Dear Folks:

If the ingrained newspaper habit of placing important facts in the lead were not so strong I could weave suspense into this and build up to a climax. However.....

I am newly and happily engaged to Senorita Clara Ysabel Alegria y Vides --- and you, I imagine, are stunned.

unpremeditated, spur-of-the-moment happening. I have known Claribel (the Spanish pronunciation is much more mustical) for more than a year now. As I related in my last letter, I didn't date her for ethical reasons until Jerry announced his engagement, but during all that period we saw each other often and became friends. (Philosophical note: I honestly think I know her better for that reason than if I had been dating her during that time because physical attraction was kept out of the picture by virtue of the situation.) We have discussed world affairs, books, music etc. and argued politics, philosophy and religion over many a beer at Cahill's during that time.

I've dated many other girls back here, but never bothered to make more than passing mention of them in letters home because I never had very much in common with any of them and had nothing interesting or enthusiastic to say. And besides, I decided a long time ago that I was looking for a girl like Claribel.

So.... I started dating her when Olson cleared out. Matter of fact it never occurred to me to cut him out, although I knew they were just good friends. Thinking back on it now, I can't understand why I didn't. I made up my mind that I wanted to marry her after the second date.

Mores of the Salvadorean upper classes are considerably different -- and the courtship ritual considerably more restrained

than is our rough and ready U.S. technique. Daughters of the upper classes down there would think it shocking to let a man kiss them unless they were engaged. Claribel, though rapidly becoming Americanized, is no exception to that set of restrictions. Consequently I visualized a long, slow road ahead and schooled myself in patience and fortitude.

As I said before, I had already made up my own mind-had no doubts or disturbing questions floating around--and had decided it was merely a matter of wearing her down. (Didn't write you about the campaign because--as you mention in your last letter, dad,--I am often prone to give easy assurance that I will complete a difficult project and then have to eat crow.) I sensed last week that Claribel loved me and thought as much of me as I do her. I decided there was no need to stall around any longer. I asked her to marry me. She said yes.

As simple as that ..

Toocalm your nerves, mother, I will insert here, the statement that we will not be married until next May when Claribel graduates from George Washington University.

And now, by way of introduction to your future daughterin-law:

Claribel is completely vivacious—the happiest person I have ever met. She is very brilliant—frighteningly so (I'll have to grow rapidly to keep pace with her). She graduated from high school at 15—just as I did. She loves music—detests jazz, unfort—unately—art, literature, and her special craze, of course, is poetry. She is better read than I in English and American literature, has an equal or better command of Spanish and French classics (she has spoken French sinne she was a baby. All her family want to

France to be educated, and Claribel's mother spoke nothing but

French to her from the time she was born, letting her get her

Spanish from the rest of the family. Isn't that a wonderful way

to learn a language!) She is well informed in history and current

events and takes an intense interest in all the important things \*\*\*

that are going on in the world.

She--and all her family (except one rich uncle)--are intense liberals and humanists. Claribel herself is a socialist and the only argument we've had so far came about because she thinks Henry Wallace is wonderful and I think he has rocks in his head.

Family background: (I'm not putting this first because I'm snobbish -- only because it comes to mind now, and because I think it may be important to you, mother.) Claribel is pure Castilian and can trace her ancestry back to Pedro de Alvarado, Cortez! lieutenant and a bloodthirsty old bastard, to boot, who swung south after Cortez installed himself on Montezuma's throme and set up a kingdom of his own in Central America after he had quelled the Mayas. MOGROSOM ship the state of to her favorite ancestor -- a red-headed renegade Irish priest who turned pirate and took three wives in different ports of call. He was simultaneously married in Spain, Nigaragua and El Salvador, according to Claribel.) Otherwise, you would never mistake her for anything but Spanish. Her father is the a very prominent doctor in El Salvador. He is a Nicaraguan citizen, now exiled because of his violent opposition to the Somoza dictatorship down there. Somoza asked him to serve as ambassador to another Latin American country, and Dr. Alegria sent back word:

"I will never be the tool of tyrants." Dramatic, huh? Fortunately, I met Claribel's mother who was here in

Washington for four months this summer with Claribel and her sister Anoushka. (Anoushka is Anna Maria's nickname. Claribel's mother was reading "Anna Karenina" just before Anna Maria was born. These impressionable Latins!) Anyway--Senora Alegria is probably the most beautifull woman I have ever met...and I'm not being disloyal to Claribel, because she will look the same when shegue grows older. Anoushka is 16. Senora Alegria brought her to the United States to study music. She is in a Catholic school near Baltimore right now learning English. Next year she will go to Jouillard school of music. She is a talented pianist--her teachers at her present school refuse to play the piano in front of her because she is so much better than they are. An amazing family.

La casa de Alegria has evidently always been a salon for the great amtists and thinkers of Latin America. I believe I mentioned that Claribel and I went to a recital at the Pan-American Union last Sunday (a week ago) and Claribel introduced me to (I think it's Raoul) Cabezas, the concert violinist who performed. He is a great admirer of Anoushka's, but his Spanish was too fast for me to get much else out of his conversation.

I don't know why I should be wandering away from our central topic. Claribel. here, except to illustrate what wonderful and amazing friends and family she has.

Claribel is a year and three months younger than I. She has been in the United States for four years now and speaks English with a delightful accent. She wants me to help her get rid of it. but I flatly refuse to do it. She of course, is teaching me Spanish, and I am improving quite rapidly with such an incentive.

A.B. in May. She had several years of junior college in El Salvador. but started as a freshman here because she was learning English.

She and I have more identical interests, a more similar and ideals viewpoint and more equal aspirations/than any two people I have ever executatered met. Honestly, she's completely wonderful and I only wish you could meet her right away. I can sit here and write about her in my awkward fashion, but if you could see her and talk to her for five minutes you would wonder why I'm willing to wait seven months before marrying her.

I know the religious question is bothering you. but there is nothing to worry about. If Claribel had not been born a Catholic she would be a good Unitarian today. In fact, she is a good Unitarian who goes to church every now and then because her woman's nature demands the mysterv and the ritual of religion. I've talked with her about it and made my position clear. I was worried about it, as a matter of fact, although there was no need to be. Here is the way it shapes up. We will be married in the Catholic church-at the side door rather since I am not joining the church and since she has never expected me to. The trade name for it is a mixed marriage, and it is necessary. She would be living in sin otherwise, I understand. The children will be baptized into the church also, and that will be as far as it goes. Those two concessions are the only ones that need be made, and They are being made only to keep her relatives happy. As for herself, it doesn't make any difference. All the men in her family are free thinkers who, apparently, never go to church. The women observe the forms. She had one grandfather who was a lusty old atheast -- the kind of guy who kept a set of Robert Ingersoll's lectures at the bedside -- but nobody in the family tried to save him or worried anduly about his soul. Claribel, herself, never went to a Catholic school -- a most unusual circumstance in Latin America as you must realize. One of her free-thinking uncles

set up a school (pretty much like the Francis Parker school in San Diego) and Claribel was educated there from the first grade through high school. So, she has never had the dogma ground into her the way most Catholics have. She does not accept the dogma. she sees the corruptness in the church, and she goes her own way pretty much. Has no truck with saints ar the Virgin Mary etc. but she responds to the beauty of the services and feels religious in her own special way. She has no more desire than I that some pompous outsider shall take our children and warpotheir minds with God and Hellfire and damnation and robe-kissing. I know she isn't just saving it to ease or to lull my feelings, and I know that she will never attempt to plead the Catholic doctrine with our children. She will be as wonderful a mother as you have been, maw, because she thinks and believes and feels the same way about the important things. (She is one of five children, incidentally, --- a very small family by Latin American standards). Marmidanaxinamianxiningxinam zin ich dar em x

And now for some specific items .....

Claribel's parents will undoubtedly be up here for the wedding in May. It will be small & unpretentious, of course. I am hoping (Claribel too) that you folks will be able to get back here. With seven months advance notice, it shouldn't be terribly hard, huh?

Union (she translates French and Spanish papers into English) and earns \$100 a month. She is going to take the summer off and go back to work in the fall. I am not going to take any summer courses at the University. I'll have two weeks vacation coming by that time, which will fit in well with honeymoon plans (Cape God, we decided tentatively—the cost of living index being what it is.)

We hope we will have found a decent apartment by that time, and we are both embarking on a strict economy program in an attempt to make the initial payments easter if we have to furnish it ourselved. I am beginning to realize that these things cost a gosh-awful amount of money.

Mother--you remember making the statement that your golden sapphire would go to the first fiancee in the Flakoll family. Unless Cub has been awfully busy in the past few months and has nosed me out, I'd like to put in a claim for it. I know Claribel would be very thrilled to have it. She's a little worried because she knows what a narrow view many american families take towards having a "furriner" in the family, and receiving the ring--your engagement ring--from you would mean the whole world to her. Please let me know about this as soon as possible, hun?

Right now I am awfully tired...madebase completely broke (what with the new savings plan)....and completely happy. I have introduced you all to Claribel via the snapshot method, and she savs hello and that she wants to meet you soon. She will write you first chance she gets (midterms are here, and when she isn't workeng or at school, or with me, or writing her numerous relatives about the big doings, she is studying.) I have to dash off a letter in impeccable Spanish in the next day or two, formally requesting her hand. An old Spanish custom, you know.

This is all much more interesting than marrying an everyday,

insipid, stereotyped American girl. I'm an incredibly lucky guv and I have a staggering amount to live up to. If there is to be any disillusionment, I fear. I'll be the one to supply it; I'm afraid she has some pretty extravagant ideas about your eldest son. Hope she never wakes up and takes a good, objective look at me...although I have leaned over backward to keep from misrepresenting myself. Best I can do is try to keep the dream living. I guess.

Guess it sounds ridhculous, but I've tried to be objective and reporterial in this account...and I haven't overstated anything. I know you'll love her when you meet her, and I hope you don't have qualms about my judgement. This is a surprise to you, but it's been developing blowly and solidly at this end. It's my greatest accomplishment to date, and, by golfy, I'm proud of it.

(I'm sending along a few not-very-good snapshots made last winter when we were wading around in the snow.)

Late now, and I work tomorrow.

Write with reactions

(favorable, of course)

bud.....

F.S. - We plan to make a joint plane call to you people sometimes in the next week or two. It will have to be on a friday, Sat. or Sun. rite, so let zeek know when you will be home.

Clasibel's address is 1708 R St., NW

Bud