



Amongst the history of my mother, the detritus of her life, is her correspondence. It is preserved in the page upon page, pad upon pad, carbon upon carbon. She was raised back in the day when people did correspond, in written form both frequent and copious. She saved copies of this correspondence as carbon copies when carbon paper was at hand, and as hand written copies when it was not. It is these copies of correspondence which preserve her memory, in part. And it is these correspondence, too, that weight me down, spiritually and literally. The boxes and bags of this written evidence of a life once lived fill closets.

These days our correspondence too frequently is both slight and fleeting. I have realized, however, that one trait I share with my mother is my collecting of it. I have archives of email going back many many years, to a time when most people still didn't know what email was. In today's world of electronic avatar and emoticon this archive still connects me back, tethers me in a way, to the past.

It is in my mother's archive that I have found a way to share in parts of her life which I was not around for and that in her mind were either not worthy of remembering to her son, or would not bear foreign scrutiny. I have learned, for example, of her initial impressions of my father, her affairs of the heart, and then finally of her rapture at the prospect of marriage. "Alec Bernstein, English biochemist, pleasant enough, somewhat boring" is how she described him in the *dramatus personae* in a letter to her youngest sister written only 10 months before they would wed. She went on to write of a magical late February night of capering with several other grad students and one young man, her professor's younger brother who was visiting from Chicago and had caught her eye. This was all written in the form of a play (hence the cast list). Later that year, in June if I recall correctly, she wrote with passion of a weekend visit to Chicago to the campus of this chap. Nothing more is preserved in the written record until November of that year and her letter to her oldest brother, Billy, to tell of her impending marriage to my father and of her joy and happiness.

Someone examining my own archive in some far off future will have to dig mightily to find anything of such passion or import. They will find a record of the dissolution of my relationship with my brother Joe, and of the prosaic rendering of my mother's estate to its various heirs. There would be the history of my business dealings and my worries and concerns of entreaties both rash and over reasoned. That collection does not burden me.