

Pia Batchelder

Post WWII Era Letters

Bordighera: 1955

\$450

Three post-WWII typewritten letters, two photographs, and financial paperwork of Italian businesswoman and a Communist hostage, Pia Batchelder. Very good with tiny tears, creasing, and some rust offsetting from staples and paperclips. A compelling first hand account of an Italian woman who sacrificed herself to “the Reds” in exchange for her husband’s freedom only to find out that he had spent the time during her incarceration being unfaithful and spending her money on other women.

In May of 1945 Pia Batchelder gave herself in exchange for her American husband, George, to the Communists under Josip Broz Tito. They were frequent travelers and most likely found themselves prey to the communists around Yugoslavia who were collecting “enemies of the state...especially social democrats, members of the bourgeoisie, nationalists, fascist Ustaee insurgents, anti-communist Chetniks and Western-oriented regime critics and intellectuals.” George was several years older than Pia and at 60 she knew he wouldn’t last long in the camp. She writes, in broken English, of her ordeal to her stepson, Kenneth, in September of 1955; “So I sat from the 15 of May 1945 until the 1st of December 1945, in a hole in the Earth “death cell” waiting to be hung every night; without light or air, and hardly any food, until I could not walk two steps without falling unconscious. Lost 65 pounds. Just the same that the communists are the most murderous people, they did not kill me because I was sitting for him.”

The purpose of this letter, which she states she has been reluctant to write, is because during her captivity and after George was having numerous affairs and spending the couple’s money, most of which belonged to Pia, on these other women. “When I came to the world again I was a living skeleton full of wound, in all this time of my hell, George was waiting in Triest consoling himself with missus Luisa Tesser, who was sure I would never come out...that was his thanks for sacrifice.”

She composed three letters, two to Kenneth making him aware of the situation and requesting help with the recovery of her assets; and one to George telling him she has had enough and includes a list of her financial records and all the money that is owed to her. “It is below my dignity to stand further a situation like that and be laughed at by everybody who knows about the facts.” In her letter to George she writes, “I gave myself to the reds in order to liberate you from the prison because I knew that you are going to lose your life like all the men lost it who were with you in prison...I was 7 months in a death cell waiting to be hang for you.” She ends this particular note with, “Now my dear I am going to behave as I should have behaved all along and I will try to make of you a real man...I write you because you run and do not want to hear, but you have to face the things you did, because you can’t cancel them.”

An intriguing testimony of a woman going above and beyond her marital duties and asserting herself at a time when society often required that women remained mute on such topics. [\[BTC#389842\]](#)