

## Churchill: Family's letters depict a lost Albany

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The Murawski family in October 1942. From left to right, Anthony, Stanislaw, Anna and Stanley. War-time letters between Anthony, Stanley and Anna depict Albany during World War II and are posted to a website maintained by John Murawski, who is Anthony's son. (Contributed photo.)

### *Albany*

In 1943, Anna Lubinski was 23 and living on Orange Street. She was married with a baby and worried often about her two brothers in the war.

Anna wrote hundreds of letters over the next three years to Stanley and Anthony Murawski, both in the Army Air Corps. They wrote frequently back to her, and to each other. A box in the Pennsylvania home of a son of Anthony Murawski contains 1,200 letters sent among the siblings.

"I didn't know what I was going to find," said John Murawski, 55. He launched a website about the letters — [familywarletters.com](http://familywarletters.com) — as he began digging through the box three years ago.

He didn't find dramatic battle stories, partly because Stanley and Anthony served in administrative roles. He didn't find the World War II depicted in movies.

What he found was a letter-by-letter portrait of life for ordinary Americans during one of the most tumultuous periods in history. The letters from Anna, which I'll mostly focus on here, describe the view from the home front.

### More Information

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"Albany sure is getting important now that the war is on," she wrote in mid-September 1943, a day after witnessing a war bond rally at the Capitol attended by well-known actors.

That kind of excitement wasn't typical. More often, Anna's letters were about the daily, almost mundane routines of family and

neighborhood, set against a backdrop of blackouts, rationing and concern for soldiers so far from home.

"I have already started to pray for safe passage for you across the ocean," Anna wrote to Stanley in that same mid-September letter. "We try to think for the best but there is always fear and doubt."

The Murawskis lived at 382 Orange St., near Lexington Avenue, a two-flat building in the heart of the city's old Polish neighborhood. St. Casimir's, shuttered in 2004, was their church. Family was their life.

When the letters started, Anna was living with her husband, daughter and parents in one of the apartments. When she and her husband later moved to the downstairs flat,

you'd have thought they were moving to California from Anna's strong reaction to the change. Our sense of space was different then.

John Murawski says Anna's letters were meticulously typed and usually many pages long. She wrote both brothers, using carbon paper to produce a duplicate. Her signature ending: "So long, good luck and God bless you."

On Murawski's site, he posts about each letter as he makes his way through the box. He initially started the site, he says, for other family members, but soon realized the letters had broader value.

The brothers write often about travels through exotic places, while Anna's life was largely confined to the neighborhood. Still, some of her letters describe newsworthy events — such as the jeweler from Green Island revealed as an enemy spy or the bitter cold of early 1945 that brought a coal shortage and shut down schools.

"Last Tuesday we all voted for Roosevelt except Eddie," Anna declares in one letter. "For a while I heard the Republicans on the radio (and) I thought they were okay but toward the end they got desperate and were smearing President Roosevelt too much."

Some aspects of Anna's world still exist — she writes excitedly of a night at the Playdium bowling alley — but mostly her Albany of tightly knit neighborhoods and extended families has vanished. Her words make it clear we've lost more than we realize.

"They experienced life more intensely," John Murawski said. "They didn't have all the distractions in terms of material goods and media and just being barraged on all sides. The personal connections were more strong."

Many of Anna's letters are touching, as she raises one baby girl, Terry, and prepares for another. A few hint at the terrible cost of war.

"It felt so funny to look at the picture," she wrote after seeing a newspaper image of a neighbor's battlefield grave, "because the fellow used to go to school with me and now he is six feet under and in a few years grass will have grown over the grave and his cross will rot away and fall and everybody will forget about him except his family."

Stanley and Anthony Murawski died decades ago. Anna died in 2009 in a Schenectady nursing home. She was 89 and lived in Albany for most of her life.

Those of us who didn't know them will never meet the older Anna or the men her brothers became. But we can still become acquainted with the Stanley, Anthony and Anna of those long-ago war years through their letters and John Murawski's website. We can almost touch their lives.

"Baby Terry prays for Uncle Anthony every night before she goes to sleep," Anna wrote in the spring of 1945. "You know the Lord always listens to the prayers of little children."

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