

The Long Lost Art of Writing a Letter

Last week I sat down and wrote two letters using paper, pen and a post box. Sounds strange in this day and age – in 2011 we type quicker than we think and seem to do most of our communication via our Facebook status or sms.

I chose to write letter one to my grandmother. As a small child I wrote letters to both sets of grandparents and have continued to this day, although sadly two are no longer with us. I write to them because I know that is what they would like – and while tempting to type off a long and newsy yarn about this child and that, it is, in my opinion, far more personal to ‘pen’ heartfelt thoughts and wishes.

I wrote letter two to some good friends. They only live a few streets away – but, hey, what the hell! They are special enough to warrant the effort and will be nicely surprised to find it – no doubt mixed in with their latest batch of bills.

I have tried to instill this same ritual in my children, but really, it is an ‘epic fail’. When I am going out to buy the cards, write the envelopes, stick on the stamps and post the darn letters – plus providing the rough copy – seems pointless. The letters in this case, are again meant as thank yous – forget the general well-wish letters that we used to write.

Boarding school memories of break time and prefects reading the mail evokes special memories. “Please read out my name, please be me...” Morning tea could be really successful – with a haul of up to six letters – or just downright depressing with none. But generally, we were all pretty good at generating regular mail through constant attention to letters. That is how we kept in contact with family, began (and ended) relationships with the opposite sex and celebrated birthdays. Oh, and for really special occasions – like our leaving exams – there was the humble –telegram.

Letters used to provide the memories, were special keepsakes –returned to the writer in big piles tied with ribbon – from parents who had lovingly kept each and every letter sent from afar – be it as a teenager at boarding school or a backpacker travelling the world. Remember the airy-fairy weight of an air letter?

When it comes to love – there is nothing more romantic than a handwritten letter. In history we learned of the love between Napoleon Bonaparte and Josephine De Beauharnais, Beethoven and His Immortal Beloved, Robert Browning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning or more recently, Princess Diana’s letters to Dodi Al Fayed. These days and somewhat less romantic, we gain up to the second accounts of celebrity love through Twitter.....think Warney and Liz as our 2011 courting role models. And while St Valentine’s Day is used to be more about sending anonymous cards than diamond encrusted presents and dinners for two, what is stopping us from keeping this wonderful tradition alive.

So next time you want to make someone feel special, thank them for their friendship, recognise the support of a colleague or associate or just say ‘hello’ – sit down and write them a letter!

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