

2 “Dear Son Write to Me”: Those Left Behind and Life on the North Shore

Lawrence Grassi died in Canmore, Alberta, in February 1980 when he was ninety years old. By the time of his death he had lived in Canada for almost seventy years, but long before the end he lost touch with his family. He also lost touch with other native Falmentines who had emigrated and tried to maintain contact with him. According to his collection of family letters – now preserved in the Whyte Museum – he stopped corresponding directly with those in Falmenta in the late 1930s, more than forty years before his death. But even when he did manage some correspondence, it is clear that Lorenzo Grassi was never one to take up pen and paper willingly or often. This frustrated, irritated, and angered his family and also complicated practical issues that the family was sometimes called upon to resolve.

The Grassi collection contains some forty-six letters that Lorenzo received from his family. They were written over a period of roughly seventeen years, from 1922 to 1939; to them we can add four letters sent by Lorenzo – in 1912, 1913, 1924, and 1928 – to his family in Falmenta.¹ We could stretch the time frame for correspondence to include the last surviving letter he received from Italy, written by his niece Angiolina, in May 1956.

Lorenzo’s sister Virginia was married on 26 February 1914, almost two years after Lorenzo’s departure overseas. She was then twenty-two years old. Her husband Enrico had the same family name as his wife and was also known in Falmenta by the nickname “U Giuvanun.” He was twenty-four when they were married. Their first child, Angiolina, was born in March 1917; when she was christened her absent uncle Lorenzo became her godfather by proxy. Five years later, in 1922, Virginia gave birth to twin daughters, Maria and Armandina.² So, in the