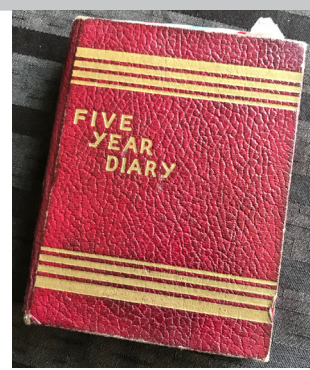


## FIVE

# ACROSS THE OCEAN TO THE HOMELAND; THE RICH, THE POOR & THE DEAD



May 24, 1953

*Between 9 and 12 we passed through the St. George Channel in the Azore Islands. They are in three groups. One of the islands has an active volcano on it. The islands are beautiful, just like a jigsaw puzzle, all shades of green & brown with houses & churches & all buildings snow white.*

May 26, 1953

*When we reached Gibraltar, on our way in we could see Tangiers on the North African coast and Gibraltar on the Spanish coast. Gibraltar is much larger than I expected, a huge rock & at its base a city inhabited mostly by Spanish-speaking people & by the British Navy. It is a Fortress, the only one Britain has never lost... Well it's 3:30 A.M. & I think that's enough for today.*

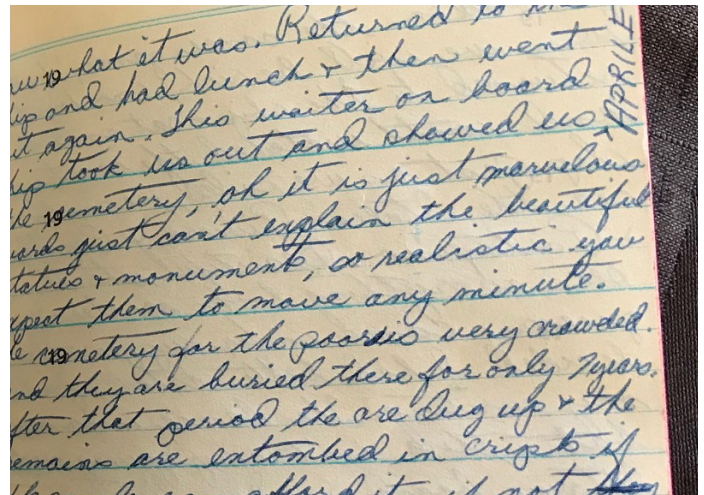
May 29, 1953

*... Left the ship to see a little bit of Genoa.*

**S**he steps foot on Italian soil for the first time. But that soil is already part of her, even though she is the only member of her family to be born outside of The Boot.

Geography be damned, for Irene was born in Trail, B.C., a small town that was then filled with Italian immigrants and where, to this day, key landmarks include the Cristoforo Colombo Lodge and The Colander restaurant, the former having hosted thousands of weddings and banquets, the latter an iconic destination for simple, inexpensive Italian cooking. By the time she will reach their homeland, her parents will have long been buried back in the Kootenays.

Two cemeteries will catch her eye during a day trip off the boat in Genoa, a city perched on the Ligurian Sea. Aprile, a waiter from the ship, takes her and her friends Louise and Erna



sightseeing. “Words just can’t explain the beautiful statues & monuments, so realistic you expect them to move any minute,” she writes that evening in her diary about the eternal resting places of Genoa’s wealthy.

She also writes about the cemetery for poor Genoese, explaining that it’s crowded and that its occupants are buried for just seven years, after which their remains are dug up and either entombed in crypts, if the families can pay, or dissolved using quick lime if they can’t.

Her eye for detail, her ability to assess the good and bad she witnesses, her tremendous memory and her ability to synthesize it all with a few words jotted in a tiny book in the wee hours after days and nights of walking and sightseeing and eating and drinking — even gambling on soccer games — suggest potential she will not fulfill.

She will be a kind and loving wife, mother, aunt and sister, a friend to many, a helping hand to her neighbours and at her children’s schools.

But it will be left to her youngest to make a life with words. And she will not read any of them.