

2014 MCC Creative Writing Contest

Essay Category

First Place: “*Bringing Back the Art of Writing Letters,*” by Melody Fracker

“Letters are above all useful as a means of expressing the ideal self; and no other method of communication is quite so good for this purpose. In letters we can reform without practice, beg without humiliation, snip and shape embarrassing experiences to the measure of our own desires...” Elizabeth Hardwick. Most people can’t remember when they wrote a letter rather than sending an e-mail or text. A recent survey showed that the average American household receives one letter about every seven weeks. Now, that is not even each American, that is each American household. In 1987, the average American household received a letter about every two weeks. That is a mere 27 years ago! With the rise in technology and the internet, there is no wonder why writing letters has become more and more rare. Letter writing is an intimate and personal way of communication that connects people and it should be revived before the art of it is lost. Writing letters should be encouraged and taught in schools to bring it back. This will be a tough thing to do, as this generation is going almost completely digital. So why are people communicating more on social media than the good, old fashioned way? Here are a few reasons.

There are a few, very legitimate reasons why the majority of people are deciding to communicate through social media. One, it is easy. When a friend’s birthday rolls around, it is so simple to type a “Happy Birthday!” on their facebook wall rather than to write a letter wishing them well being on their next year of life. Not to mention having to address the letter, putting stamps on it and going to the post office to mail it out. It is much easier to send a text or facebook message. Which brings us to another reason.

It is quick. Between school, work, family, errands, chores, etc... People feel as if they do not have the time to sit down and write a nice letter to a family member or friend. So instead of doing so, they might send a quick text and go about their day. Communication through social media has taken over so much that the Postal Service is even suffering financially. Randolph E. Schmid with Associated Press, wrote an article called, “You never write anymore; well, hardly anyone does. Postal Service: Internet communication to blame for decline in letter-writing.” He quoted the Postal Service saying that the decline in letter writing is “primarily driven by the adoption of the Internet as a preferred method of communication.” There is a battle of communication between social media and writing letters and writing letters is losing. Some people may think that this is not a bad thing, that it can actually be good. But do they really know the consequences of letting letter-writing die? There are many benefits to sitting down and writing a letter.

A person’s overall well-being can increase by writing letters. Stephen Toepfer, a professor at Kent State, did a study on letter-writing and the benefits it has. Toepfer had the participants in the study write a series of letters and asked them to express “heartfelt gratitude” as they wrote. What he found was the levels of each participants happiness, overall well-being and satisfaction

of life, went up as the study continued on. Now, studies prove that using social media does the exact opposite. With increasing depression rates, letter-writing can be an effective tool in people's treatment.

Writing letters can deepen a relationship between people. Whether it is with parents, siblings, distant family, significant other, etc... Taking just a few minutes to write down thoughts, the going ons of daily life and corresponding with another person can make that relationship stronger and more intimate. So how can letter-writing be brought back if it is not taught? It cannot.

The art of writing letters was once taught in schools, but recently the pen and paper have been replaced with computers and tablets. This must be brought back. Educators, adults, society must become aware of this simple, but important art. Writing letters must be brought back before it is too late. It should be required by school curriculum as part of English. Perhaps even art class since it is such a rarity now. They need to realize the importance.

Writing letters can improve well-being, relationships, and connects people in a special way. Without it, our world is just taking another step towards an impersonal and electronic world.

Works Cited:

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JUDGE'S COMMENTS

I like the use of sources to support ideas, the quotation to start, the AP writer's insight, the Kent State professor's comments on benefits. I fear that our technological methods are here to stay and that letter writing will continue to decline but I hope this author will continue to write those letters—or maybe apply those same letter-writing skills to email.

Jim Fatka served as judge for the 2014 contest. Mr. Fatka is a recently retired MCC English instructor who taught numerous writing and literature courses, including creative writing.