Stewart Bell Maclennan was the first Director of New Zealand’s National Art Gallery, and the first full-time professional director of a public art gallery in New Zealand. In 1958 he spent six months in Europe and America, visiting galleries and museums to gather ideas.

At home in Wellington his wife and four children eagerly awaited his letters, following his progress with coloured flags on a map on the lounge wall. His daughter, Mary Bell Thornton, has now put together a delightful collection of the letters to and from Stewart and his family – including some of the sketches he made while travelling. A frank and intimate record of the art world of the 1950s, and packed with humour.

Dear Stewart, we are beginning to miss all your dirty jokes at the tea table, and Janet is missing her morning cup of tea … I am feeding the cat regularly — he’s just as fat and doesn’t seem to be missing you.

Hello My Dears, I’m writing this in the train which is stopped at the moment at Salzberg for passport examination. So if the writing becomes erratic, you’ll know I’m on the way again …

… The Gallery is grim from the outside but contains probably the best Municipal collection in the world …