

Dear Miss Millicent Jones

REBECCA ROUSE

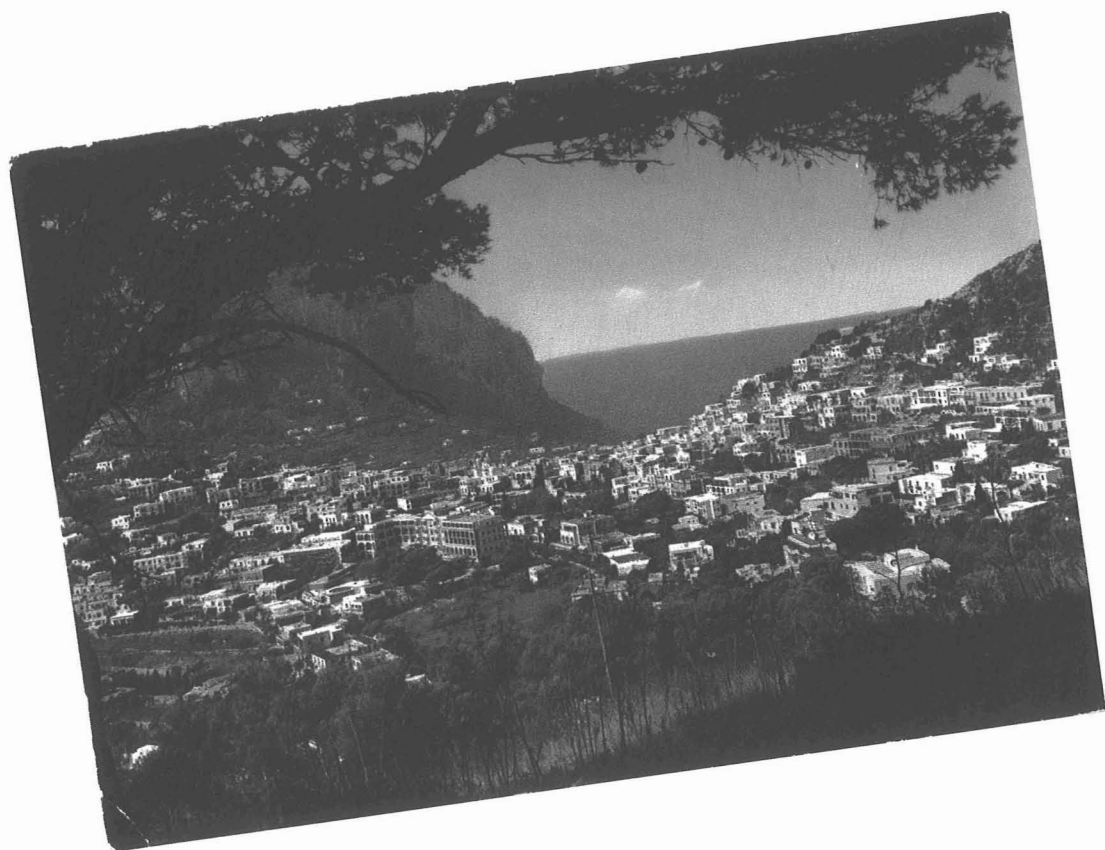
A young writer and experienced snoop, I spent several days in the summer of 2005 milling through junk shops in Providence, Rhode Island. I wasn't looking for anything in particular, except inspiration. What I found was a true surprise—an entire life revealed in postcards. At second-hand dives on South Angell and Wickenden Streets, I found 148 picture postcards from 1960 to 1994, all addressed to the same person: Miss Millicent Jones, Tolland Rd., Bolton, Connecticut, and one postcard written and signed by Millicent herself, that was never mailed. Currently, I am in the process of scanning in all of Millicent's postcards, as well as transcribing their messages, in order to develop a virtual museum for her online.

Dear Miss Millicent Jones,

I am writing to confess that I have read your mail—a whole lot of it. This must be rather upsetting to read, especially coming from a total stranger. This isn't Lois or David writing as a prank. You really don't know me. Anyway, we both know David wouldn't have the imagination for this sort of thing, and it can't be Lois since you can read the handwriting without going cross-eyed.

Now that I've broken the ice, let me tell you exactly what I've got. I've got them all—the entire postcard collection. I know you saved these very carefully for quite a long time and it pains me a little to relate to you exactly how I found them. They were all mixed together with other people's cards in a couple of junk shops—What Cheer and The This and That—on the east side of Providence. Some were crammed in musty wooden crates, while others had been left to disintegrate at the bottom of a green metal pail littered with dead leaves and Bazooka chewing gum wrappers. I don't believe this is how you wanted it, and I'm sorry to say your collection ended up this way. It must be one of your relatives, who, unable to see the true value of such a collection, is responsible for the impoverished fate of your beautiful cards. It had to be someone totally lacking artistic insight. It was that baked squash nephew of yours, David. Remember the time he wrote to you from California? In that card, as always, his note was brimming with brilliant observation: "Having a good time Aunt Mill some of the country is really nice, It is like you said a little bit cooler up north. David."





d:\personal

CAPRI - Panorama
General view

Spent a lovely
day in Capri
Such beauty I
have never imagined

Millicent



Mrs. Ella & Jeanette Sumner
Bolton Center Rd
Bollon Conn
USA
06040

20912
Ediz. Vincenzo Carcavallo - Napoli
Via S. Baldacchini, 29 - Tel. 328.069
Riproduzione vietata

DA FOTOCOLOR KODAK EKTACHROME

Unsent, No Date, Signed by Millicent Jones.

"Spent a lovely day in Capri. Such beauty I have never imagined. Millicent"

At any rate, I've got the postcards now, and I promise I won't let any harm come to them. When I moved from Providence to Toronto this past Christmas, it was you, or rather, your cards—carefully wrapped in white tissue inside a specially purchased wooden box—that sat on my lap for the duration of the trip. I prize your collection even above my own. In fact, my collections of books, records, teacups, shoes, rocks, and decorative erasers were sent on by mail in cardboard packing boxes. As one collector to another, I expect you may want your postcards back. But I'm afraid I can't do that—not yet. You see, I've become rather attached to them. To the *David's* and *Lois's* of the world, your cards might look like faded, uninspired photo reproductions of Whozit Birthplace and Whatzit Mountain, backed by corny captions and boring, one-sided conversations. But to me, and I hope this doesn't embarrass you, Millicent, I find your discarded correspondences highly seductive.

These notes, observances, apologies, greetings and thanks that you received so many years ago have cast a strange spell upon me. And that spell is you, Millicent. Through these hen scratches and misspellings, I can see you. I know you by your green thumb. I can hear your prim accent from your British childhood. I've read of your stubbornness, and am fascinated with your intelligence. I feel your sense of integrity and conviction through Louise's belated apology for challenging your wise leadership at the regional garden club meeting. And through all the years that you received correspondence from places like Hartford, Tanzania and Prague, you remained faithfully and simply, Miss Millicent Jones, Tolland Rd., Bolton, Connecticut. During all of those years, what did you find on Tolland Rd? Did June's camellia cuttings from California take in Connecticut soil? What do your famous English roses look like today? All bulldozed to make room for progress? Don't worry. I will make sure your postcards do not become casualties of real estate development. I will transplant your garden online, your *Ellesmere*: brilliant orange blossoms of the flame tree from Hawaii postmarked 1978, perky yellow tulips from Vienna postmarked 1967, creamy white dogwood flowers from British Columbia postmarked 1986, and the saucy magenta Zing rose from Connecticut postmarked 1993. They will all bloom together in an eternal bouquet, regardless of season and weather. *Ellesmere* will be open to the public, its borders branches composed of fibre-optic cable. I do hope you will visit sometime. All your friends are there.

Sincerely,
Rebecca Rouse