you.

In some ways, I feel as if we have been together for a long time. It is something I can't explain in a letter. The thing is, our eyes haven't met yet. I can't wait to tell you how I feel about you when we're face-to-face. I wouldn't care how you look on the outside anymore. I'm only interested in the inside. It's your personality that's important to me. But I hope you know how attractive you are to me on the outside. I just don't want you to feel any different. To me, you are pretty. I want you just as you are—the whole package.

I know we have a lot to learn about each other still. But just like you said that time will tell. I'm sure it will, and I'll prove it to you. I am not taking this situation for granted, but I believe in us. Haven't I told you lately that I trust you too with all my heart? I've trusted other girls before, but I was wrong. To me, I feel you are very different from all the rest.

Yes, it is funny how things turn out. And yes, you've told me before to try not to get too anxious. Well, I've been eating my heart ever since. It is true, I shouldn't get serious until we meet. It's just that I cannot get over the happiness I feel every time I read your letters. You make me feel a part of you. And then I become more excited with every passing day. I'm counting the days I have left here. At the present time, I have forty-four more days to go!

I know our letters aren't "love" letters but of a great friendship—more than anyone could ask for. Believe me, I feel like the luckiest

guy in the world to have someone like you write to me. Tell me one thing, Carolyn, don't you sometimes feel the same way I do?

What's this? I smell a different kind of scent. Did you change your perfume?

So you got my two letters on the same day too, huh? Isn't it nice to get more than one per day? But either way, I would rather get one letter at a time because it keeps each day enjoyable.

You say you are still a shy girl today? You see? We have another thing in common. I was a shy kid, just the same way you described yourself, hiding from people. Around 1948, I decided to put my foot down and start being more like other people. It worked. Today, I'm still a little bashful but trying to be more alive. Oh, Carolyn, I can hardly wait to meet you. I'll bet you're a lot of fun and full of spirit.

Yes, I intended to ask you about the men in your life, but I just thought we would talk about it in person one day. If it is all right with you, we can talk more about each other's past when we meet. I wouldn't be able to explain my history very well in a letter.

I am glad to hear you recalled what Lily said about me. You should have written to me then, Carolyn. You weren't too embarrassed when you finally wrote to me, were you? I am glad you finally wrote to me, though. What would have happened if you hadn't?

After Lily stopped writing, I received letters from another girl in California and another one from my own hometown in New Mexico. They obviously did not last long. They are all married now.

I just got back from an emergency call. We had to fall out into the rain to pick up the guard shack. The guard who was on duty was inside the shack when it fell. The guard wasn't badly hurt. I only thank God I was not on guard duty tonight. What a terrible night.

Oh, yes, we had a parade today in honor of a lieutenant colonel. That is one time I forgot to take my camera with me. I wasn't in the parade as I really didn't want to be in it anyway. But I had to go for the troops at the "D" Battalion. There are forty guys from each camp. And we gathered about two hundred men from each of the five battalions to march in the parade.

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

You make me laugh, Carolyn, to hear you say that I make you hungry. I wish someday you could taste one meal in the army. Some of the meals they serve us are pretty decent. The delicious ones are prepared every two to three days a week. But some meals I would say that not even a hungry dog would eat them. Like tonight, we had a fairly good meal. I hope you don't get hungry now. We only had steak, but they were only four-inch squares. You are the one that makes me hungry, especially when you mentioned fried meat. Yummy. Now I'm hungry. How do you like that? I made myself hungry.

It must be easier for you when you get hungry for a snack. You can just open the icebox and raid it. Me? What do I do? Nothing, except smoke up a Lucky cigarette, or I would go to the dayroom and get a Pepsi-Cola from the vending machine if I have a nickel. Now, at the PX, they only leave it open for just one hour where we can buy some potato chips or candy. Speaking of candy, I love candy! My father, when he was alive, spoiled me with candy every day. I used to eat candy a lot. Maybe that is why I am skinny now. I don't eat much since I've been in the army, as I am losing some weight, I noticed.

I guess I'll close for now. I've got to go to bed, as I've got KP again tomorrow.

Faithfully yours always,  
Joe

PS. I am five feet and seven inches. So you must be 4'11". Ha! And you call yourself Shorty?

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*Answer from October 20*

October 24, 1955, Monday

Dear Joe,

Howdy, my sharp soldier. Once again, it gives me pleasure to answer your most appreciated letter. I just received your letter this afternoon and glad you are doing fine. As for me, up to the present, I am fine, except for a slight cold. I just hope you don't catch it from me.

This afternoon, as soon as I got off the bus, I ran home because I had a hunch that a letter was waiting for me. It seems like I get correspondence from you every Monday. Sure enough, there it was, a sealed envelope just sitting on my dresser next to your picture. It was as if you were there in person talking to me. Only the voice is different—my own voice reading as I stretched across my bed to read it. I almost fell asleep reading. After that, I just laid there thinking until my mom came in. She said, "What kept you? The supper is ready. Say, are you sick?"

I said, "No, I'm just tired."

Mom then asked, "Tired from running? Why were you running?"

I told her that I was just anxious to get home. She then asked me how you were. I told her, "Fine." And I ran to the kitchen to eat.

I didn't help Mom cook, but I did do the dishes and some other chores. After that, I started to answer your letter. But soon, Dad got home. Then Al, Herman, and Carmen came home. They were out hunting again. They caught one, so they came in bursting with laughter and commotion. So I was busy writing when the three musketeers came in my room and jokingly pointed a rifle at me. They said, "Put your hands up and hand over the letters and stationery!"

So I said, "Please, mister, it's of great value to me. Take the stationery, but not the letters."

Soon the joking was over, and they sat at the table to eat. But they continued to joke at the table and kept interrupting my writ-

ing. So I decided to join them. Then they started teasing me, saying, “Writing again, huh? We just betted that you were writing to your... what was it you said a while ago?”

I said, “Come on, you guys.”

Well, they continued to tease me about me writing letters to you and telling jokes. So I had to stop writing for a while until the coast was clear. Finally, everyone went to bed, and now I have peace and quiet, except for some cats fighting outside, and the ticking of the clock.

Today was quite a day. During the school lunch hour, I went to town to buy a “get well” card for my aunt as she is sick. I also bought more stationery. When I came back, my friends at school wanted to know what I bought. Then they started to tease me about my secret writing. They asked me, “To whom are you writing to?”

I said, “Oh, my boyfriend—what about it?”

Here they were, thinking I didn’t have a boyfriend. They became so curious and asked, “What’s his name? Now don’t lie to us.”

I told them your name, and Loraine said, “Why, I know him. He’s that nice fellow. A gentleman too.”

I was so pleased to hear that.

Well, Joe, that was how my day went. It was too much in one day for me. Now, here I am at peace by the stillness of the night as I gaze out the window. It is quite dark and half dawn while I’m still answering your letter.

Yes, forty-eight more days to go. Time sure passes by quickly, and if it’s God’s will, we will finally make our acquaintance.

Your dream was exciting indeed. Say, maybe I can try to pick up from where you left off to solve the mystery of what happened. I agree with you about waking up in the middle of a great dream. Nothing is worse than not being able to complete a mystery.

You like children as I do. I just admire little kids.

Well, I have not seen Bennie and Alice lately. We have been wanting to visit, but something always comes up.

Thinking back on my brother’s wedding, I do recall being with Virginia the whole time. I sat with her and Rosie in the church. We

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sat at the far back so we could take pictures of the bride. During that time, that man, Amari, was taking pictures. Halfway during the ceremony, Virginia and I went to take Rosie to school. Then we went into town to do an errand for Carmen. We got back on time before everyone was heading out to the reception. So then we got into our black and white two-tone '53 Ford and went riding around, honking. We finally got back to eat. That's when I remembered seeing you. I also saw you again when we were at Virginia's house. You were talking with Al and one of my cousins when we walked out of the house. That's when Angel said hi to you. Then, we were on the way to see Nestor's kids. That's all I remembered.

Well, Joey, I think I better sign off until the next letter. May the Lord guard you and keep you safe in all tasks and events. Regards from all with the sincerest blessings.

Sincerely yours,  
Carolyn Cortez

PS. Excuse my crooked writing.

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*Answer from October 23*

October 26, 1955, Wednesday

Dear Joe,

Hi, sharp soldier. Today I received your most welcomed letter that I was more than glad to receive. I hope you are doing fine. As for me, up to the present, I'm doing fine as well.

Now to answer your letter. Thank you for the flattery. You are also a pleasure and an honor to write to as well. The important thing for me is that you are enjoying yourself.



## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

No, your letters are not delayed. It was delayed only one time as I recall.

Well, let's pretend here...thank you for letting me use your handkerchief. Ha-ha!

As I mentioned to you before, I am not a very good Catholic. Although I do try my best. Now we have a chance to become better Catholics together. All we can do is try, right, Joe?

So what would you say to me if I came out of my picture, Joe?

No, I didn't know you had a license to run a movie projector. That sounds very interesting.

So you told a "white lie."

"Thou shall not lie." You slipped, but no one is perfect. Don't we all "let go of the axe" sometimes, Joe? Well, as long as there wasn't any damage done, you're okay.

Here's my opinion about boys drinking. It's okay to drink once in a while—two to three cans may be fine. More than that can form a bad habit. I'm so relieved that you don't go drinking heavily. You know, when I first read that you and your buddies drank it all, it surprised me. But reading further along made me relieved. Say, Joe, are you sure you weren't drunk when you wrote to me? Ha-ha! Anyhow, it sounded like quite a celebration. I'm glad you had fun with your buddies.

I hope you had fun at the parade. Yes, I agree with you that you must do things, even though you don't like doing it. It's similar to my situation whenever I am in a play. I don't like to be in performances, but I do my best to play the part since I was chosen. Also, I never want to disappoint others. If I were to tell you all the things I dislike, especially related to school, you would just faint. But I believe you know exactly how I would feel, just as you expressed your dislike for the army. Yet, both of us must learn to cope with and honor the policies they want to teach us.

Now I believe you would like to know what I have been doing lately. It's not much, but I have been studying a new subject at school. It's about marriage and many other personal things related to it. We all need to learn how to live successfully in life. We were asked things

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like why we marry, what's expected of marriage, and its meaning. We have just started the first chapter today.

I was invited to a party sponsored by the Spanish club, and I was approached by two people. But I turned them down. I had some reasons for not going. One reason was one of the persons who invited me was my ex-boyfriend. I think he was dared by someone to take me out. You know how guys always dare one another. Anyway, two other reasons were that I had a lot of homework, and I had no way of getting there. The main reason too is that I wanted to spend more quality time to write to you. That's more important to me than going to parties.

Tomorrow night, I need to practice for a play. Then I have some ironing to do when I get home. I also have two reports due on Friday. One of them is a storybook. Well, Joe, there's not much else that's of interest to mention.

Oh! By the way, I saw our dearest friend, Angel, yesterday. We chatted for a few seconds, then off to our classes before the bell rang.

I almost forgot to mention that I couldn't pick up from where you left off in your wonderful dream. But I did have an interesting dream last night of you and Alice and Ben. Well, in my dream, I was in a strange house, and then you guys came in to ask me if I could help sell some chili. I saw a truck full of chili—half with red and another with green. I remembered I kept teasing Ben about never passing any opportunity to make money. Alice told me that I was better at keeping track of the amount of chili being sold because I was good at mathematics. You and Ben were busy washing the chili. Man, what a dream. I was also surprised because I don't know Math that well, much less know how to measure quantities of things.

Well, Joe, I believe I better sign off. I hope this letter leaves and finds you in the very best of health, and may God bless you.

Truly yours,  
Carolyn C.

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## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

*Answer from October 24*

October 27, 1955, Thursday

Dear Joe,

Hi, Blondie, o' pal. How are you doing? Fine, I hope. As for me, I am fine, thanks to our Lord. Well, today, I got your most beloved letter, which pleases me so. Thanks, Joe, for saying you trust me. It makes me feel better knowing that. I would even try harder to be trusted and never lose that confidence from you. I also have come to trust you too, which I felt from the first letter I received from you. Why? I really don't know. Maybe it's just a feeling, I guess. I can't deny that I feel the same way you do about our friendship as you described in your last letter. I believe we both have this sort of bond together.

No, of course, I was not embarrassed to write to you. It was a favor for Virginia, and I felt it was a good deed for the day. I really wasn't going to, but then I said to myself it won't hurt. After all, I knew that the soldiers got awfully lonesome in the army. So I put my foot down and decided to write to you. I first mentioned this to my ex-boyfriend, and he agreed as long as I kept it friendly. He obviously knew how lonely soldiers enjoyed receiving letters. In fact, he said he received letters from many pen pals when he was in the army. He liked that I was truthful, but later on, he said he wanted to read the letters you wrote to me. Of course, by that time, I had already decided to break up with him. So he never had the chance to read your letters.

Oh, you poor guys out there in the rain. Why, there ought to be a law against that. Gee, you're liable to catch a cold. I'm so glad it wasn't you in that shack. Thank the Lord!

You can bet that you would find me in the icebox. It's a wonder I don't just move into it. Ha-ha! Sometimes I get so hungry it's pitiful.

K. L. ESTRADA

Someday you will get to eat those tasty o' homecooked meals again your mom makes—no more army chow. There's one thing I don't go for much—candy and Coke. Yes, there are times I will have them for kicks, but Coke actually makes me sick. I, too, used to eat a lot of candy when I was younger. But Mom used to give me chocolate laxative, which I didn't really need to take. I would raid the whole box, but since then, I had enough. I began to hate chocolate, so I guess that set me straight.

Well, today, I practiced for the play as I mentioned in my last letter. My role was to play a football player. Can you believe that? It's an awful act, and I hate the position. But I'm doing it for their sake. I play a man—the best player on the team who completes the field goal. It's a pep assembly where you cheer and talk about the players. I was on the Riverside's team, and the other group was the team from Ontario. My team's aim was to win, while the other side loses on purpose. The Ontario team had to look goofy by stopping in the middle of the game to salute the Statue of Liberty every time instead of paying attention to the game. This made the Riverside team look sharp and alert.

Why they chose me for this act? I don't know. I don't even know how to play football. But I have to be a good sport, I guess. Sometimes I think they read my thoughts. I am a good sport, but I don't really care for games unless I am participating. No one really knows that about me except for a girl I talked to one time. And now you know. Maybe this girl exposed me somehow. Anyway, I don't like it.

Well, I believe I will cut it short for now. So until our next letter, may God be your protector throughout the day and night. Blessings and regards from the family and Angel.

Cordially yours,  
Carolyn Cortez

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## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

October 27, 1955, Thursday

Dear Carolyn,

Hi there! I thought I would drop you a line tonight since it isn't time to go to bed yet. I would have written to you yesterday, but I had taken my truck to the "B" Battalion and spent the night there. I was sent there because my truck was the only one that passed inspection. The other trucks were brought back to the headquarters for inspections. If I had known that I was going to sleep over there, I would have taken my tablet to write to you.

How are you? I hope fine. As for me, up to the present, I am okay, thanks to God.

Did I say I slept last night? Heck no! I was awoken twice last night because I had to drive. If I did get any shut-eye, it would have been no more than one hour. And today, all day long, my truck didn't stop running for more than a minute. Guess who was driving? You guessed it, your Blondie.

Gee, isn't it terrible how I always get carried away talking about myself and my troubles? How about you? How are you doing in school? I bet being in classes all day is not fun either. You'll be done with school by the time I'm discharged from the army. Everything comes to an end in time, if you are patient. Of course, there are things in life you would never want to come to an end. But that is the way it is. "Take it as it comes," I always say. But always try to make the best of your life.

Tell me one thing, Carolyn. How do you like Riverside? Are you enjoying yourself there? Or would you want to live in a bigger city instead? Oh, gee, I ask you the silliest questions, don't I? You might think I am going crazy or something. Maybe I am.

I hope you will excuse the paper I am writing on. I hate to write letters from a tablet. I don't know why. It was the only thing that I could afford right now as I am broke. But I'm getting close to being paid soon, and I will be rich once again. This will be my last payday in the army, but they don't pay much anyway.

K. L. ESTRADA

There I go again, talking about my troubles. You might say, “Why does that blonde guy keep talking about his problems when I have my own issues to deal with, like homework?”

What subjects are you taking in school, Carolyn? Have you ever taken biology? Boy, I used to hate that subject. I didn’t stay in school long enough to find out if I passed it. I don’t think I was going to with the report card I got.

I don’t know if I ever mentioned this to you yet, but I didn’t finish high school. I quit around two weeks before the end of the school year of 1951. I was in tenth grade. I was a little behind anyway and didn’t want to flunk.

I think I’ll have to close for now as I’ve still got to answer Bennie’s letter I received today. And after that, I am hitting the sack.

I wish you all the best. Bye-bye!

Love,  
Joe

PS. My best regards to your family and friends.

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October 28, 1955, Friday

My dearest Carolyn,

Tonight, I am the corporal of the guard. So I decided to type you a letter. I just relieved the sergeant of the guard. The time now is twelve midnight. I went to bed at around ten o’clock. I know, I know, you’ve told me many times to try to get eight hours of sleep. Believe me, I do try. But it’s different tonight—I have a duty. And you know how it is: responsibility comes first in the army.

How are you today, my faithful pen pal? I hope that when this letter gets in your hands, it will find you joyful and in good health. As for me, I am just fine, thanks to the Almighty God. This morning, I went on a dental call. One of my teeth was decayed. So I had

it refilled with silver. First, the dentist had to numb my gums so I wouldn't feel any pain. Then he put the filling in. It took him almost all morning, but he did a good job. I drove to the dentist in my own transportation—a jeep. It was fun to drive it in traffic. I went to the highest speed. Don't worry, I am a good driver, I think.

Well, here I am in the orderly room all alone. I've got to stay awake or be sorry. I'm not too sleepy anyway. I have my combination radio and record player here with me, and I'm listening to soft music. Sometimes I have people coming in and out. Some of the guys are just coming back to the headquarters. They come in to return their passes and then spend a few minutes with me. They only talk about their travels and what they did while on the pass. They are also trying to make me feel bad because at the moment, I couldn't go out and leave my post. Of course, there's always the time to go out, but someone else must take my place.

Boy, the time sure flies by while I'm just typing a letter to you. The time is now 2:04 a.m. I still have four more hours to go, and that is at 6:00 a.m., and then I will be off duty. It's a shame that I have the whole weekend off, and I don't have a single coin in my pocket. I'll be glad whenever I will be out of the army because I used to always have money in my pocket when I was a civilian.

Well, I killed some more time again as it is now 3:29 a.m. I just woke up the other guard to relieve the guard on the post. That guy was ten minutes late, so I chewed him up and asked him why he was tardy. He said he had trouble finding his shoes. Of course, that was his excuse, and I'll go along with that. But wait, here comes the guard who was on post. He tried to blame me, saying that I didn't wake up his relief on time. He just slammed the door and went away upset. He was not fair as he didn't let me explain that it wasn't my fault. Oh well, he will probably cool off by sunrise.

I sure hope today will be another sunny day like yesterday. I like sunny days like California.

Carolyn, I expected a letter from you yesterday and today, but I guess I was wrong. I had better get it this morning, or I will be a sad kid throughout the weekend. You see? See what you've done to me?

K. L. ESTRADA

You already have me spoiled. I now expect letters from you every day. I just wonder now what I would do if you didn't write to me. I just know I would be even sadder by now from the time I first got drafted in the service.

Well, I must be getting sleepy as I am making too many mistakes in this letter. So I will close for now. I hope you will excuse all my errors as you know I am not a typist. I sometimes type just for kicks.

Give my best regards to everyone, and to you, my very best wishes.

Love,  
Joe (Joey) Cotillo

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*Answer from October 24*

October 30, 1955, Sunday

Dear Carolyn,

I got a very interesting and exciting letter from you yesterday afternoon, which was a pleasure to read.

I am all dressed up to go to church, but it is raining cats and dogs. I'm wondering if I am going to find a ride. The church is pretty far to walk, and if I do, I would be soaking wet. So here I sit and wait, hoping someone with a car goes to church.

How are you, Carolyn? I hope fine and getting better from that cold. What do you mean I'll probably catch a cold from you? I already had a cold, so I think you got it from me, ha-ha! Anyway, I don't mind sharing everything with you.

You were anxious and ran home to see if you got any mail from me, huh? You should see me tearing my bed upside down every day,



looking for any letters from you. If I don't find anything in my footlocker, I start looking for the mail clerk. Whenever he sees me coming, he starts running, for he knows what I'm after. So I start chasing him all over the field. I know when he runs away, he has a letter or two for me. That's his way of kidding with me. I never give up chasing him. When I catch him, I better see a letter from you.

Say, I can hardly believe that your mother asked about me. I know your father knows me very well, but I can't recall if I've ever met your mother. She must be as wonderful a mother as mine is. I am actually flattered that people ask for me.

So your brothers tease you about me, huh? Well, then, I shouldn't feel like the Lone Ranger as the guys tease me here too. Don't mind them, Carolyn, it's all in good fun, I am sure. I like to be teased myself. You know, I bet you turned all red in the face when they teased you, ha-ha!

Don't let them steal your stationery either as it is lovely stationery. Next time, take the guns away and point it at them. Tell them to leave you alone. And if they don't leave you alone, I will have a word with them when I come in January. Or I might take a jet and go to California right now. Why, of all the nerve of bothering my Carolyn.

Carolyn, you silly girl, you consider me as your boyfriend too? It made me very happy to hear that, though. Does blue stationery mean you are writing to a boyfriend? I heard somewhere that specific colors of paper have different meanings. Is that right? I don't know much, except what I've heard.

I could picture your friends asking you all those questions, asking you who was your mysterious pen pal. If you hadn't mentioned it to them before that you write to me, I could see why they would be surprised. You mean to tell me that only Angel knew about me?

Well, it looks like I am going to miss church this morning again, and the rain is coming down harder now. So I hope you do go to church today and say a little prayer for me. Please pray for me every Sunday in church, okay, Carolyn? Because I hardly go to church due

to being on duty or having lousy weather like today. I know God will forgive me if I miss church, even when I'm lazy.

Boy, when you talked about your brothers going hunting, it made me homesick. I sure wish I was over there to join them on their hunt.

Well, I heard that next month, I will get my orders. I will have to go to Fort Dix, New Jersey, or Fort Meade, Maryland, to get my discharge papers. I will clear the battalion about a week before I am supposed to get out as I have to complete a physical examination. If something is seriously wrong with me, they will not let me out. I would have to stay in the hospital until I am well. But as far as I know, I have no health problems. So I am pretty sure I will get out right away—I hope.

Believe me, I feel bad I didn't go to church. At least I tried. Well, it is chow time now—I'll be back soon.

Hello again, I quit writing at noon as I went to eat, and after that, I laid down for a little while. I ended up falling asleep. I slept all afternoon until someone woke me up for dinner. The time now is 6:30 p.m. It sure is awful to just lay around and do nothing. Don't you ever feel that way too? When you are not doing anything, you become restless. And again, when you are doing something uninteresting, you feel like taking it easy.

I left your letter again as someone loaned me his iron. I had to partially iron a civilian white shirt.

I am running of words, and I think I'll take a walk outside. It stopped raining, although it rained most of the day. I don't mind the rain anymore as I have become used to it. I just don't understand why people would want to live here. I sure wouldn't.

Well, after my walk, I went down to the PX, but it was closed. But I played a few games of pool, and I am proud to say I won every time. As I recall, I could never beat Bennie, my brother. He is too good of a pool player than I could ever be.

Boy, the chow they had for us today was awful. There wasn't anything I liked. So I was starving when suddenly, someone decided to buy each of us a hoagie. I don't know if you know what a hoagie

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

is. It is something we don't have back at home. It is a slice of baloney with cheese, lettuce, onions, peppers, and tomatoes inside a big bun. Of course, I take out all the onions as it is my worst enemy. I hope I didn't make you hungry. If I did, you could just go raid the icebox. I know I would.

Well, someone here is trying to sing, making a lot of commotion. I cannot concentrate anymore, so I might as well close for now until the next letter. I hope I can get another one tomorrow. Bye!

Yours forever,  
Joey

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*Answer from October 27*

October 30, 1955, Sunday

Dear Joe,

Howdy, there! At this moment, I am putting my pencil to work, answering your most welcome letter.

My goodness, Joe, they are working you so hard, even at night! That's so cruel, man, yet you make time to answer my letters. Although, that only means one thing—that you care, which I am appreciative even more.

What is this, Joe? You said that you are ashamed of sharing your troubles with me? Aren't we the kind of friends who share our hang-ups? It's true, I have problems, but you, too, have your own share of struggles. I am always glad to lend an ear to anything you want to say. I will understand and help you to the best of my ability. And you can do the same for me as well. This is what makes our letters interesting, Joe.

Well, as for me, I am doing all right in school. Of course, there are times I get bored, especially when there are many lessons to do. But as you said, "Take life as it comes." And do the best that you can.

No, I would never like to live in a big city. And they are building a freeway. When I first came to California, I remembered it took me a while to get used to living here. I am now getting the hang of things. The people here are very friendly and make you feel at ease.

Say, rich guy, how about passing a little of your wealth this way? Ha-ha! Yes, the army does pay very little. That's such a trouble spot you are in, man. It's no wonder you don't have enough to buy new blades, much less stamps. Money has wings. It doesn't matter how great or small. My dad's pay is very high, but it's all spent in a matter of days. By Friday, we will be eating leftovers, and our icebox is almost empty. I can only imagine what it's like with your situation. You don't have to worry about me. I can bear it.

How interesting that you got as far as the tenth grade in high school. By the way, what school did you attend? No, I didn't take biology. I have heard of it as I wanted to become a nurse. It's a required course for nursing. But I didn't take that subject because I would have had to skip other classes. And if I did that, I wouldn't be able to graduate soon. If I decide to enroll in nursing now, I would have to study for another semester.

I wish I had taken biology in tenth grade, but my interest at the time was to be a secretary. So I took up typing but then dropped it. That's when I decided nursing was for me, but it was too late. I didn't have the mind to make a sound decision earlier, so I will take the required subjects for graduating this year.

I don't know now what will happen to my career. All my skills are pretty standard, which is sewing and cooking. I might as well work as a store clerk or a waitress. Also, I know Spanish, so I could be an interpreter. I could type a little, but it's required to type sixty words per minute without mistakes. I can only type nineteen to twenty-five words per minute. So I guess a secretary is not for me. The subjects I concentrated on are social studies, garment making, English, Spanish, Acapella, and gymnastics.

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

Wow, I believe I have mentioned enough about myself. So for now, I'll close. May God bless and keep you. Goodbye until next letter. May this letter get to your hands and find you in the very best of health.

As always, I remain,  
Carolyn Cortez

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*Answer from October 28*

October 31, 1955, Monday

Dear Joe,

Hi there! Here I am, back at the pen, answering your letter, which is always a pleasure. I have just finished baking cookies and making popcorn balls, which I made for the kids or gobblers for trick-or-treating. Now, while I am writing to you, I am eating one of my creations with coffee. So every once in a while, I get interrupted by a trick-or-treater. My uncle was here earlier just to drop by to visit. Herman and Carmen went to see the parade and then the midnight show afterward. Finally, Al has gone to bed after all his fooling around with his silly jokes. Mom and Dad have gone to bed too, but it's only 8:00 p.m. now.

I am creeped out with the wind blowing outside in the dark. It's making funny sounds. I realized that the wind noise makes a Halloween night much scarier, which reminds me of when we used to go trick-or-treating as youngsters. It was fun then, but now I just enjoy giving out treats to the neighborhood kids. I also like to have a good time with adult entertainment, such as dances, parties, parades, and shows. Of course, tonight, I'm not participating in anything except for handing out goodies to the children and writing to you.

K. L. ESTRADA

You know, Joe, I never have gone to a midnight show. I almost went one time, but it was too crowded, so I came back home. Other times, I am too sleepy to go as I like to go to bed early to wake up refreshed. I enjoy my beauty sleep.

I hope you're doing fine with your teeth and the pain is gone.

I think your typing has improved, Joe. I know you said you weren't a typist, but you could have fooled me.

So what was that siren I just heard? Police or an ambulance? Maybe both attending to a wreck probably. I hate accidents.

Man, I bet it is fun driving a jeep. I can just see you in it. Say, Joe, how about teaching me how to drive? Since you are a good driver, I could learn to become one too.

Boy, you sure have a lot of things to do to stay awake while on duty. But doesn't soft music make you sleepy? It does me—puts me to sleep right away.

That's some excuse that guard told you about not finding his shoes to justify why he was late. So what reasons do you use? Someone stole your clothes or had trouble waking up? And what is your best solution for staying awake? Is it loud music, coffee, cigarettes, drinking beer?

Well, Joe, I better close this letter. So until I receive your next one, may the Lord look upon you.

Truly yours,  
Carolyn C.

PS. Try not to lose your shoes so you don't have that excuse for being late. Oh! And don't speed too much in that jeep or you're liable to fall into a bottomless pit.

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WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

*Answer from October 26 and 27*

November 1, 1955, Tuesday

Dear Carolyn,

It is a pleasure to sit down and answer two of your precious letters I just found in my footlocker this evening. I don't know why I often get two letters at the same time, even though they are post-marked with different dates. Anyway, two is better than one to cheer me up.

How are you, Carolyn? Have I mentioned to you yet that I think your name is such a pretty one? It matches your face perfectly.

I hope you are fine. Me? I am good, except for my hand. I injured it today. Well, let's start with what happened this morning. Here I go again, telling you about my adventures. I hope I don't bore you, but it's just something to write about.

Well, early this morning, a very good Catholic who goes to confession every Sunday woke me up. He invited me to go to church with him. He explained that it was "All Saints Day," a day of obligation. "Sure," I said, "why not?" I will make up for last Sunday's Mass. I got ready in a hurry, got my pass, and took off. After Mass, we stopped at a café for breakfast. I had my favorite dish—sunny-side up eggs and sausage. What is your favorite breakfast? After that, we stopped at the corner where I developed some film and picked up some prints. From there, we went back to the camp. It was 9:00 a.m. when we got back.

You know what I found out when I came back to the motor pool? That I was considered AWOL. With all the hurrying and excitement of going to church, I forgot to ask permission to leave my post. I have to see the motor officer tomorrow morning. I didn't see him today because they put me on duty right away—I had a run with my truck to the "A" Battalion. From that point, I took ten men with me to Fort Mott where I used to be stationed before they transferred me to the headquarters. The "C" Battalion was in Fort Mott as it was

very close to the Delaware River. Oh, how I used to hate Fort Mott. It was very inconvenient and outdated with no water and not much of anything else. The worst thing of all is that the closest town was about eight miles away. There is nothing there anymore as both the “C” and “A” Battalions were in one location. Now they have moved to permanent and more modern areas.

Well, we got there at 11:00 a.m., and everyone wanted to eat in town, even though they packed sandwiches for us. We all said, “The heck with those sandwiches, let’s go into town.” So off we went to Salem, NJ, which was the closest town. Salem was very popular when I was stationed in Fort Mott. Well, Carolyn, I took a lot of pictures of Fort Mott that I will share with you someday. This will give you an idea of what kind of life I lived there for nine solid months. Anyway, after we came back from town, the men started the detail they were assigned to do. Since I was the driver, I didn’t have to work.

I got tired of sitting in my truck, so I wandered down to the beach where the water was splashing against the rocks at the edge. I walked up to the stones where the water would go up to my shoes and splashed a bit. Suddenly, a fairly big wave came up strong enough to cause me to slip from the rocks. My left hand broke my fall, but it sure hurt. Okay, it’s not broken or sprained, but it was sore. After that, it started to swell up. If I feel worse tomorrow, I will call in sick. I don’t think it’s a serious injury, so I’m not worried. One thing I’m grateful for is that it wasn’t my right hand. Otherwise, I wouldn’t be able to write to you. I got back to the headquarters after taking the ten men back to the “B” Battalion.

Well, how did you like my one-day adventure? I am not bragging. Maybe, in a way, I am complaining.

You are welcome to use my handkerchief anytime you need it. You don’t have to ask me for it—just reach out and get it. Keep that in mind, okay?

What would you say to me if you came out of the picture? Why, you can talk about anything. You can tell me things that you like about me or you can just put your arms around me and whisper words in my ear. Ha-ha! I’m a scream, aren’t I?



## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

No, I didn't get drunk. I never try. I just enjoy drinking beer. Okay, so why did you ask me that question? I guess I must have slipped somewhere in the last letter. I seem to mention things I don't really mean to say. I usually read what I've written before I seal the envelope. You'll be surprised how many mistakes I find—I guess I missed something.

There's one thing I need to ask. Why did they pick you to play a star football player? Maybe because they know you are as good as I think you are. You are smart and good-looking as the rest of the girls. I know very well they don't pick out just any girl for the right parts. I know you will not be a flop. But I'll keep my fingers crossed and pray for you if you like. You'll show them, won't you, Carolyn? Be the star of the play for my sake, okay?

Oh, now, Carolyn, you can find time to write to me and still have fun. So go to parties and enjoy yourself.

How sweet that we both dream of each other now. I love dreaming of you every night.

Well, I've got to quit now. I am going to bed as my hand is hurting a bit. It's probably just sore.

Bye-bye!

Love,  
Joe

PS. It's now thirty-six days...

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K. L. ESTRADA

*Answer from October 30*

November 2, 1955, Wednesday

Dear Joe,

Hi, handsome! Upon receiving your letter this morning, I was, as usual, more than glad to hear from you. I am so happy you're doing fine. As for me, up to the present, I am doing swell. As for my cold, well, I got tired of it, so I handed it over to someone else. Too bad it had to be my brother, ha-ha!

I do declare that I don't mind sharing things with you too. It's like the saying goes, "Share and share alike," right, Joe?

Yeah, I can imagine you turning the place upside down to find my letter, including chasing the mail clerk, ha-ha! It must have been like a wild goose chase, poor guy! Say, I bet you're quite good at running. That means you could easily be a good ballplayer. Watch out, everyone! Here comes lightning flashing by...

Say, no wonder I didn't see you at the wedding. You probably flashed by, as fast as sound. I think my mom knew you when you were just a tat in diapers, ha-ha! I'm just kidding, but I think she remembers you during my Aunt Gadalupe's funeral way back when you were just a kid. She obviously didn't recognize you at the wedding, for you were much older and changed a lot. So, I'd say you are no longer the "Lone Ranger."

So you say I can point a gun right back at my brothers, huh? Well, since I will have you in my life, I don't have to defend myself anymore. You will be my hero.

I really don't know much about colored stationery. All I know is blue is appropriate for guys, just like floral paper is fitting for gals.

You are correct. Angel was the only person who knew about my mysterious pen pal. Now there are three more others that know I am writing to you.

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

Well, too bad you missed Mass last Sunday. Maybe you'll have better luck next week, which should be sunny, right, Joe? If not, I will pray for you.

I wish you much luck on your physical examination and a very safe journey.

Man, I do feel that way too, Joe. I am just used to staying busy all the time, but the moment I don't have anything to do, I get very restless. It's pitiful. Yet when I am working hard, I crave to relax and just do nothing.

Hoorah for the champ! That's amazing to me that you win all the time playing pool, except when you play with your bro. Maybe you will end up beating your brother with more practice someday.

Say, that hoagie sandwich did sound good. I think I may try making myself a sandwich just like that. I would say it's a "sub" sandwich as they call them here.

Well, Joe, there isn't much more to say. As Dad tells it, "I am running out of my English." So I'll cut it short this time. May this letter find and leave you in good health. And may God watch over you. So until the next one, so long, Lone Ranger. Hi ho, Silver! Away!

Truly yours,  
Carolyn Cortez

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November 4, 1955, Friday

Dear Joe,

Hello, big chief! This afternoon, I decided to write you a few lines to let you know I'm doing fine. I'm hoping the same for you.

Ten minutes ago, I was reading an excellent book, a love story. It is called *Courage Has No Color*. After that, I started to read something else, but it wasn't that interesting, so I stopped. Everything seemed so quiet, and I had no one to talk to. Mom is finishing up sewing a blan-

ket while Dad is shaving. The rest of my family have gone off someplace. I thought about joining Mom in a sewing circle, but I changed my mind. Then when I came to my room, I gazed at your picture and started wondering about what you were doing right at that moment. That's when I decided to write you a letter. So here I am, stretched across my bed like a lazy girl with my stationery box next to me.

Isn't it funny how the time flies? Pretty soon, you'll be home—"home, sweet home" for you, Joe. I am sure you will be glad to get out. I guess, after the army, you'll be doing something you like at your free will—no more saluting "Yes, sir," right, Joe? Like others say, "Free from rules and regulations." There are so many things you have to conform to while in the army. Isn't it funny how we like to feel free and independent? Of course, there are things we do against our will. I guess there are benefits to abiding by the rules and doing our duty. As long we are doing something right, nothing wrong or evil.

So what does your mom think about you coming home from the army? I bet she's overjoyed. Knowing most moms, they always like their children to be home with them. They may have faith that things will be all right, but there is still fear of the unknown and what things can happen when they're far away. Moms have a special bond and love for their kids as they always want the best for them. Yet, we tend to disregard our moms' advice and constant worry. We see it as nagging or complaining instead. They say most girls understand their mothers better than boys. Maybe because they are closer to their mothers.

Joe, do you think I say too much? I get into a brainstorm sometimes. Anyway, I better come to a conclusion and cut off right here until the next letter. May the good Lord bless and keep you safe. I hope this letter finds you in good health. So enjoy yourself and take it easy.

Fondly,  
Carolyn Cortez

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WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

*Answer from October 31*

November 4, 1955, Friday

Dear Carolyn,

Howdy, Doll! I got a letter from you this evening, which always gives me the pleasure of reading. I hope this letter will find you in the best of health. As for me, I am okay, except for my left hand. Unfortunately, it kept hurting and was still swollen up until today. When I went back to see the x-ray results, they told me I had fractured my hand. The bone was slightly split. They put a cast on and told me I had to wear it for two months. That means that I would have to go home to New Mexico with it on. I sure hate to go home like that. But you will probably not see it on me by the time I see you. Hopefully, it will be off by then. I am all right—I don't feel any pain now, except that it feels funny to carry extra weight around my arm.

The bad thing is I cannot do any more driving, which I'm unhappy about. I really like driving. But that also means I don't have to do the KP nor the guard duty. This part is good. As it turns out, I will take it easy for the rest of my time in the army. I've "got it made in the shade!" Ha-ha! All my buddies joke with me, saying that they are now going to keep me longer in the army, although the medic already told me that it should not affect my discharge. Even after my release, I could see a civilian doctor. Carolyn, I hope you are not worried about me. I am fine. Everything will be all right.

Carolyn, I really shouldn't laugh, but I couldn't help it—the way you sealed the stamp on the envelope and wrote my address upside down in place of your address. I just thought you were being creative writing upside down, ha-ha!

There you go again, making me hungry. So you were baking cookies and popping popcorn for the kids and forgot about me, huh? This kid here is starving, and you talk about something to eat. I will think up a trick on you if you don't give me a treat, ha-ha!

K. L. ESTRADA

I guess you must love kids a lot to stay up late for them. I can't believe that you weren't scared to stay up late, especially on Halloween night. I could just see your face if I was to sneak up to you and say, "Boo!"

It will be a pleasure to teach you how to drive. Have you ever driven at all?

You know, we seem to be very much alike. I don't go out much as I've mentioned to you before. I don't enjoy myself here and much less go out with this cast on my arm.

Well, Carolyn, you haven't told me what program on the radio you listen to so I can dedicate a song to you.

Carolyn, I am sending you a couple of snapshots from the night I played poker and lost all my change. One of the photos is where we had that party with the three cases of beer I found. Now you can see the real deal instead of imagining it. I am just lending you these pictures. I want you to give them to Bennie and Alice so they can send them to my mom. Do this when you have a chance or give them to Angel. But try to use this as an excuse to see Bennie and Alice. I'll close the door—I mean the letter for now, until the next one. Bye!

Yours,  
Joe

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*Answer from November 1*

November 5, 1955, Saturday

Dear Joe,

Hi, there! I got a letter from you this morning, which I was more than glad to receive. I am just fine. But, gee, I am so sorry to hear about the accident you had with your hand. I hope you'll feel much better by the time you get this letter. By the way, what were

you doing so close to the edge? Were you trying to commit suicide and leave me without a pen pal? Or were you just collecting seashells?

Speaking of shells, I love to collect them. I remember the time when we went to Long Beach, where Molly, our cousin, lives. Anyhow, she took us sightseeing on the beach during the day. There's no water among the rocks during the daytime, so it's the best time to look for seashells. So as we were looking for the pretty ones, I found what I thought was a perfect one. But to my surprise, there was something alive inside the shell. I quickly dropped it. It turned out it was a live starfish. There were many crabs too—large ones that my brother kept putting on me to scare me.

Speaking of the ocean waves, I know that the water rises to the rocks very quickly at dawn without expectation. Before we went to collect seashells, I saw a sign that warned about strong currents at sundown.

It sure was fun to go to Long Beach. I haven't been there for such a long time. I would like to go there again to see so many amazing things. Man, Molly sure knows her way around the beach areas. She knew all the shortcuts and is an excellent driver at that. I think she drives better than her husband. One time, all the women drove in one car and the men in another. Well, the men got lost, and the women started looking everywhere for them. My guess is they were looking for us too. So it turned out to be fun because we got to see more areas around Long Beach.

I hope you took a sick call and checked out your hand to make sure there wasn't anything serious. Even though it doesn't hurt much and looks like only a scratch, you should still report it.

Well, good for you going to church. That was nice that you were invited by your buddy. He seems like a nice gentleman.

You beat me this time, Joe. That breakfast sounded so delicious. Well, for me, I like to enjoy a morning meal when I can take my time to eat, no rushing. But I only do that on the weekends. The rest of the week, I just grab myself a toast with butter and some coffee to go.

That was too bad for you, Joe, getting yourself into a mess like that, being absent without permission. I know what it's like to be absent-minded sometimes when you are in a hurry. Maybe God will help you to never do that again.

K. L. ESTRADA

I can't wait to see those pictures you mentioned when you went to Fort Mott. That would give me a better idea of the way you lived for nine months in that place. Even though you didn't like it much, it must have been quite an adventure, right, Joe? I don't think that it is bragging or complaining. I want to hear what is happening in your life. It's all fascinating to me.

You're not kidding, man. You are a scream—a good one. I may reconsider coming out of that picture to talk to you. You sure have some imagination.

I am not surprised at your mistakes, but it's clear that I make more mistakes than you do.

Thanks for your support, Joe. I was surprised that the play went pretty well. We really showed them! I guess I had low expectations. But all week long, I was praised for doing a good act. I admit that this was something I am not used to—being told how good I am. I am speechless and don't know what to say, except for "Thank you." But after a while, there's only so much praise I can take. I have a feeling that you would feel the same way too, right, Joe?

Well, it's near closing time. So until the next letter, goodbye, and may many blessings be upon you.

Truly yours,  
Carolyn Cortez

PS. Thirty-six days is almost over. Hoorah! Joe will be marching home!

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November 7, 1955, Monday

Dearest Carolyn,

Hi, Doll! I don't know where to start. I've now collected three letters from you as of today. I feel like a heel for falling behind on



## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

answering you, but I'm so happy to receive them all. I don't know what I would do without you as my pen pal.

Well, I went to church Sunday morning and got back just in time for chow. In the afternoon, I went to Camden to see a movie with a buddy of mine. After that, we decided to go to Philadelphia where we saw another movie. You know, this pal I was with is not my kind of company. He is too fast for me. He has a way with girls, and I don't. Every time I turn around, he is talking to a female. What I'm trying to say is that I can never just walk up to any girl and start talking to her. I need to get to know her first before I do that. If I weren't around to pull him away, he would spend hours talking. He would tease me and say, "Don't you like girls?"

I would answer him, "I do, but I came to see a movie, not girls."

Let's face it, Carolyn, I am a stuck-up. I am still afraid of girls. One thing I'll say now is I'll never be fearful of you. I am not telling you all this to make you more interested in me—nothing like that. But still, I don't care to have any girlfriends here. In fact, I don't have anyone but you as that's what is important to me.

Well, we were back on time before the lights went out. And before I fell asleep last night, I started to think of you and remembered I didn't write to you. I was very sleepy, so I decided I'll respond to your letter the next morning.

You were in my dreams last night. I dreamed of you playing in that role you mentioned. Somehow, I saw Angel in the play too. There was a group of girls singing something when I saw her. She pointed to a girl in the crowd. She was blonde. When I looked at her, she smiled at me. This was supposed to be you but with blonde hair. You then walked up to me, still smiling. I was wearing very greasy clothes, so I didn't want to get too close to you. I asked, "Are you, Carolyn?"

You said, "Yes."

You were a beautiful blonde, and then I thought to myself, "What does she see in me?" Suddenly, you turned around and went back to sing. I don't remember anything else after that.

K. L. ESTRADA

Well, let's switch to a different subject. How are you? I hope fine. Me? I am okay. I don't feel any pain in my hand, except for this uncomfortable cast. It really makes my arm itch, and there's nothing I can do about it. I have trouble eating without my left hand. Putting on my clothes is another problem. Well, I guess I'll soon get used to it.

I hate wearing this cast, but it will benefit me tonight because I don't have to stand guard. I do not have to do KP either. The only thing I will miss is driving my truck. So what do I do during the day now? Nothing! Today, I spent the day just taking it easy as I think that's what I'll have to do for the rest of my time here in the army.

Carolyn, I am glad to hear you like Riverside. Also, I didn't think you cared for big cities either. It's the same with me. I prefer small towns.

Carolyn, I know I have so much more to write to you about, but I will quit for now. I will write again tomorrow. The oil burner went out, and it is freezing in here—brrr! Good night!

Always,  
Blondie  
(a.k.a. Joe Cotillo)

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*Answer from November 4*

November 8, 1955, Tuesday

Dear Joe,

Hi, handsome! How are you doing? Fine, I hope. I hope your hand isn't bothering you much. Me? I am fine. Say, you got Dad's saying, "I've got it made in the shade."

Well, they better not keep you there longer because your family and I will not be happy about that.

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

I have not tried writing upside down, but I could if you don't mind reading that way, ha-ha!

Oh, dear! I am sorry I made you hungry again—that's bad of me. I'll try to remember not to tempt you on food once again. Well, if you can think up a trick, then I deserve it.

Oh, guess what, Joe? I'm too excited to say this, but I am a new aunt! Imagine that? Herman just arrived from the hospital to share the good news. I have a nephew now. How about a cigar? I am sending you one.

Well, I wasn't afraid of the trick-or-treaters. But I do get scared easily, especially if someone sneaks up on me.

No, I have never driven a car before. That is so nice that you're willing to teach me how to drive.

I really thought I mentioned the programs I listen to in one of my previous letters. Well, here it is again: I listen to KWTC in the afternoon after I come from school and all weekend. I also listen to the AVLW program.

So you found or stole the three cases of beer? Hmm...if you found them, it's "finders keepers, losers weepers." Ha-ha!

What a grand idea to have that as an excuse to visit Alice and Bennie. I'll have to drop by sometime this week anyway. And by the way, they were actually just here Saturday. We were just leaving for the drive-in when Alice and Ben stopped by. We sure enjoyed their visit. They are doing fine, and the little sweetheart, Helen, is sweeter than ever. She clings to her dad and hits him in the stomach like it was a drum. When her dad, Bennie, teases her, she yells, "Momma, look at the wolf." Helen is such a character. And about Alice, she looks terrific with her new eye. It doesn't even look like an artificial one. Man, we talked and laughed all night.

Oh, wow! We have visitors right now. Our cousins just arrived! I'll be right back.

Here I am back to writing. I went to just say hi and decided not to join the conversation.

So about the pictures you sent. I thought they came out excellent!

Oh, boy, I have some interruption again! The kids are gathered around me and asking a lot of questions. I decided I will give them some cookies to keep them busy while I write...

Okay, I'm back again! Oh no, there I go again, mentioning food. It's beginning to be a habit of mine, huh, Joe? For some reason or another, the subject of food always seems to come up.

Well, where was I? Oh yeah, pictures—they really came out nice, but why did you close your eyes? Or were you trying to wink at me but couldn't? Ha-ha! Nice try! Who are the girls behind you? Just kidding. There were no girls, but there were some pinups in the background. I did not notice until Al pointed them out to me. Well, my brothers kept teasing, and I just defended you by saying, "My, you seem to be jealous." Gee, after all, they are just pictures, right, Joe? Also, my brothers kept talking about your hand. They said you probably were hurt by some girls. I said, "No, silly, he got hurt while he was on duty." I described it exactly how you mentioned it to me in your letter—the way you slipped on the rocks when the ocean wave came in. My brothers always make jokes out of nothing. But maybe because the words "waves" and "rocks" in Spanish are feminine ("olas" and "rocas"). I know, it's silly.

Anyway, looking at your pictures, I noticed how drab your barracks look. You poor thing, what an awful place to be in. Your bunks look hard, and it seems like such a dark place. I pity you.

Speaking of which, yesterday, I came across some information about Fort Dix near Trenton, NJ, where you were at. I found it in *The American Legion* magazine. The article talks about how recruits are trained for the army and how they turn civilians into soldiers. It describes the details from the time you enter basic training to the transfer of specialized training camps. Man, basic training seems so hard. First, it's the manual of arms, clothes fitting, meeting bunk inspections, learning basic cooking and cleaning. Then it's battlefield indoctrination, instructions on using different guns, cleaning rifles, constructing tanks, proofing fox holes, eating in the field, etc. Man, that is all too much for me. You would find me dead in the battlefield indoctrination. I really don't see how you guys can stand it.

WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

Luckily, I can read books and learn about the facts. Otherwise, I would not have any understanding of what you go through in the army. Unless, of course, you can tell me about a few details here and there.

Well, Joe, I guess I better be closing for now. Many blessings to you, and I hope you will get well soon.

Always,  
Carolyn C.

PS. Be careful for my sake. I don't want to see a broken-up boy.

PPS. What did you mean by "I'll close the door"?

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November 8, 1955, Tuesday

Dear Carolyn,

Hi there, Doll! Well, here's the letter I promised to write, which I postponed from last night.

How are you? I hope fine as that is my desire for you. As for me, I am still kicking. I didn't do a thing all day. But it is out of my control for the remaining of my time here in the army.

How is school? What did you learn today? Anything new happening in California? Yes, I noticed that Riverside is still growing into a little modern town. I can hardly wait to move back there. You know, I just figured out how many days it will take to finally arrive there—sixty-nine days, to be exact. It seems like so many days, doesn't it? You've been very patient with me too, which I appreciate very much. You haven't failed me yet. Instead, you make me happier every day.

Well, let's see what I did today—besides nothing! I went to the PX and played pool with one arm for a while. When I got tired, I watched TV for the rest of the morning. The sergeant kidded with

me, saying, “What are you doing here at the chow line? You didn’t earn anything today, not even for one meal.”

Ha-ha! I get a kick out of watching everyone work while I just sit around all day. This seems to upset them.

Carolyn, I just heard someone here yell out that there’s a new movie in town, and it starts in ten minutes. I think I will go and see it as it is supposed to be pretty good. I hope you’ll excuse me for a while.

Well, here I am again. It was a great movie. It was funny. The lights were off at the barracks, so I brought the stationery down here in the orderly room (office). It is nice, warm, and peaceful in here. I know you may be used to writing on a table all the time, but I’m not. I am used to sitting in my truck with the stationery box as my writing table. I hope you’ll excuse my mistakes.

The sergeant of the guard is the only one here with me. He was just telling me how long he has been in the army—twelve years! I asked him how he could stand being in the military for so long. He said that he just got used to being in the army, just like I’m accustomed to the civilian life. It’s true, no one likes to change once they become familiarized with something. I know I could never get used to the army as I see the civilian life much more enjoyable. Don’t you agree, Carolyn?

Today, I got a letter from a Mr. and Mrs. Henry Gallegos from California. You might not know them. They are my ex-girlfriend’s uncle and aunt. They are very good to me as they treat me like a son. I remembered whenever my ex and I would quarrel, they would do their best to bring us back together. I know they can’t force us to be together, but they still want us to remain friends. They probably wish we can always be a couple, but I will never go back to her. I haven’t seen her since. Maybe I will tell you about her someday. I have so many things to say to you, but it’s hard to explain in a letter.

Say, how did you like the snapshots I sent you? It was not my idea for you to see me in the pictures. It was mainly to show you the background. I know my brother would just laugh at the sight of those photos. Say, speaking of which, you mentioned some time ago

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

that you would take a senior class picture. Be sure you don't forget to send me one, okay? And don't be shy about it.

I forgot to tell you about my buddy, Barajas, a guy from my hometown of New Mexico, came into the barracks one night to visit me. Secretly, he started reading one of your letters. He was almost finished when I caught him. I quickly grabbed it from him. He said that I have finally done what I've always wanted to do.

"I know it was not right to read someone else's letter, but I know why you are so interested in that girl now. She seems like a nice girl—a religious type," he said. And then he continued to say, "I wish I had someone like her." I could tell this buddy of mine was not joking with me. It was such a compliment and made me proud to be with a girl like you. I've known this from the beginning.

Oh, Carolyn, you've been so wonderful to me. But sometimes I fear that you might think differently of me when we finally meet in person. I know I shouldn't feel this way, but this has happened to me before. I have never been popular with girls until you came along. What I mean is, you haven't failed me yet, and I hope you never will.

Let's talk about the weather. God answered your prayer, Carolyn. Because today was a beautiful day—not a single cloud in the sky. I hope I get to see more days like this. How is the weather down there? Is it getting colder?

Well, I guess I'd better close this letter for now. So until tomorrow, and if I have a chance during duty hours, I might write you another letter. I really enjoy writing to you. Bye, Doll. I'll see you in my dreams.

Love,  
Joe

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K. L. ESTRADA

*Answer from November 7*

November 10, 1955, Thursday

Dear Joe,

Howdy-do! Here goes the reply to your most welcomed letter, which is always a pleasure to get. How's my soldier doing this time? I hope fine. As for me, I'm doing good.

Gee, Joe, you really must trust me to tell me all about your affairs with your pals. I admire your honesty.

Now, now, Joe, girls don't bite. Why be afraid of them? Well, there are some dangerous ones, like prostitutes. But I believe guys like you can spot these types and avoid their temptations. You, obviously, know better than I do. Other than that, there's nothing to be afraid of women.

Wow! What a dream you had. Me as a blonde! I can't even imagine me like that. Say, do you like blondes like Marilyn Monroe? She's quite a character, huh, Joe? She used to be a brunette. Also, did you know she's married to a man named Joe?

Well, Joe, I am glad you are doing better with your hand. Speaking of the cast's itch, my dad had the same experience when he broke his leg. As you probably already knew, he got hurt on the job. Anyway, he couldn't stand the itch, so he went and drilled a hole into the cast, which was big enough to scratch it with a stick. He was so relieved. Also, the other reason for creating a gap in the cast was to cool off his leg, as it gets pretty hot after wearing it so long, and with the hot weather like here, it was better for him. We teased him about it and called the hole his air conditioner. Some people said that it was also an excellent place to hide his money. But he had some explaining to do at the next doctor's appointment. The doctor ended up telling my dad that he did not blame him for creating a hole in the cast, but he really should not have done that. Well, how about that, Joe? Now I hope you don't try to do that yourself.



## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

Poor Joe. I wish I could be there to help you any way I can. But I am glad you are taking it easy.

Well, as far as what is happening here, today, we had a big event. It was a parade at the base, celebrating Armistice Day (for the Veterans). So we have the day off tomorrow in their honor. There are a lot of other parties happening this afternoon. And tonight, there's a bonfire where the school kids gather around to dance, which they call "shake dance."

Instead of going to a party, my friends and I decided to watch the marines play football at the base. I wasn't thrilled about it because they weren't that good as they did not get any field goals while we were there. So I asked to go home before the traffic starts. They really wanted to stay, but I kept insisting on going home. Then one of my friends said she knew why. She said, "You probably want to go home to see if there is any mail from José." That's what she calls you, even though I don't like that name.

So I would always correct her, "I like 'Joe' better."

She then said, "Forget about Joe for a while and enjoy the game. Look at all the marines—you have your pick."

I said, "Look who's talking." I know her so well. In school, she used to drool over her boyfriend at the time. And I would kid with her and try to distract her by pointing to other boys. Now it's her turn to tease me.

My friend was right—I wanted to go home to see if there was some mail from you, but I also wanted to relax and have some peace and quiet from all the activities. I also had my usual chores to do at home. So they finally brought me home after talking my head off. They kept calling me "molesta" (troublesome). Well, by the time I got home, sure enough, there was a letter from you. Gee, Joe, I shouldn't be so sure, huh? It's like taking it for granted.

Oh! You know, Joe, last night, I went over to the hospital to see Carmen's baby. He's a doll! Guess who was there visiting too? Alice and Bennie. So we all talked for a while, and I mentioned your pictures. I told them that I would go visit them one of these days. So,

K. L. ESTRADA

God willing, maybe I could go over tomorrow since it's my day off from school.

Well, that's all for now. So I will be signing off. May God bless and keep you. I hope this letter finds you in the best of health.

Truly yours,  
Carolyn Cortez

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*Answer from November 2*

November 11, 1955, Friday

Dearest Carolyn,

Hi there, my faithful girlfriend. How are you? Yesterday, I got two of your sweetest letters, which I always look forward to reading. I hope you are fine and enjoying life as it comes your way. As for me, I am okay, but as far as enjoying life in the army, it's pretty dull. I didn't answer your letter last night as I thought it would be better today instead. After all, I have all day to write to you, which is a holiday. Also, since there are no mail-runs today, this letter will go out tomorrow.

Boy, today, I got up at 11:00 a.m. I was up, at least, to eat lunch at twelve noon. We had fish, which I like, but not how they fix it up in the army.

Gee, Carolyn, your mother has quite a memory to remember me at your aunt's funeral. I'm guessing your mother must know my mom. If that's the case, you and I will not have much trouble when introducing each other. Isn't it wonderful, Carolyn, that we have learned a lot about each other just through letters? The only thing left to do now is to meet each other in person. Believe me, that will be the happiest day of my life.

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

You made me laugh when you wrote about your mother knowing me from the time I was in diapers, even though I can't remember, ha-ha!

Well, yesterday, I went again on sick call to have them check on the cast. When it was first placed on my hand, it was swollen, and now that the swelling went down, it became loose. The doctors actually didn't do anything but check it out. So I had to make another appointment for next Wednesday to get a new cast put on. I hope it will be the last time. Yesterday, I also had an appointment to have my teeth cleaned, so I had two different things done on the same day.

Tonight, we are having a battalion party right here on the post in the mess hall. They borrowed thirty vinyl records from me. We have plenty of beer and all kinds of food. They also are bringing girls from the Philadelphia YMCA. It's too bad I won't be able to dance with this cast on my hand. I hope no one asks me to dance with them. But I will help myself to that beer.

Since I took a while to answer your first letter (out of three), I promise to write to you again tomorrow or Sunday to answer the other two.

Because I can't work with one hand, I feel so bad that everyone here is at the mess hall, getting ready for the party while I am taking it easy.

My friend who borrowed twenty-five of my Musica Ranchera records just returned them all. I'm not lending any of them to the party tonight as there won't be any Hispanics there. I don't think they will like them anyway. I will play them later when I am all by myself in the barracks.

Today was such a beautiful day compared to yesterday. I will close for now. I hope to hear from you again soon. So until then, bye for now!

Yours truly,  
Joe B

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K. L. ESTRADA

*Answer from November 8*

November 12, 1955, Saturday

Dear Joe,

Hi there! Here goes the reply to your most welcome letter and hoping this letter finds you doing all right. As for me, up to the present, I am fine.

I just received my grades for the semester, which were pretty fair—mostly As and Bs. Except I had a C in Spanish. But overall, I did not learn much more than I already know.

Thanks for saying you appreciate my patience. Although it comes with a price—my poor manicure. I have to admit that I chew on my fingernails often when I am nervous or worried. Although, right now, my nails have grown back, so maybe that means I have learned to be more patient. I'm glad to get rid of my bad habit. I hope you will keep me in place whenever you see me biting my fingernails. There's a lot to say about not being calm about things because sometimes it leads to worry, which can be unhealthy.

I really enjoy writing. It comes naturally to me. Some people don't like it, so they don't understand why I do it.

So you are getting a kick out of not working, huh? Well, you have a good excuse. Just enjoy your free time, and don't let the guys make you feel bad.

Your sergeant did make a good point. He actually found a common interest in the army. Otherwise, he wouldn't have become a sergeant. I think it took more than getting used to it. You may have been inspired at first but later figured it was something you couldn't get used to doing long-term. You then realized that civilian life was more interesting.

I'm afraid I don't know Mr. and Mrs. Henry Gallegos, but they must be very kind people.

Joe, I don't understand why you say you are unpopular. I would say you have a lot of people that like you.

Why do you say you never want to go back to her? Meaning your ex. You must forgive her for what she did wrong to you. Don't forget all humans make mistakes—we aren't perfect. This would be a different world if we were. So whatever made you turn against her, I would say there must be some confusion. It might be that she lost interest in you when you went into the army. She probably went out with other guys and found acceptance elsewhere. Maybe she realized she didn't love you after all. Or perhaps she did but got confused and couldn't figure out between you and the other guy. Who knows? But these things happen all the time. Really, it is harder for a girl than a boy when it comes to emotions. But whatever was on her mind, you shouldn't judge her. How can we possibly know what is in a person's heart? Maybe I would have done the same thing as Mr. and Mrs. Gallegos did to keep you two together or stay friends. The important thing is we shouldn't create enemies.

Well, the pictures have not come in yet, but I will definitely send you one, okay?

Well, I might say I was unhappy to know that your buddy read my letter. But on the contrary, it was a lovely compliment.

So to answer your question about the weather here, it's all right. It is getting a little chilly as you mentioned. It is also very windy right now.

Not to bring attention to my height, but whenever someone next to me says, "How's the weather down there?" they're actually teasing me about how short I am. Ha-ha! It's fun, though, and I just play along. I usually say, "The weather is not too hot and not too cold—it's just right." Or sometimes I also respond, "The weather is the same as it is way up there." I complain a lot about my neck becoming stiff from always looking up. But someone once told me to "just keep looking up, and you will go places." Then some more encouraging people tell me, "If I continue gazing up, I am seeing God and reaching toward heaven." I particularly like that one.

I am quick to be encouraged now as I used to get hurt easily. I have learned to take the teasing. In fact, I like being teased now. I can turn things into compliments.

K. L. ESTRADA

Well, Joe, I hope the weather is okay up there too. I will close now. Gee, I am always writing long letters. You know, Joe, you and I have been writing for six and a half months already. To me, it's been fantastic writing to you. I don't think I will ever get tired. I have not counted all the letters so far. I've actually lost track. Gee, I have never had anyone write to me for this long. The most were maybe ten letters. You are the winner in my book.

Well, as I mentioned earlier, I better close now. May God always guard you wherever you are.

Truly yours,  
Carolyn Cortez

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*Answer from November 5*

November 13, 1955, Sunday

Dear Carolyn,

Well, here is the letter I promised to write to you. And I wanted to tell you more about the beer party we had Friday night. It was quite a party with plenty of beer and lots to eat. We had plenty of records to dance with the girls that came to the party. No, I didn't drink much, just a little. There were quite a few fights, though, which ended the party pretty early. I was unhappy about that. I stepped up to the guy who started the brawl. He took a punch at me but missed. Then my big buddy of mine took over to defend me. He told the guy, "Why you...so and so, why would you take advantage of a one-armed man?" He really worked on him, though. There were other fights I didn't see, but it was about midnight when I was dragging another buddy of mine to his bed. I found myself in my barracks, so I decided to go to sleep too.

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

The next day, I was the only one sober in the entire motor pool. Everybody else was dead-dead drunk. Since they saw I was the lone soldier awake and alert, I was asked to transport the drunkards to the hospital. Some were pretty beat up from last night's fights. Some had black eyes, and others were cut up badly. The worst one was a guy that was hit in the face with a chair. The battalion commander was not too happy about what happened. He said it was going to be the last party. Well, I got back to camp with about half the load of guys I initially took to the Fort Dix hospital.

The next day, which is today, I went to church. I got back on time to eat chow. I just started to pack all my civilian clothes in a box ahead of time to send back home. Also, I am going to send all my Spanish records with my box of clothes. But, first, I want to invite my buddy to the shop at the motor pool and listen to my records one last time. Actually, that is what we are doing now. It is sure nice to listen to music while writing to you.

Would you believe me if I told you I didn't dance with a single girl at the party? Well, to be honest, I was too embarrassed with the cast on my arm. I really hate wearing it.

Tonight, I am going to see a movie in Camden. It's called *The Left Hand of God*. They tell me it's a good picture. It is religious, which I know you would enjoy it. I wish you were here so I could ask you to see it with me. Otherwise, there is nothing else going on here.

This morning was a beautiful sunny day, but this evening, it looks like rain is on the way.

Boy, to me, it seems so strange to know that I will be out of the army soon. I have a feeling that it would take a while for me to get used to civilian life again. But with a girl to make an acquaintance with, what more can a guy ask for? I know it's going to happen with God's will.

Well, I just finished packing my last piece of civilian clothes to send home, along with the records. It's going to be quite heavy. I will send it first thing in the morning.

K. L. ESTRADA

Oh, yes, we have a general inspection tomorrow. So in a while, I've got to get ready for that as well. It involves straightening my footlocker, shining my shoes, and cleaning my bunk area.

Say, why did you say you didn't want to walk out of the picture to talk to me? Are you already afraid of me? You silly girl. I don't bite, ha-ha!

Well, the wheels in my brain are starting to dull out and stop working soon. Anyway, my buddy just came in to go see the movie I mentioned earlier. Bye, for now!

Good evening, Carolyn, did I keep you waiting? I just got back from Camden. Would you believe there was a line about two blocks long to see *The Left Hand of God*? It must be such a good movie. I will see it tomorrow instead. Tonight, we just decided to go to another theater as I hate to stand in long lines. Curtain time! Bye again!

Yours truly,  
Joe

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*Answer from November 8*

November 14, 1955, Monday

Dear Carolyn,

Hi, cutie doll! I received the most cheerful letter today, which, as always, makes me happy to hear from you. How are you? I hope fine as that's my desire. As for me, I am too excited for words as I am now a short-timer in the army. My hand is fine, except I still have this cast on.

So you are an aunt now, huh? Congratulations! And to the new mother and father. I'll bet they are as happy as a mother hen with their little chicks. Thanks for the cigar or should I say half cigar as half of it was crushed when I got it. But I did get to use part of it. I am not much of a cigar smoker, but it's worth trying it when I'm



offered some. I must say you were very thoughtful of me, so thank you very much. What did they name the newborn?

I can see why you are so excited about being an aunt. I know it is fun for a girl like you to have a little one to spoil. Taking care of the baby will be an excellent way to pass the time away. I bet you would really get carried away.

I guess you, too, have your problems while writing a letter as I do—people making noises, children gathering around you, etc. At least you can get them out of the way by giving them cookies, etc. But with me here, the only way I can stop the guys from making noise is throwing something at them. Of course, I don't really do that because it's against the rules, ha-ha! I bet those jokers (meaning your brothers) disturb you while you are writing to me too. I hope you just ignore them. Are you sure you didn't tease your brother before he got married? If you did, I can't blame him for teasing you now, being his turn and all. I think it is fun to tease and be teased, don't you think, Carolyn?

About the pin-ups you saw in the background on those pictures, well, frankly, they are not mine. In fact, I didn't put them up there. I didn't even know they were up there when the photo was snapped. I am sorry they came out. If I had known about it, I would have ripped them out. Now I would be too ashamed if my mother saw them. I am glad you like them, though. You can keep them as long as you want them. When you get tired of them, you can pass them over to Bennie. Only when you have a chance. No rush.

Come, come, Carolyn, I'm sure your camera takes more than two pictures. How about taking several snapshots? Am I asking too much? How about a photo of you and the new baby together?

Yes, I think that the barracks I live in look a bit shady too. That's what I have been complaining about all this time. But if you think these are bad, you should see what we had at Fort Mott, New Jersey. Living here is much better compared to that place.

By the way, I hope the way I talk about beer doesn't make you think I am a drunkard or anything. I don't want you to have the wrong impression because I am not into alcohol as you might think. I only enjoy it socially for kicks.

K. L. ESTRADA

I'm glad you read magazines and books. It is nice to learn about things you don't already know. Me? I only like to read letters, and to my embarrassment, comic books. I read magazines or newspapers occasionally, but reading books doesn't interest me at all.

Boy, I hope you'll excuse my writing. My thumb keeps wanting to go to sleep once in a while. I guess because my cast is too tight or something. It makes me restless and causes me to make a lot of mistakes.

As you can guess, I just threw my ballpoint pen against the wall. I never want to see another one again! They run out of ink so quickly.

My hoagie just arrived as I ordered it earlier. I just finished eating it with a Coke. It was the best meal of the day.

Well, I'll be closing the door again. You asked me what do I mean by that? It's the same expression as I would use in "closing the letter." Well, I've got to see if I can get some circulation in my thumb as it has gone to sleep again when I should be the one going to sleep! Good night!

Forever yours,  
Joey

PS. Always thinking of you!

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*Answer from November 11*

November 15, 1955, Tuesday

Dear Joe,

Hi! Here goes the reply to your most welcomed letter I just received today.

I didn't go to school yesterday and today because my mom got sick. And I had to do some housework that piled up. Carmen usually

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helps my mom, but she's also ill. Now I'm doing the chores for both Mom and Carmen. It's not a problem. I actually enjoy the work.

My poor mom gets sick a lot, especially in the wintertime. She can't do heavy work. Whenever she overdoes it, she gets sick for sure. Yesterday, there was quite a pile of clothes to wash, and the day was cold and windy. It was not hard for me, and I could have done it all by myself. But Mom kept insisting on helping me because the clothesline broke with the wind and we had to rehang everything. I could have managed it all, but my mom is stubborn sometimes. Mom is forty-three, but she has been through so much, which has weakened her now. So people like her need to rely on the younger ones like us as we are still strong and healthy.

That was one reason I was going to quit school. I am absent a lot because of my mom. I worry so much about her, my schoolwork, and even Dad's bills. I feel like getting a job somewhere to help with the bills, but getting hired is not easy. You usually need experience, and most positions are already filled. Poor Dad. He works so hard to keep us fed and clothed. He worries about keeping a roof over our heads, education, and other important things, while I do nothing. I feel like a heel, man. I can't do much to help. Excuse me, Joe, for telling you about my troubles. I usually get that way whenever Mom gets sick. I become nervous and worried. But I'll be all right. I shouldn't be telling you all these things. It's my job to cheer you up and not trouble you with my problems.

I am writing to you in-between my chores. I just finished ironing half the clothes, so I'm taking a break right now. It's 12:15 in the afternoon, and now I have to make supper for the sick ones, Mom and Carmen, so excuse me for a while.

Hi, there! I'm back. It's three o'clock now. It took me this long to make food, serve it, and wash and dry the dishes. Now for a little pleasure. And now that Mom, Carmen, and the baby are asleep, I can answer your letter.

I am glad to hear you are doing fine from your hand. With a little patience, your cast will be off in no time. You know, Joe, I feel

K. L. ESTRADA

like a nurse sometimes. Right now, I'm going to leave the nursing station and be myself for the moment.

Mom told me she doesn't remember your mother. Dad is the one who knows your entire family well. Yeah, it seems to me like everybody knows everyone except for you and me, ha-ha! You silly boy, how can you remember anything when you were in diapers. You sounded like my aunt when she noticed she was missing in the family album. When she asked her mom, she kept telling her that she was definitely in those pictures. But my aunt kept insisting she was not present when the photos were taken. All this time, she was, but where? Do you want to take a guess, Joe?

I hope you had a good time at the party. Say, who said you need two hands to dance the mambo? And whoever heard of a boy being asked to dance? I am ashamed of you, Joe. Some excuse you have. Dancing is done with your feet, not your hands. I don't think it would have bothered the girls a bit. But anyway, I'm glad you didn't come out seeing triple though. Sometimes drinking too much can lead to hangovers and risk getting court-martialed.

Well, Joey boy, I better close now as it's time now to make dinner for the whole family. If I hadn't realized the time, Al would have gotten mad at me. He's usually so hungry when he comes from school. So until the next letter, may God bless and keep you.

Cordially yours,  
Carolyn C.

PS. I heard that Alice and Bennie are going to have a welcome-home pig feast. So don't forget to bring me some chicharrones, okay?

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WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

*Answer from November 10*

November 16, 1955, Wednesday

Dearest Carolyn,

This evening, I got one of your adorable letters that I am always so happy to get. It gives me the thrill to see a blue envelope in the mail. Well, Carolyn, how are you? I hope fine. I feel great, thanks to God!

Well, today, I got a brand-new cast put on my arm as I took a sick call today. I also have another appointment on November 29. I hope it will be the last time.

You are right, Carolyn, some girls do bite. I've been quite aware of prostitutes and their ways of temptations. So don't worry about me. I stay far away from them.

Yes, it was a beautiful dream. But I still can't figure out why I saw you as a blonde. Of course, I have never dated a blonde before and I don't think I ever will. There is something about blondes I don't like. The only blonde I see these days is my own reflection.

Carolyn, just for kicks, why don't you cut me an inch of your hair and send it to me? I want to keep it in my wallet with your picture. I don't mean just one strand. A little bunch. I hope you know what I mean.

Boy, you have no idea how much a cast can itch. So do you want to know what I did to relieve my itch? Well, the best thing I thought about was to stick a coat hanger to scratch it. Boy oh boy, what a relief! Of course, that was for the old cast. The new one was too tight to perform that task. Besides that, the hair on my arm is glued together. It will take time before I get them loose. Your dad's plan in drilling a hole wouldn't work because I would freeze. However, Carolyn, you did give me an idea about a secret pocket for my money. Did I say money? I have no cash right now, but I'll have to try it when payday comes.

Gee, Carolyn, would you really like to be here as my nurse? I know I couldn't ask for a better helper. Actually, I need someone to help me cut the steak. That is one thing I can't do with one hand. My buddies often get a kick out of helping me cut the meat on my tray. After cutting it, they proceed to put a piece into my mouth. "No," I say, "I still have my right hand to feed myself." They are such jokesters.

Too bad you didn't enjoy the ball game at the Marine base. Yes, some games can be just dull sometimes, especially when no one makes a field goal.

So you, too, have figured out the days to expect letters from me, huh? Same here—I figured I would get correspondence from you this evening, which I was right. My instincts are always correct whenever I get a good feeling about something. So after you rushed home and found my letter as expected, wasn't that amazing? I won't say that it is taking each other for granted. It's just that we have a special connection now.

Don't let those teasers get you down. You might make them eat their jokes someday.

I got a letter from Bennie and Alice today too. They mentioned you meeting up with them and talking about the pictures, etc. I really enjoy hearing all the happenings going on there. It makes me long to coming home soon.

A couple of soldiers, Hill and Rocali, were here a little while ago and went into the kitchen to steal some cheese, bread, and milk. They brought it into the barracks and asked me if I wanted some. I was a little hungry, so I joined them. Of course, I didn't like the fact that they stole the food. In the army, we always seem to be starving as they don't feed us enough. Well, when I get out, I am going to eat steadily for a whole week until I burst.

Yes, I'm not sure if I mentioned this already, but my family is getting a fat pig to feast in my honor. The preparation is always an all-day event in New Mexico. My brother and I are usually involved heavily in the ceremonial of this occasion.

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

Bennie and Alice said they were going home to New Mexico for Christmas. They will arrive there on December 2. That means they will be waiting for me there too. I plan to be in Albuquerque on December 9. I have a feeling this will be the merriest and unforgettable Christmas ever. After that, early in January, I am going to meet a wonderful girl in California. Guess who?

It's getting late, so I will close this letter now. Here's wishing you the best of happiness and blessings.

Your true soldier,  
Joe

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*Answer from November 13*

November 16, 1955, Wednesday

Dear Joe,

Howdy! I'm just dropping the reply to your most precious letter I received this afternoon.

I am glad to hear you had a lovely time at the party, but too bad that it had to end with brawls. Gee, you almost got involved, didn't you? Shame on you. I'm just amazed that you stepped up to that guy—that really surprised me. I don't think you should have done that. You should have let someone else do that, like the crew captain, a sergeant, or other officers in charge. You are lucky you got out safely, thank goodness. I wouldn't want you to get hurt, God have mercy. Fighting for no good cause is awful. I don't blame the commander for deciding not to have any more parties to soldiers who cannot behave like men. They acted like animals, but who is to blame for their behavior? The liquor, of course.

I didn't know you owned Spanish records like the Rancheras. How nice, I really like them. They are very touching, huh, Joe?

Yeah, wearing a cast is such a bother. I guess you can't quite hold the girls while dancing, ha-ha!

Yes, that movie, *The Left Hand of God*, was shown here at the local theater. I didn't go see it, but I wanted to so badly. Al did go, and he told me a little about it. It will be shown in the drive-in soon, so hopefully, I'll see it then.

You asked why I didn't want to come out of the picture? It was because of what you said in your letter. I can't remember what I wrote, so you will have to reread it.

I am assuming that the inspection was satisfactory?

What a rush, man, to leave quickly to see a movie only to find a long line. That's too bad! Maybe tomorrow the line won't be so long.

Now, to say a little about myself. Not that there's much to say, but here it goes. Today, I went to school, as I'm glad to say that Mom was feeling a little better. I am happy once again. It sure makes a difference when Mom is okay as everything is cheerful once again. So I'm back to the same routine, except I had a little to make up for my absence. But the bad thing is I got an unexcused absence. My excuse was for Mom, not myself. I can only be excused if I was the one sick. These unexcused absences count against my credits toward graduation. If I have too many of these, I won't graduate.

Finally, school was over, and it was time to leave. So Emma and I went downtown again to make another money order. It gave me a chance to mail my picture to you. Then we went to JCPenney's to buy a skirt pattern for Home Economics.

During the day, all the girls were talking about the big coming event—the Christmas ball. We girls like to discuss what we are going to wear and who to invite. Some of the girls asked me what I am going to be wearing and who I was inviting. I told them I didn't know as of yet. Some asked, "How about your old flame?"

I exclaimed, "No! Of all things, I wouldn't think of inviting him for the world." He, as I like to say, is gone and forgotten. He is not for me, even if it's just a date. I just don't feel right going out with someone I just broke up with.



## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

All the girls have lined up their men for the invitation. I'm the only one who's undecided. I probably won't go at all. Gloria also hasn't decided who she will invite as she too is writing to my cousin, Clay, in the service. They have become very friendly, and he tells her that he will be on leave of absence for Christmas. So if he does come, she will be inviting him. If not, she would ask this other guy, a very good friend of Clay's. I told her that I was in a similar situation, but I do not have anyone in mind to invite yet. She then said, "Wouldn't it be nice if we had a double date?"

I thought that would have been great, but I told her that you won't be here until January, so that was out of the question.

Gloria and I ended up talking a while until we said, "Oh, boo, we are talking too much." That's how she and I spent the time in class talking and didn't do our homework. I figured I will do it the next day, which is tonight, but first comes your letter, of course. So the school assignment is undone, and the teacher told me that I wasn't doing so good this semester. I really don't care because I know they are trying to encourage us to get straight As, which I used to get, but now I'm averaging Bs.

Well, I believe I've done enough talking. I better be signing off. So, until the next letter, may God take care of you. Bye now.

I remain the same,  
Carolyn Cortez

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*Postcard from Joe*

November 18, 1955, Friday

Dear Carolyn,

I was never so glad to be woken up today around 10:00 a.m. as I was asleep to get the best surprise of all time. I could hardly open

K. L. ESTRADA

the wrapping as I only have one good hand. I knew it had to be a picture of you. Finally, I unwrapped it. You're a doll. And to think you told me once you were an ugly duckling, why, I ought to go and court-martial you for saying that. You came out just fantastic. My heartfelt thanks for the picture. I hope that smile on your face was for me. I just hung it inside my locker, so I will see your picture every time I open it. That way, I am the only one who looks at you.

Carolyn, you don't know how much I appreciate it. I have always wanted a large picture of you. Thanks!

Love,  
Joe

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*Answer from November 14*

November 18, 1955, Friday

Dear Joe,

Hi, soldier boy! Well, here I am once again with a pencil in my hand as it begins to work. It's saying, as always, getting your letters is a delight. I am glad you're enjoying your health. As for me, up to the present, I am fine.

Yes, Joe, you can bet that the parents are as happy as a hen to her chicks, including all the aunts, uncles, and grandparents.

I am sorry to hear that the cigar got partially smashed. I didn't realize that the envelope wasn't that sturdy.

Sunday is the day that my nephew is being baptized. His middle name will be Herman after his dad's name. And did you notice the cigar's outside wrapper with the words "It's a boy?" Now I have a nephew I can spoil as I do with my little sweetheart, Helen. Are you jealous that I call Helen that, Joe? But we can share her, right? It seems like we have the same feelings for little tots.

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

Yeah, I would say it's against the rules to throw things at people because they're bound to get back at you, and that would be a terrible situation, ha-ha!

Speaking of joking around, whenever someone asks me why I am short, I tell them because I've been hit on the head with a hammer. Well, I am always looking for fun things to respond to people who tease me about being short. Another one is "They soaked me in hot water too long, so I shrank." Joking back usually puts them in their place. Jokes don't bother me unless they are dirty.

Oh! I have visitors right now. Guess who? None other than "mi amigos," Alice and Bennie. It's nice to have them drop by. I actually feel bad that I haven't done the favor in paying them a visit to give them those pictures. Bennie is talking to Dad right now and Alice with Mom. And in the other room, the new parents are speaking out loud and feeding the baby at the same time. Al is also talking and joining the conversations. And of course, I noticed *our* little sweetheart next to her mom whom I want to be with right now. So, every little while, I'm listening to the conversations and writing to you at the same time.

You know, every time I see your brother, he reminds me more of you. Looking at him feels like looking at you. I kind of blush when he looks at me. Gee, Joe, you guys look so similar? I hope I'm not insulting you, but he stares at me often. Maybe I am just too self-conscious, or it's my imagination.

Would you excuse me for a few seconds? I'm going to show them the pictures. But I'm only going to show them and keep them longer. I hope they will not take them from me. Unless, of course, you wanted them back.

Well, I'm back and showed them the pictures. I told them what you mentioned, and they said it was quite an excuse you made. Anyway, their visit was very short. They were going to the show and decided to stop by on the way there.

Now it's very quiet. How about if I changed the subject. Well, Sunday, I will try to take some pictures of me with the baby, okay?

K. L. ESTRADA

At least you are still reading, even though it's comics. I like to read comics too when I have nothing else to read.

Well, Mr. Cotillo, you are definitely showing your personality by writing about how your pen frustrated you when it ran out of ink. I can imagine how mad you were by throwing the pen against the wall. I sure would hate to be there when you get upset. I'm liable to get hit by something, ha-ha! Well, it's not like I never get mad. I sometimes do. In fact, I get upset easily, but I just as quickly turn it into something happy. I never stay angry too long.

Hey, mister, you are getting me hungry again. Wait here, I need to get something to eat. Say, pretty soon, I'll be the fat lady of the circus.

Well, Joey, I am quite sleepy. So I will sign off. I hope this letter finds you in good health and that God will always be there for you. As usual, good night and many good dreams. Well, until the next letter, God willing.

Fondly,  
Carolyn Cortez

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*Answer from November 16*

November 19, 1955, Saturday

Dear Joe,

Howdy! Once again, I have the pleasure of writing to you. I am fine and hope you are the same. I am answering your letter dated November 16.

It is good to hear that you got a new cast on. Too bad it's tighter than the old one.

So maybe you have been watching too many movies with Marilyn Monroe and getting my letters at the same time, which

made you dream of me with blonde hair. I'm quite the psychologist, huh, Joe? I hope you know I'm just kidding with you about blondes. I did not think you dislike dating them. I figured all guys prefer blondes—you're the exception.

Well, I'll be. What if I won't cut my hair and send it to you? Sorry, Joe, you are out of luck to get a lock from my hair.

Oh, Joe, I warned you not to try what my dad did to relieve his itch. At least I'm glad you didn't drill a hole in your cast. And as far as the secret pocket, don't give that secret away, ha-ha! You're bound to have your arm cut off by robbers, which would not be good.

Yes, why not? I would like to be your nurse. However, I would only like to attend to you and no one else there. That way, I can see you all the time. In the meantime, I can practice nursing. I'm glad you have some help with the men nurses, ha-ha! How nice to be served like a king! "At your service, Your Majesty."

Gee, Joe, you're so encouraging to me. Besides my family, you are the only friend I trust. Your inspiration is heavenly, so thank you so much. I could never depend on a man as much as I do with you. I could never bring myself to tell other guys what I've told you about myself.

You poor man. They have you half-starved there. When you get out, we will make sure you are well-fed.

I enjoy pig feasts with all the cooking and baking, but I do not like the part of killing the animal. When I was young, I used to hide and cry during the time of butchery. After hours of crying, I'd come out and help with what was left of the pig and help Dad cook the liver on the hot coals. We used to own about a hundred pigs at one time. We fed them on slap and corn. And since Dad worked at a café at the time, he brought home plenty of food for the pigs.

We had acres of corn in Jarden's lot that Dad rented near my grandpa's home. That field had great soil. When harvesting time came, all the women and children would all help pick the corn. The trouble was, we would go home all cut up and bruised from the corn stocks. We never noticed until we got home to wash up. Also, we would itch all over our bodies. Man, farming was a lot of work.

K. L. ESTRADA

I actually used to like it. What about you, Joe? I believe you know what farming back home was like. That is, if you were a farmer. Once you get used to it, it's actually enjoyable. But I don't think I can do it now. I'm too lazy and complain a lot. I ought to be ashamed of myself. I don't work half of what I used to back home. Life is sure funny, huh, Joe?

I think I've talked enough about farming. I really hope you will have the happiest holiday ever back home.

Well, my guess is that I am the one who you are coming all the way here to meet. How thrilling! And what more can a girl ask for? I can't even believe how close we are to the time we'll finally meet. I am now counting the days you will be here.

Oh, Joe, could you please do me a favor and send me your hometown address? That way, I can redirect my letters if you don't mind or if your mother would be okay with that. Otherwise, let me know when I need to stop writing to you in New Jersey.

Well, for now, I better be closing until I hear from you. May God send upon you many blessings. And may this letter, when it reaches your hands, find you in the best of health.

Sincerely,  
Carolyn Cortez

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*Answer from November 12*

November 20, 1955, Sunday

Dear Carolyn,

Just the answer to the letter I got from you Saturday afternoon. Hoping this letter finds you okay. As for me, up to the present, I am fine. I just opened my eyes and looked around and then looked at my watch. It is 2:36 p.m., and I slept most of the day—that almost

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

never happens! I missed breakfast and lunch. I did wake up twice this morning but was too lazy to get up. When my eyes came into focus, I found myself staring at your picture hung inside my locker. To my surprise, I forgot to close my locker last night before I went to bed. In the photo, you are smiling, so automatically, I smiled back. I then wondered what you could be doing at that very moment. I said to myself, "I think I'll write to her." But wait, I said, "I think I better respond to the letter from the day before first." I reached under my pillow, and there it was, the one from yesterday—still smelling like a rose.

I would say you're doing pretty good with As and Bs. When I was in school, the highest grade I could get was a D. I guess I would have done better if I tried hard enough. Carolyn, I am proud of you. No matter what happens, I promise I will be at your graduation, even if no one invites me. I will crawl there if I have to, just to congratulate you.

Yesterday, we had a standby inspection inside the barracks. We were also going to have one outside by ranks, but they called it off because it started to snow. Well, we all passed the inspection. I was so proud that I decided to take some pictures. One was of my display inside my footlocker. The other one was of me standing at attention with a carbine on my shoulder. When I have those photos developed and they come out okay, I will send them to you.

I received a letter from a friend of mine who is stationed at the "B" battalion. He asked me to meet him at a certain place in Philadelphia as he is celebrating his army discharge in a few days. So then, yesterday, I took my buddy, Barajas, with me as he knows him too. We went to see a movie first before we headed out. Boy, it was snowing pretty hard that evening. When we came out of the theater, the ground was covered with snow. It was the first day of snow this year. Then we met our friend in Philadelphia at a bar called Gay 90s. We talked and drank a little until midnight, but none of us got drunk. By the time we returned to camp, it was around 1:00 a.m. when I finally went to bed.

K. L. ESTRADA

Well, today is Sunday, and no one woke me up for breakfast, and it was too late to go to church. It was the coldest morning I can ever remember here. In fact, it was chilly all day long, and maybe that's why I didn't want to get out of bed. I am actually in bed right now writing to you.

Carolyn, I hope you know I don't usually meet with guys for drinks and wake up late the next day and miss Mass. This was my first time, which was fun with my buddies to celebrate a good cause. And I couldn't let my friends down and not join them. I didn't want to drink much beer until they started to tease me, "What is the matter with you, Joe. Why can't you drink some more and have a good time? Are you in love or something?" They also encouraged me to dance, which I didn't because of my cast. I am such a wimp sometimes.

Oh, before I forget to mention, my orders arrived yesterday. I will be discharged at Fort Meade, Maryland. So, I leave here on December 1. I will tell you when to stop writing for a while until I'm in New Mexico. We will continue to write again from there. Naturally, I will send you cards and letters from Fort Meade.

Well, it is almost time for dinner, so I think I will have to get up before I starve. I guess I will mail out this letter also. Bye!

Love,  
Joe

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*Answer from November 15*

November 21, 1955, Monday

Dear Carolyn,

Hi, Doll! I received a letter from you this morning and just decided to answer it. When I went to my locker to pick up my stationery, I was surprised by another letter that came this afternoon. I am always so glad



## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

to hear from you, especially twice in one day. How are you? I hope fine. So far for me, I'm okay, thanks to God. I haven't gotten too much news this time, except that I am happy to be getting out soon.

I am sorry to hear your mother is sick and you had to miss school for that. Always bear in mind that your mother comes first before anything else in the world. You are doing a good thing. I am glad to hear that you take responsibility for the household chores and cooking. I can just see you doing all the work and still have time to write to me. I hope you don't quit school if you can help it. You and your dad are doing the best you can. How can you talk about finding a job? Not that it is my business, but a woman's work is at home, which is a big job. A man's job is outside the home. I don't want to hear you say you are a heel. You do enough by helping your mom and sister-in-law. Almost everybody takes time for the family, which should come first.

My two brothers and I have done our part as a family. First, there was my father, who was always sick. But when he was well enough, he would go to work. When I was around four years of age, he went looking for a job somewhere in California and was tragically hit by a train and died. Since Bennie and I were too young, my oldest brother was our father figure for a very long time. But he later became ill also. But by that time, Bennie was old enough to support all of us. When he got married in 1950, I have taken over to help support my mother. The army sends her a check every month. She receives almost twice the money I receive here. So there you are, Carolyn. We all do our share. You, as a woman, are doing your share too. So you shouldn't worry like that for my sake. Look at it from my example.

Carolyn, now quit mocking me about dancing. I will not dance again until I take my cast off. Ha-ha, you're such a teaser. And I don't know how to do the mambo—I've only tried it a couple of times. I am not that great, and you will be my teacher just for teasing me so much, ha-ha! Oh yeah, Carolyn, girls actually do ask boys to dance at parties.

I am sorry to say I never got to see that movie, *The Left Hand of God*. I hope you will get to watch it, though.

I am sorry you got an unexcused absence. That would be called AWOL here. Maybe you are going to be court-martialed? Ha-ha!

K. L. ESTRADA

So you are undecided who to invite to the Christmas ball? Well, Carolyn, it is up to you who you ask. It's your decision. Don't let me stand in your way. After all, we are not going steady as of yet. If we were, that might be different. Of course, I am flattered to hear that you thought of me. It's too bad I can't be there. Otherwise, I would be glad to take you to the ball. Double dates? That sounds exciting!

Well, I'll be signing off for now. I'm hoping to hear from you very soon. Bye!

Very truly yours,  
Joe

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*Answer from postcard*

November 22, 1955, Tuesday

Dear Joe,

Hello there! Here I am dropping you a few lines to let you know I am fine. I am hoping you are the same. I also want to let you know how thankful I am for the beautiful postcard. As usual, it finds me speechless as words are not enough to express my appreciation. So a billion thanks. Most boys are not very thoughtful, but you are certainly different than most. There aren't many like you—you are one in a million. Believe me, not even I could be as thoughtful and have good taste as you. You would make any girl proud. You are beginning to spoil me, Joe. What am I going to do with you?

So you want my picture to be seen by no one but yourself? Well, I am glad because I wouldn't want anybody else but you to see it. I actually wondered where you would place it since I know you don't have drawers or chests. I then thought you might put it in your truck. I never thought about your locker, which is an excellent place!

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

So let's talk about what I have been doing from Saturday through today. On Saturday, I cleaned the house and washed a few clothes, including my sister-in-law's clothes. After dinner, I started to bake cookies and pies for the following day and refreshments for the people who would come to visit the baby after the baptism. On Sunday, I got up to do the usual chores. Then Mom and I started cooking the meal to honor the godparents. We expected more people than the immediate family, which ended up to be ten of us. So there was a lot of leftover food. And by the way, the baby was given the name Gilroy Herman.

Monday was the school routine. Same for Tuesday, which is today. Nothing of interest. I just want to give you an idea of what I have been doing lately. Not much, huh, Joe? Everything has slowed down since the holidays are near.

Dad wanted to go to New Mexico for Thanksgiving, but he changed his mind and decided to go around Christmas instead. I said, "That would be great!" because I was thinking of you, that I might be able to see you there. So if the plans work out, we will be going to New Mexico for Christmas. I think it will be fantastic. I have never been there around Christmastime. We've always visited around August when school is out. So it looks like it's going to be different this year, God willing.

School is out for Thanksgiving, November 24 and 25, and the family will probably have a turkey feast, as we always do. Last year, Mom let me fix the turkey for the first time as I usually do the rest of the baking and side dishes. This year, I'm not sure who will do what as there are three of us now.

Gee, I have a lot to be grateful for this year. I am most thankful for having such a wonderful, thoughtful, and swell guy in my life. You, Joe, have given me great joy—more than anybody has ever done for me, even if it's been only through letters. Well, handsome, I'd better come to a close for now. May the Lord look upon you always.

I remain the same,  
Carolyn Cortez

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K. L. ESTRADA

*Answer from November 16 and 18*

November 22, 1955, Tuesday

Dear Carolyn,

Well, here is your answer to the sweet letter I got from you today. I hope you're fine. I am okay to the present, thanks to God.

Carolyn, you've spoiled me so much with your letters every day—two yesterday and another one today. Well, I am going to give you a break. I never thought I would be telling you to stop writing. Don't write to this address anymore. If you do, I am afraid I might not be here to get them. I will be in Fort Meade, Maryland, getting my discharge completed. I leave here on the first of December. Of course, I will get a few more letters this week from you and part of next week. I will answer them, of course, but you can't answer mine. Once you get this letter, you can lay your pencil down and just sit back and wait for mail from me. I will send you correspondence every day from Fort Meade, Maryland.

Before I leave Fort Meade, I will send you my hometown address. So you can write to me right away. So besides being welcomed by my family, I will have a letter from you waiting for me. That is quite a bit of instruction, huh, Carolyn? Well, I think it is the best way it can be done.

Believe me, I will not forget you while I'm at Fort Meade. I will be sending you a postcard every day to let you know how I am doing along the way. Since Washington, DC, is just a few miles away from Fort Meade, I plan to catch the plane from there. I hope I get to be there for a few hours to visit the White House and take many photos.

So you think Bennie looks like me, huh? A lot of people have noticed that same thing too. Bennie is wonderful to me. He treats me like a brother should. He'll do anything for me. I can just see you blushing when my brother looks at you. I know he is a big teaser. I also know how fond he is of you. I am glad my brother and Alice looked at those pictures I sent you.

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

Temper? I can control it sometimes. You would be surprised at how much patience I have.

Well, I have nothing much to tell about what is happening here. I still loaf around the area, and I don't drive anymore. All I do is sit around here and there and get some needed sleep. Other times, I miss chow because I am asleep somewhere. One thing I never miss is mail-call. I can spot those beautiful blue envelopes of yours a mile away. I sometimes go talk to the cooks as most of them are my buddies. I get to drink all the coffee I want, and I am a walking announcer. I walk along the area, yelling, "I am a short-timer, only fifteen more days to go!"

Well, it is getting late, so I will close for now. And don't forget, no more letters until I give you a different address.

Love,  
Joe

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*Answer from November 20*

November 23, 1955, Wednesday

Dear Joe,

Hi, soldier boy! Here goes the reply to your most welcome letter, which is a pleasure to receive.

Hmmm, you lazy bone, sleeping all day—what a life, huh, Joe? You are sure taking it easy these days—how nice!

Thanks, Joe, for saying that you'll be here for my graduation. That made me so happy to hear. Well, you'll be the first one to invite—that is, if I can graduate.

My, my, that's what I call sharp and being on the ball. I am glad you passed your inspection. I can't wait to see your proud picture, especially with a carbine on your shoulder.

K. L. ESTRADA

So, it's snowing, huh? I love the snow. It reminds me of Belen in the wintertime when the kids used to throw snowballs and make a snowman. We even made ice cream from the snow. You know how fun the people are in Belen, don't you, Joe? I wish it could snow here once in a while. Actually, it's been cold recently in California. It even rained too, finally! But it hailed and rained so hard one day. It was the day the girls and I got soaking wet, which caught us off guard. My friends were so upset because it straightened out their hair. I was okay because I enjoy the rain. It doesn't hurt to let yourself go once in a while. You can't always look your best all the time. So I don't know why people get so furious about getting drenched. We need to learn to be content with what we have. We need to accept and appreciate all the gifts the Lord provides. Like rain, to me, is a gift from God.

Gay 90s—what a name! I think it should be Gay 50s instead, ha-ha! Although it would be fun when we reach the '90s.

So, Joe, why didn't you have fun with the boys? It's okay to drink as long as there wasn't any trouble and you weren't driving. When guys drink with other boys, it's okay, but they shouldn't drink when dating a girl. That's where I disapprove. Also, I don't think it's good when both boys and girls are drinking a lot to the point of getting drunk. Nowadays, when women go into a bar, just like men, they are usually up to no good. I also heard that boys would never go to dance unless they drank. And now girls are saying the same thing. What a shame, huh, Joe?

Well, enough of that kind of talk as I will bore you with all that I have in my brain to say. I talk way too much...blah, blah, blah! Anyway, I will make it short by saying that I wish you the most pleasant Thanksgiving. And may God send you many more blessings.

Sincerely yours,  
Carolyn Cortez

PS. If you find yourself in good health, praise God because that is a blessing that we sometimes forget—one that money cannot buy.

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## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

*Answer from November 22*

November 25, 1955, Friday

Dearest Carolyn,

I received the most beautiful letter today, which made me very happy. I especially loved hearing about the possibility of seeing you sooner.

How are you? I hope your health is good and you're happy. As for me, I am fine, and my hand is better, thanks to God.

Carolyn, you should have seen me light up with excitement to hear you will be in New Mexico for Christmas. I said to myself, "Is that dream going to come true after all?" Do you remember that dream I told you about meeting me at the train depot? That would be great if you will come at the same time Bennie and Alice do, which is around the fifth or sixth. I sure would like to see you then. Also, you could meet my whole family. Carolyn, I'll pray that all this does come true, and I know you will do the same.

Gee, I got carried away by the excellent news, Carolyn. Let's go on to something else. Yesterday, as it was Thanksgiving, we all had the day off. We had a wonderful turkey dinner at the mess hall here at the headquarters. There were several volunteers to serve everyone. We didn't have to stand in line as we were served like at a restaurant. There was a lot of food that we were very grateful for. I am thankful for so many things this year, especially for having you as my girlfriend.

It is getting quite cold here now. The heaters do not seem to give enough warmth, so I have to wear a jacket indoors. Maybe the ducts need maintenance.

I just left my locker open so I can look at your picture. I look at it every day. I may indeed be a little selfish to allow anyone else to see it.

Now getting back to Thanksgiving Day. After the delicious dinner, I went with a buddy of mine to see a movie in Camden.

K. L. ESTRADA

We came back early around 6:00 p.m., just in time to see another film here on the post called *Mambo*. Boy, they really know how to mambo. I could never learn to dance like that.

The next day, which is today, was a typical working day, but as usual, I don't have anything to do during the day. Oh, yes, I did do something. I took some coffee for the officers. I saluted them first and then offered sugar and creamer on a tray. They asked me how my hand was. "Oh, fine, sir," I said. Then I saluted again and left. Oh yes, they did ask me if I also wanted some coffee. I said, "No thanks, sir, I just had some, sir." Ha-ha! That is one thing I won't put up with whenever I'm working as a civilian. I don't have to "sir" them anymore. I'll just say "Yeah" or "Nope" and not salute.

Tomorrow, I don't know what we will do. Inspection, maybe. On Saturdays, we usually work until noon and off on Sundays. And a week from today, I will be in Fort Meade, Maryland.

Gee, I can't get over what you told me about you and your family going to New Mexico for Christmas. I hope your father will agree to leave with Bennie and Alice at the same time. I will write to my brother about it and give him all the details.

When you do go to New Mexico, I hope your family can visit mine. I hope to be home by then. Any friend of mine is welcome at our house. I have a good feeling that things are going to work out so we can finally meet. I hope it's real and not just a dream.

Well, I have to close now and go to bed. I feel so good about the whole thing. I just know I am going to dream about you tonight. Again, don't send an answer to this letter to the army. Just hold it and wait to hear from me. I will give you more details later. Good night!

Love,  
Joe

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WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

*Answer from November 19 and 23*

November 28, 1955, Monday

Dear Carolyn,

I just got a letter from you today. I'm always so happy to hear from you. I hope this letter finds you in your best health. As for me, I'm doing good, thanks to God.

Today, I've been clearing things up at my battalion station, such as returning all the locks, field equipment, and rifles. Sunday, after I got back from church, I started to pack. And today, Monday, I still haven't finished yet. I didn't know I had so much stuff. It's a good feeling to know I am getting ready to leave this place, though. In exactly eleven more days, I will be home wearing civilian clothes and sitting on an easy chair, smoking a Lucky Strike.

Well, so much about me, let's focus on you now. So, Miss Psychologist, you are still giving me a hard time about that dream I had about you with blonde hair, huh? For all I know, you might be a blonde since you refused to send me a lock of your hair as I requested. Ha-ha! Well, it was a good try. I'm sorry I asked. I don't blame you, though. It might have ruined your hair. No, I am not allergic to blondes. It's just that I don't care about ever dating one. Well, I'll put it this way. It would look odd—a blonde dating a blonde. Oh boy, I'll bet that request about cutting your hair may have shocked you. I just asked for a tiny bit of it to see what color it really is. Well, forget it, I guess I'll have to wait to see you as I seem to be getting overly anxious.

By the way, I enjoyed learning about you as a farmer's daughter. I am glad to hear you have lived and experienced being at a farm. We have that in common too, except I did not enjoy it. Well, I guess now I wish I was back on the farm, behind a plow, with a team of horses. It's better than being here.

You didn't mention your family coming to New Mexico for Christmas in your last letter. I really hope it will happen. I've been

K. L. ESTRADA

looking forward to the time you first mentioned it. Boy, wouldn't it be wonderful to meet you sooner than expected? And, believe me, Carolyn, in my heart, there is a good feeling that I am going to meet you very soon. I think I would die if I didn't.

You asked me for a favor to give you my hometown address. But please don't send anything until I tell you as I will write to you every day from Fort Meade, Maryland. You can send me your responses all at once. Here's my hometown address: Rt. 1, Box 37, Los Lunas, NM.

I don't see why my mother would mind as she's always wishing for me to find a nice girl. I know she will like you as she already knows I'm writing to you. She asked me for your name, but that is all the information I gave her. All this was through letters as I would instead offer her more details in person.

Well, I think I better be closing for now. I don't expect you to answer this letter until further notice. Bye! You'll continue to hear from me.

Love,  
Joe

PS. I am going to miss your letters for a while, boo-hoo!

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*Answer from November 21 through 25*

December 1, 1955, Thursday

Dear Joe,

Hi, sir! I can't wait to welcome you home, soldier! Well, where shall I begin? It seems like ages since I last wrote. I feel so behind. So here I am, back with my pencil, which is a pleasure as always. The last time you wrote to me was about you being a short-timer in the army. But by the time you get this letter, you may no longer be there, huh,

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

Joe? I'm sure this letter will be forwarded to your hometown address if you don't get this while still there.

Thanks for encouraging me about not feeling like a heel whenever I can't help pay the bills. You make a good point about a woman's place at home.

Well, that was quite the challenge you gave me to teach you how to dance. But that would be such a difficult task as I am not that good at dancing, ha-ha! Well, I'll be, I didn't know that girls ask boys to dance. Gee, I don't think I would ever have the courage to ask a boy to dance with me.

Yeah, I got court-martialed all right. I had to make up for schoolwork! I hope I will never go AWOL again as you call it in the army. Gee, it's getting to the point where I would have to lie to get excused from school. It's crazy that they will not dismiss me unless I am the one who is sick. I can't miss school to care for someone else. Last year was different because you could ask for a "non-illness" absence, but not anymore!

Well, I ended up inviting one of my cousins to go with me to the Christmas Ball, but I'm waiting for his answer. He was stationed at the China Lake Navy base. He came over during Thanksgiving vacation. So then I decided to invite him. You might know him, David Chavez. He's a sailor. He's one of my nicest cousins.

Thanksgiving weekend, I went to the movies to see *To Hell and Back* and *Sabaka*. They were good movies, especially the first one, a true story of a brave soldier. Then we had a small dinner.

So now let's talk about the next letter you wrote to me (November 22), the one with the instructions. Yes, sir! I will do as you asked, sir!

Wow, you're going to Washington, DC—how wonderful! I hope you will enjoy that trip and be able to take some pictures.

Sure, I remember your dream as it was very touching indeed. However, I am afraid that it won't come true because we won't be in New Mexico until December 17. That's when I get off from school. But I do hope, in some way or another, that we will see each other.

That's too bad that the heaters don't work that well. I hope you don't get another cold before leaving the army.

K. L. ESTRADA

That movie *Mambo* was shown here too. I didn't see it, but I heard all about it.

Thanks, Joe, for saying we are welcome to your home. I will try to persuade my parents to take me to visit you and your family. Oh! By the way, we are staying for two weeks in New Mexico. We are spending Christmas at my grandma's house in Belen. We will go to midnight Mass. So, with God's help, we will get our wishes met. I didn't want to say too much, Joe, as I'm afraid I would spoil your plans, including your Christmas celebration with your family.

Well, enough for now. I will come to a close. As always, when this letter reaches you, I hope it finds you enjoying health. And may God always be upon you.

I remain the same,  
Carolyn Cortez

PS. Well, sir, may your wishes come true—just don't wish too hard.

PPS. This letter will be old by the time you get it, but it will be a good memory.

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*Fort Meade, Maryland*

December 2, 1955, Friday

Dearest Carolyn,

Hi, cutie doll! I just arrived here in Fort Meade last night. I had expected to be here earlier, but the HQ Battalion 738 had all my records mixed up before I left New Jersey. They finally got them straightened out around 3:00 p.m. Well, there were three of us that were discharged at the same time. One of the fellows had a car, which made it easy for the rest of us. I shook hands with about a hundred

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

guys—they all wished me well. Some of them said, “I wish it was me getting discharged” or “I will be following you.” I looked back at the camp one last time.

We made it to Fort Meade in three hours. We turned in our records, then they gave us our bedding and supplies for the next six days. I now have five more days in the army. Well, I shouldn’t call it army now. It’s called “processing.” So I am currently going through the process of discharging.

Today, they woke us up for roll call pretty early. Then breakfast and after that, another formality called “work call.” I was on detail all morning. They gave me sort of a break with light work because of my hand, ha-ha! After lunch, we had to fill out a lot of medical forms.

I just got back, and here I am, writing to you. It’s almost dinner time now. I guess I’ll have to go get something to eat. I’ll be back in a while. Don’t go away now. Just sit right there and wait, okay?

Hi! Did I keep you waiting long? It was a good supper. That’s one good thing about being here. They feed us nothing but the best. Up until the last eighteen months, the meals were never this good. My stomach stays full until the next meal, which means I’m not starving anymore.

Well, we are all off for the whole weekend. Tonight, I might go to a service club or a movie on the post. Fort Meade is considered a temporary army post.

Tomorrow, I think I will sleep most of the day. That’s what I enjoy most as that is when I get to dream of you.

Well, Carolyn, I hope you get an idea of what I do here. I know you can just picture in your mind everything I have mentioned to you.

Gee, I guess I’m talking about me as if I was so important. I hope you are doing fine and hoping you will still get to go to New Mexico for Christmas. We could possibly meet in a matter of days. Carolyn, I just wonder what it will be like to finally meet you. We have both dreamed of this occasion for months now. Believe me, I can hardly wait.

K. L. ESTRADA

Carolyn, thank you for understanding the meeting with my buddy in Philadelphia. I did have a good time—I just don't believe in drinking too much. I don't like hangovers. It's true, I slept late the next day and missed Mass, but I was just tired and went to bed too late. Sometimes I can't get up in the morning unless someone wakes me up, although I usually wake up at a regular schedule when I go to bed early or at my everyday routine.

Well, I guess I won't be going anywhere tonight. It's not that late, but I feel like going to bed right now. I will keep writing to you every day until my last day here. I will tell you when to send your letters to my hometown address.

Well, I'll close for now. Wait for another letter from me. I'll be seeing you soon, I hope. Bye!

Love,  
Joe

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*Fort Meade, Maryland*

December 5, 1955, Monday

Dearest Carolyn,

Hi, cutie! Here I am again, writing one of my last letters from the army. I may have time to write one more to you tomorrow night. I think it's time to put your pencil to work now. I will give you the address again at the end of this letter if you have forgotten it. So when you respond to this letter, it will be waiting for me by the time I'm home on December 9. Nothing would make me happier.

What did I do over the weekend? Well, my buddy took us all for a drive to Washington, DC. We saw a lot of exciting things. We were able to see the Pentagon and the White House from a distance only. The thing I regret was that I didn't take my camera with me. But I

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

plan to go there again on Wednesday, December 7. I will take a bus or cab down there and catch a train. I hope to be in Washington DC for about three to four hours so I can take as many pictures as I can.

Well, the next morning, I went to the Catholic chapel at the post around 9:00 a.m. After church, I went next door to a service club for some free coffee and donuts. I got back on time for lunch. In the afternoon, I went to a matinée show. After that, I came back and slept for the rest of the evening.

Today, the guys and I went through the same routine—roll call, breakfast, work call, police call, etc. We took a complete physical examination to see if we had any health issues before our discharge. That took all morning. In the afternoon, we each had an exit interview and went over our personal records. I found out I would get TPA (transportation pay allowance) for California instead of New Mexico. So that meant extra money plus my twenty-one days leave I've got coming to me.

Oh, gee, I guess I've talked too much now. I'll try to write some more tomorrow night. If not, I'll send you a couple of postcards. Now, here's the address again: Mr. Joe Cotillo, Rt. 1-Box 37, Los Lunas, New Mexico.

Love,  
Joe

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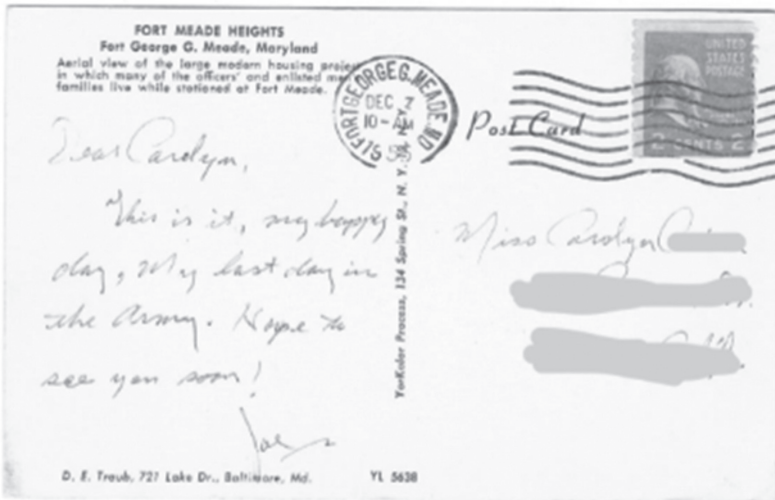
K. L. ESTRADA

*Postcard from Fort Meade, Maryland  
Postmarked December 7*

Dear Carolyn,

This is it, my happy day. My last day in the army. Hope to see you soon!

Joe





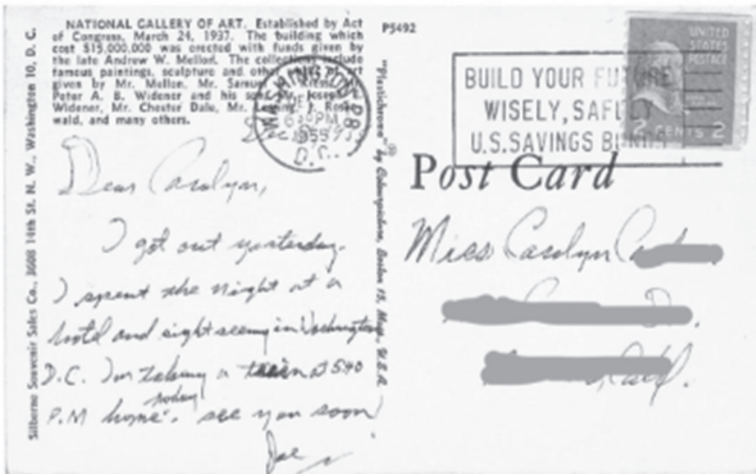
WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

*Postcard from Washington DC  
Postmarked December 8*

Dear Carolyn,

I got out yesterday. I spent the night at a hotel and went sight-seeing in Washington, DC. I am taking a train at 5:40 p.m. home. See you soon!

Joe



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K. L. ESTRADA

*Los Lunas, New Mexico*

December 11, 1955, Sunday

Dearest Carolyn,

Well, I am home now! "Home, sweet home." My dream finally came true of becoming a civilian again. I arrived in Albuquerque at 7:00 a.m., Saturday, as my two only brothers were waiting for me. My family was happy to see me, and I was so glad to see everyone. My trip was very pleasant.

I hadn't been in the house for more than ten minutes when Alice handed me a present from you. Talk about me being thoughtful. You sent me something unexpected—my favorite brand of cigarettes. You remembered that I like to smoke Lucky Strikes. I love the tie-set as well. I actually wore it to church today. My mother told me how nice it looked on me. I felt so proud to wear it all day. It was my first Christmas present. I just can't express the right words of appreciation, except to say, "Thanks a million!"

So you'll be here on December 17, huh? I'll be looking forward to that time. I've been waiting to see you for six months, now it is just a week away. After that, I hope to spend two precious weeks with you—it would be so wonderful.

Last night, I went to a dance in Los Chavez, just two miles away. And every time I danced with someone, I pretended I was dancing with you. That's how crazy I am.

The first thing I unpacked was your picture. I set it up on top of the kitchen cabinet where I can see it every minute. I want everyone to see it too as there's no one to be jealous here, ha-ha!

My mother thinks you're cute, and of course, I agree with her.

Boy, you should see me now, how happy I am at home as a civilian. My heart is singing with happiness. Also, to know that my joy has just begun. There is still you who I want to see. Alice laughed at me just a little while ago and said she has never seen me so happy before. She tells me, "You must be in love or something."

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

Bennie and Alice were at the dance last night too. I got the chance to dance one time with Alice. She is a good dancer. We danced the tango. I love it better than the mambo.

There was another dance tonight too, but we all decided not to go. Bennie, Alice, and my mother went to the “*vísperas*” in Los Chavez.

Tomorrow is the Los Chavez fiestas. It is a celebration of dances for three nights in a row. As you know, it’s my hometown, and I wouldn’t miss it for the world, just like you would feel about the Belen fiestas.

Well, everyone has gone to bed, except for me. It’s 11:00 p.m., and I’ll be hitting the sack in a short while. But it is quiet here now. I had so much more to write to you about, but I just can’t think of a thing right now.

Carolyn, instead of waiting for me in California, I’m expecting you here in New Mexico. Isn’t that funny? In your next letter, please give me the address of where you will be in Belen. Or if you know your grandmother’s phone number, it would be easier. Anyway, I’ll see you soon.

Love,  
Joe

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*Answer from December 2 and 5*

December 13, 1955, Tuesday

Dearest Joe,

Hi there! It feels fabulous to write to you again. Man, it must have been like you were talking but not getting an answer from me, huh? Well, here I am.

Anyway, how are you, Joey? Fine, I hope, and happy as can be. Well, shall we continue from where we left off? I am actually replying to the last two letters. First, it was “Once upon a time,” then you were saying farewell to all your buddies, which must be the most challenging thing in a departure. Then, finally, you were off to Fort Meade, Maryland, for all the things you needed to do to discharge from the army. I was glad to hear that it was easier there with better food and a full stomach to boot. I was also happy to hear that you visited a lot of exciting places. I can’t wait to learn more about it later. In fact, I will be just tickled pink to hear it from your voice and not from a letter.

I understand, Joe, how difficult it is to get up the next day when you’re too tired. Even if you had gotten drunk, it would have been expected as boys usually get carried away when celebrating and having a good time.

Well, now, to answer the second letter, which was a short one. You mentioned a little about what you did in those last days at the post, like going to church, service club, meals, shows, and napping on the weekends. Then you talked about the usual routine, such as the roll call, etc. And finally, the physical exam, exit interview, and going over your personal records. It was short and to the point but nice to have heard from you and know how you were doing.

Lastly, but not least, I received two postcards from you, which were very touching. I was indeed overjoyed in getting such beautiful cards. How can I ever thank you, Joe? I was just flattered. By any chance, did you get to see the National Art Gallery that is on the front side of the postcard? If so, would you tell me all about it, Joe? The buildings in Washington DC really look beautiful on the outside. I can only imagine how it looks on the inside.

Well, how about mentioning what I have been doing lately? Well, it’s not much, but I have gone to the movies, shopped in San Bernardino, and went to the Christmas Ball. I actually had a good time at the ball. There was dancing, plays, and refreshments. It was held at the school gym, and it was decorated beautifully with

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

Christmas displays. The dancing was mostly waltz. Overall, I thought it was nice, but I would have wanted you to be there.

All this week, I have been very busy at school as well as at home. I have lots of homework and need to study for final exams and practice for the program, which starts tomorrow through Friday. Tonight, I am supposed to go to singing practice, but I had business to attend to—writing to you and then doing the chores at home. Tomorrow is the program for the senior high school students; Thursday is for the junior high, and Friday is for all the parents. I had better get on the ball and learn my part as one of the choir's sopranos. So I believe by Friday, I will have a sore throat from singing for three days. I hope not. Then, Saturday, I need to get up early to take off to New Mexico.

That means that after the program, I need to rush home to help Mom pack. Mom has been doing a lot to prepare for our trip. I have been too busy to help her. So I promised her I would as soon as I finish with the school programs. Meanwhile, Dad has been getting the car prepared with the tires, oil, etc. to make sure it will run properly on this long trip. Then, hopefully, we will get some shut-eye and be on our way to New Mexico early morning.

Well, Joe, I am getting too sleepy now, and I am running out of words. So I better be signing off now. I am the only one up still. Here's hoping this letter finds you in the very best of health. And as always, may God bless you. I also wish the same for your family. So until then, may God be with all of you. Good night, Joe.

I remain the same,  
Carolyn Cortez

PS. Good cheers in your homecoming. May you have a pleasant time.

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K. L. ESTRADA

*Answer from December 11*

December 14, 1955, Wednesday

Dear Joe,

Hi, there! Today I received your most welcome letter. I am glad you are home safe and sound. I can only imagine how happy everyone was to see you. Congratulations once again, Joe. Man, I can't believe I'm replying to a different address than the one I was used to.

Poor you on what you had to go through with all the restrictions, new routines, expectations, and, oh man, your empty stomach. No more sneaking around for food, huh, Joe?

Well, enough of the old memories. You're home now with your beloved family. By the way, how is everyone there? I sincerely hope they are fine.

Joe, you flatter me so much. My, oh, my, I couldn't be that important to you. Thank your mom for me on the compliment.

Ha-ha, Joe, I can just hear your heart singing with happiness.

I never knew anything about the fiestas in Los Chavez. I guess that shows you how little I know. I thought they only took place in Belen. I wish I could have been there. Anyhow, I am glad you enjoyed yourself.

So what's this? Are you getting sleepy already at 11:00 p.m.? I remember you used to get up in the middle of the night for duty and went to bed around 4:00 a.m. What an experience it was in the army. Now you get to have plenty of rest at home. Ah, what a life of the civilian, huh? Only the mice could bother you now, ha-ha! Say, you no longer "hit the sack" but go to sleep in a nice comfy and cozy bed.

Man, I am getting sleepy myself. Well, before I say good night, I got one more thing to say. And that is I am staying at my grandma's home in Belen. Do you know where the old town in Belen is? It is on the other side of the tracks. Here's the address: 322 N. Wisconsin. Unfortunately, she has no phone.

## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

I'm coming to a close now. I would like to say may our Lord give unto you many blessings and everything your heart desires. May God be upon you each and every one in your family. Good night and pleasant dreams.

As always,  
Carolyn Cortez

PS. Regards to Alice and Bennie and sweetie heart.

PPS. I hope you have the most wonderful time at the fiestas.

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*Los Chavez, New Mexico*

December 27, 1955, Tuesday

Dearest Sweetheart,

We just got back from Santa Fe, and I remembered I had promised to write to you today. I heard the honking this morning at 5:00 a.m. sharp. I was already awake. I was just lying in bed, just thinking about getting up. I finally did, shortly after you and your family passed my house. I am glad you remembered to honk the horn as you promised. My family wondered who did that and why would anyone honk the horn so early in the morning. I explained it all to them.

Well, the trip down to El Santuario de Chimayó was beautiful. I enjoy looking at historic buildings such as the old churches down there. I had the opportunity to take a few snapshots. I took some of Santa Fe. Also, that was the first time I have ever been there.

I certainly hope you and your family had a safe and successful trip with no incidents. I'm starting to miss you already. I hope these next few days won't seem too long. I'll make a promise to you that on

K. L. ESTRADA

my way over, I will be extra careful on the road. I think you would like to hear that.

We had quite a lot of company this evening. They are finally gone as I now have a chance to write to you.

Well, let's see, what is going on here? My mother is washing the dishes, my older brother is reading the newspaper, Bennie is trying to figure out a puzzle, Alice is fixing her hair, and Helen, as usual, is making a lot of noise.

Well, here I am, writing to you, and already I don't have much else to write about. My head's gone blank again as well.

Tomorrow, I will take my car to have it adjusted here and there before any last-minute preparations.

I'll close for now. I hope I get a letter from you as you promised.

I love you always,  
Joe

PS. Regards from the family.

PPS. One more thing. I'm sending you a kiss from me!

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December 28, 1955, Wednesday

Hi, Darling,

Here's dropping you a few lines to let you know we got home safely. Although we did have a little trouble on the way. The speedometer and temperature controls of the heater were not working when we got to Gallup. We had it fixed. So from there on, everything went fine. By the way, honey, you better have that noise in your car looked over. I wouldn't want anything to happen to you on the way here.

Enough of that. Oh, you know what, Joe? We left Belen at four in the morning since Uncle Juan, Gloria, and David's dad came with



## WALLFLOWER PEN PALS

us. We honked when we passed your house as I promised you. There was a light on, so you probably were up.

How was your visit to Santa Fe, hon?

Now, let me tell you what time we got here and what I did today. Well, we got here around ten thirty at night. Boy! My brother and sister-in-law were so surprised to see us. It was sure good to see them too and my new nephew as well. Oh, home, sweet home. This morning, my aunt came to leave her two kids with us. So I am here, babysitting today. I did my usual chores, and now I am writing to you.

Man, one day and a half, and I'm already missing you, honey. Gee, five more days until we can be together again with our hopes and faith intact. But now, I don't have to wish anymore because now I know I have you. So where there is love, there is faith and hope.

Once you were meaningful to me as a pen pal, and now you are extra important because you are now the man of my life. Well, hon, I better be signing off. I sincerely hope you and your family are happy and in good health. Now may God bless each and every one of you.

Love,  
Carolyn Cortez

PS. Regards to your family and from mine!



put on each other  
What I would have  
stormy day. It is

He would say, "None for me"  
as they usually call me.  
all



## Epilogue

After Joe moved to California, he courted Carolyn and attended her H.S. graduation as promised. Following that, they were married on June 25, 1956.

Joe and Carolyn raised six wonderful children, and later became proud grandparents to six grandchildren.

Together they kept their dreams and hopes intact for sixty years.

**“Where there is love, there is faith and hope”**

**~ Carolyn C.**



## About the Author



**K**atherine Estrada is the author of this book, and she is also the proud daughter of this incredible story's characters. Like her parents, she was also timid initially but eventually came out of her shell and conquered her fears. Katherine was raised with four brothers and one sister.

Mrs. Estrada has been happily married to her husband, Al, for twenty beautiful years. She used to love to read romantic novels when she was just a teen. Katherine has been an accountant for many years but also enjoys writing in her spare time. When she's not working or writing, she likes to stay active at the gym, taking daily walks, hiking in nature, and spending quality time with her husband on road trips and vacations.

In the coming years, Katherine hopes to continue her skill in writing and become a best-selling author.