

"Letter to a Friend" by Sharon Lee Riguzzi

This week I did something I hadn't done in years: I actually took out some stationery and wrote an honest-to-goodness letter to a friend.

I bet if I took a poll, I'd find that it's been years since most of you (like me) even entertained such a low-tech idea as putting pen to paper! And that's why I want to share with you the amazingly good feelings that accompanied the whole experience.

First of all, once I made the decision to sit down and see if I still knew the how-to's of composing a letter, I was pleasantly surprised to see that letter writing was, as the saying goes, like riding a bicycle. It all came back to me: the salutation, the opening, the body, and the complimentary close. I say that with much gratitude to my grade-school teachers!

This was not the burdensome chore I had been anticipating. In fact, after the first couple of paragraphs, I found myself wanting to share more of what might be of interest to this particular friend.

After addressing the envelope and searching for a stamp (did the one with the flag send the right message?), I took it to the mailbox. And as I dropped the envelope through the slot, I actually felt proud of myself! How ridiculous! It was, after all, only a letter.

I was still patting myself on the back when a new and truly exquisite feeling began to take hold of me: sheer joy. See, I was picturing my friend's face as she received this letter. It would be a treat.

So many things nowadays are done in the fast-forward mode: there's E-Z Pass for our tolls, fast food for our stomachs, ATMs and online banking for our finances, and on and on. Or how about those one-hour photo services? The very thought of mailing film in a yellow and black envelope to a processing lab in Wisconsin would send some of us into appoplexy!

I for one could not survive without these speedy innovations. But I believe they also groom us to become more impatient-ever found yourself telling the microwave to hurry up? Still, we might be missing out on some positive experiences by taking the quick way to get to an end result.

Now I guarantee some of you are shaking your heads right now, and I know exactly what you're thinking: "Might be missing out on what experience? Waiting on a long line at the bank?" All right, maybe that isn't one of the experiences you'd be missing. But let's take a look at the fast-food scenario-it's probably one that we are all familiar with.

In the time it takes you to decide whether you want a super-meal 4 or 5, wait in line for the delivery of the order, and then double-check your change, you could instead stop at a vegetable market and pick out some nice, healthful produce. And if there are other humans in the house, you could enlist some volunteers to help create a salad or stir-fry some veggies with protein. You'd not only finish the night with a healthy meal but also get caught up on some conversation too.

Here's another example where positive opportunities may await you. Try phoning someone when you know they are going to be home instead of when you know they will be out. We also use the avoidance technique to some extent. But the interactive dialogue, which we might be dreading, could turn out to be a really good thing.

In writing to my friend, I rediscovered that the body of the letter was the most important and beneficial part-for me. And the same holds true for the examples I just gave. My point is that we spend a lot of time hurrying, a lot of time with our heads down as we review and check off things on our personal to-do lists, a lot of time possibly missing out on some really neat parts of life.

This week I challenge you to try blending some state-of-the-art processes with one or two from the past. This might slow you down a bit-and that might be a very good thing. Ah! The mailman's here. I have to go check to see if I've gotten any letters.

Lemon-Ginger Fruit Dip

1 PointsPlus Value Prep time: 5 min Cook time: 0 min Other time: 0 min Serves: 8

Lemon and ginger give this yogurt dip a bright note. Spoon it over berries or angel food cake, or serve it with apple wedges for dipping.

1 cup(s) fat-free vanilla yogurt

1 tsp lemon zest

1/2 tsp fresh lemon juice

1/2 tsp ginger root, fresh, grated

Instructions: In a small bowl, stir together, yogurt, lemon zest, lemon juice and ginger. Yields about 2 tablespoons per serving.