



**INTERNATIONAL
LETTER WRITING
COMPETITION**



BEST OF THE BEST

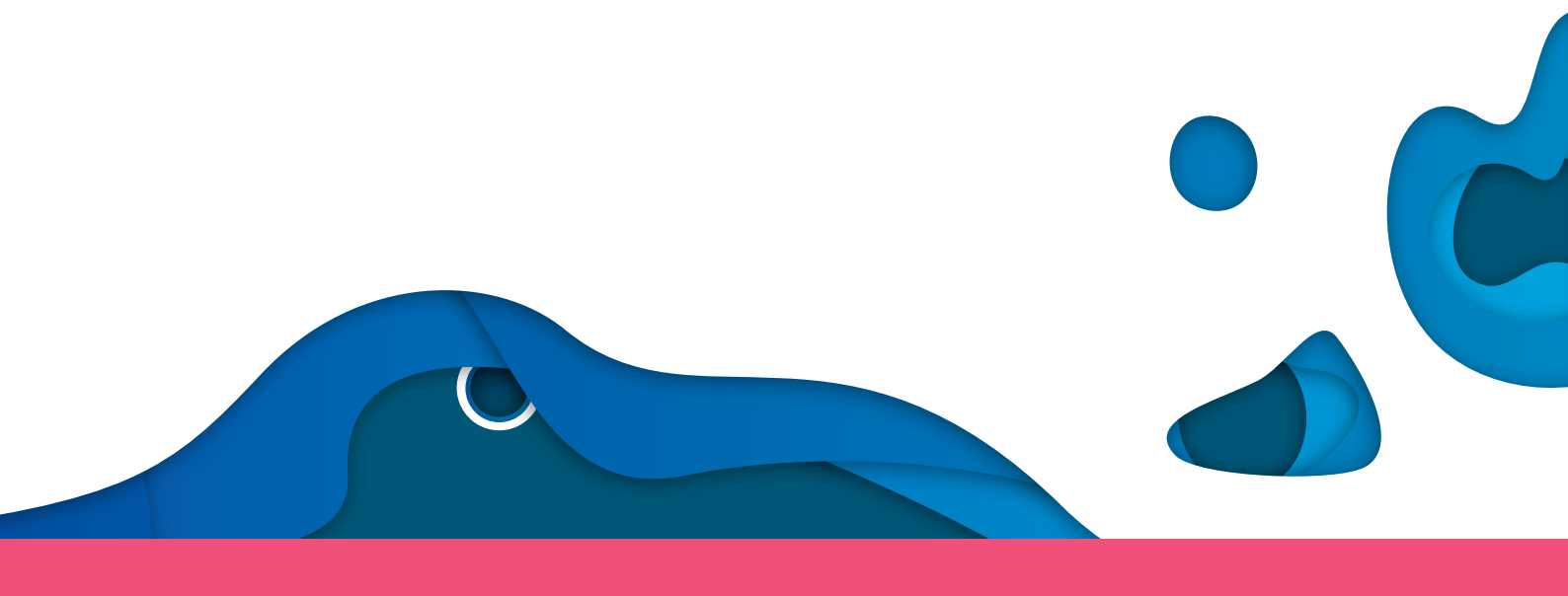


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The letters in this booklet are shown in their original form. The language or terminology used reflects the time period in which the letters were written.



1972

A LETTER TO A FRIEND

Dear young man of
the 21st century,

You who live in the era of cybernetics, of interplanetary voyages, with velocities diminishing distances and communications saturating a culture which dominates space and time, you, young man, you probably do not imagine that I have a long story worth telling.

Ever since the Ancient Assyro-Babylonian civilizations, I have been a means of information.

I served the Pharaohs of Egypt and the princes of Mesopotamia almost three thousand years ago.

I have been to China and Greece, I passed through the hands of the Greek hero of Marathon, and, in Rome, Emperor Augustus in person oversaw my efficacy.

In the Middle Ages, the king's messenger galloped quickly, with priority over other travelers, when he was carrying me. At that time, I began to be checked by the government.

A rate was established for my conveyance.

In the 19th century, Rowland Hill conceived a stamp which still accompanies me today.

England adopted it officially, followed by Sweden, Switzerland, and your country, Brazil.

In general, with other elements, I was present at the finest events of your native country's history.

I served as a witness to the Caminha texts recounting the majesty of the discovered land, and I foresaw the power which would arise. Only today I know how right I was!

I played an outstanding role when, in the hands of Paulo Bregaro, I was sent by Dona Leopoldina to her husband Dom Pedro I, who, on receiving me, proclaimed Brazilian independence.

This is why there is no happier postal item than me at this moment of the 150th anniversary of Brazilian independence, for, a hundred and fifty years ago, I arrived in a Brazilian home to meet a free family!

And it is with great satisfaction that today, by aircraft or by other very modern means of transport, I reach the most distant plains and the highest mountains, each time drawing still closer the bonds of friendship between peoples.



Sergio Roberto Fuchs da Silva
15 years old, Brazil

Owing to successive improvements in postal conveyance, I do not know how I shall reach you, but I know that I need to arrive, since it is essential for a young man like you to receive a message from me which reaches him not only thanks to me, but to a team which redoubles its efforts to ensure that I always reach my destination.

Despite the time separating me from you, you know me well.

The computers, the automation of life, the techno culture of your century are perhaps in conflict with my simplicity, but I continue my letter's mission, each time more useful.

Dear young man of the twenty-first century, if you have a little word of love, a very big problem, a communication of joy or happiness, remember me, I shall always be your friend the LETTER.

Sergio Roberto Fuchs da Silva



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”



1973

THE PLEASURE OF RECEIVING A LETTER FROM A FRIEND

After so many days of relentless work, the holidays had come at last – the time in which all our cares are transformed into a lake of happiness.

Everyone goes back to his relatives, overjoyed to be with his family again. Everything is forgotten, if only for a little while: no more homework, no more lessons to be learnt. We could spend our time playing all sorts of games. Voyages of discovery to foreign countries had to be arranged. Was this not all part of the joy of being on holiday?

And then one day, as I was strolling with my friends towards evening on the outskirts of the village, I met the local postman who told me to come next day and collect a letter that had arrived for me. Throughout the following night I could think of nothing but that letter. My whole mind was fixed on the letter and I kept wondering from whom it could be and what it might contain. I thought I could guess.

In the morning I went to see the postman. He handed me a letter on which I saw my name written in large letters. Turning the envelope over and over, I saw that it was a friend living far away on another continent who had written to me. I held the letter in my hand. I smiled and kissed it gently. I touched it with my fingers. I did not want to open it – I wanted to keep it for a week first. But a letter from so far away – what could be in it? It felt rather heavy. And I said very softly: "Nadjet, my friend, here you are with me at last in this letter; what are you going to say to me?" My eyes shining with happiness, I still went on holding the letter in my hand, inspecting the beautiful stamp which bore the emblem of my friend's country and which he had chosen just to please me.

At last I decided to open the letter. Once more I read my name and looked at the stamp. Then I opened the envelope gently, slowly and very carefully, so as not to tear the letter as well. As I unfolded it, my eye suddenly caught the first sentence: "You will not be surprised to receive a letter from..." It was a good letter – a friend's letter.



Dagourou Bogro Auguste

Côte d'Ivoire

Smiling, I ran my eyes slowly along the beautiful lines and felt myself transported into another world – close to him. At the end of each sentence I stopped and said to myself: “At long last we are together again”. Truly, “a long silence does not mean that we are forgotten,” I added. My friend had included with his letter some lovely postcards depicting his country’s landscape and market scenes, and a photograph of his family and their house, on which he had written: “The one seated is me.” I remained looking at it for a long while before going on with my reading.

“Can it really be you?” I asked softly. There is nothing more interesting than reading a letter from a friend. I gently folded the letter and ran home with a joyful heart.

Dagourou Bogro Auguste



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1974

A LETTER TO A FRIEND

Dear Roane,

*Ring the bells, roll the drums,
Herald my missive which arrives!*

How do you appreciate my new craze for poetry? I must admit that “drums” does not rhyme completely with “arrives,” but one cannot just whistle for inspiration to come at one’s disposal. I am afraid the Muse is not so obliging – to me at least.

Anyway, how are the measles getting on? I was dismayed when I was told that I could not even visit you. Although Christmas must seem the worst time of the year to catch measles, it may console you to know that the festive season is not hindering any of the teachers at school from handing out any more work. On the contrary, life seems as full as an egg what with the last hectic rehearsals of the Christmas play and examinations looming up dangerously near.

The spirit of Christmas is reigning both in our house and at school. My young brothers and sister keep popping up from nowhere evidently trying to discover where I have hidden their gifts. Then sometimes I catch them smiling furtively or concealing their hands hastily behind their backs when someone approaches. The same restless spirit dominates at school. Last time, during mathematics the teacher asked Jane to define a triangle. Jane, reluctantly emerging from the depths of a reverie, replied solemnly, “A three-cornered square,” and gazed in consternation round the class when it dissolved in giggles. We had another good laugh during the geography period yesterday. Mr. Grech asked Diane, the jester of the class, why days are longer in summer than in winter. She promptly answered wickedly, “Because heat makes everything expand.” Honestly, that girl’s glib tongue will be her downfall some day. She would win first prize for her knowledge of creating diversions!



Sandra Theuma
15 years old, Malta

Last Monday, I witnessed another funny incident. You know there is a hotel just near the library and if you remember, it is entered by a revolving door. Well, while I was passing by I observed a man who showed signs of having drunk more liquor than befitted him. He tried to enter the hotel by the revolving door but in his confused state of mind he must have thought it a sort of roundabout for he completed three whole revolutions without being able to decide when to step out into the hotel proper. Anyway, he finally managed to disentangle himself and giddily lurched back into the street.

I nearly doubled up with laughter when I saw him contemplating that great revolving contraption with such a puzzled expression on his face!

I must now close my letter as, funnily enough, my idle chatter seems to have spent itself. Seriously though, believe me when I say that I am missing you desperately in spite of my attempts to sound jovial. I am counting the days to when, "with a leap and a bound," you will return to school and sweep us all off our feet with newfound energy after your illness.

Sandra



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1975

HOLIDAY MEMORIES

It was Saturday, the 10th of Hamle. The clock was about to strike 6:30 a.m. The crowing cocks were heralding the breaking of dawn.

I was busy preparing my luggage for a journey to the countryside. After I finished packing, I made my way to the bedroom to kiss and say goodbye to my sleeping younger sisters and brothers. I immediately felt it was time to leave for the bus terminal lest I would miss the bus.

I arrived at the bus terminal. I was a bit late. Passengers were now and then instructed to get into the bus for departure. As soon as I finished bidding farewell to the people who came to see me off, I jumped onto the bus and settled myself on one of the empty seats. The bus had already started moving when I made my last adieu through the bus window.

The bus kept on moving fast and passed the city limits leaving my hometown behind. I suddenly felt disturbed. The reason was clear. I remembered the evening I passed with the kids at home when one of them said, "What will you get me when you come back?" and when another begged to go with me. The way my younger sister wept and the way they struggled to sleep with me that night made me feel nostalgic.

Not only the children, but the condition my mother was in also disturbed me. She never liked my going to the "dark" countryside. She would have refused to let me go if she had not been afraid of going against my wishes. All this came to my mind. My eyes could no longer control tears streaming from inside. My tears poured down from my cheeks for quite a time.

It was at this moment that a woman who claimed to know me woke me up from my deep thoughts.

The time was about 3 when I almost reached my destination on the second day. My grandparents live in a remote area where car traffic is non-existent. Beasts of burden do all the transporting of people and goods. So I hired a mule and set out for my grandparents' house.

On my way, I was wondering at the beautiful scenery of the countryside. To my left, cattle were grazing on the green pastures. A shepherd sitting on a block of stone was playing the flute. To the right, the vast ploughed field was awaiting the sowing season. The farmer was busy breaking the solid earth which was only slightly touched by the plough at the first run. The scene was very interesting to me as I was born and brought up in a city.



Azeb Gebre Christos
15 years old, Ethiopia

The mule-back journey was over soon afterwards. I dismounted the mule as I approached the gate. My grandfather was in the compound basking in the rainy season sun which was throwing its warmth through cracks in the day's light clouds. I made my way straight to him and bowed to kiss his feet, but he raised me up and kissed me on the cheeks. "Where have you come from, young lady?" he inquired in wonder.

"I have come from Addis," I replied.

"Whose daughter are you?" he inquired again.

"The daughter of Yismashewa," I said. He was surprised. He stood up and kissed me for the second time.

My grandmother came in a hurry. The mere sight of me surprised her. "Where have you come from?" she exclaimed. Before listening to my reply she dashed to kiss my cheeks.

We entered the house. My grandmother walked up and down the room in excitement. The home-tanned leather hanging over the wall was brought down for me to rest on. The home-spun cotton cloth was also taken out of the box. Later I learned that the cotton cloth was especially reserved



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1975

for my mother just in case she turned up one day to visit them. Wiping her tears from her cheeks with the edge of her garment, my grandmother told me that Jesus and his mother Mary had listened to her prayers that day.

I began thinking of her kindness, her love, and her tender devotion to her child. "How could she keep such a nice cloth for her daughter while she did not own enough herself?" I asked myself.

My grandparents' house was very large. The fireplace was right at the centre. Every corner was occupied by an earthen dais (medeb). The mud wall was covered with tanned skins of goats and sheep. The cotton-softening equipment, the degan, could also be seen hanging down from the wall. Family members and neighbours who came could easily see how much the scene inside the house had taken my attention.

Silence reigned in the house. A young girl entered and extended her greeting. I was introduced to her through my grandmother. She came and kissed me and sat by my side near the medeb. Shewaerkabesh, they called her.

Shewaerkabesh seemed reserved and timid. She did not talk nor move. She never dared to raise her eyes to look at me. When I saw her playing with the fringe of her dress, sewn by herself or by her mother, I felt ill at ease. I thought some kind of inferiority complex enveloped her. Was it because I lived in the city? It was really puzzling.

Some time had elapsed when another girl, named Yilfashewa, entered the room. She too was introduced to me. She asked if I was from Addis and my positive answer made her smile.

Tired as I was from the journey, my grandfather ordered boiled water for washing my feet. After dinner I laid down peacefully.

However, I began meditating upon their kind hospitality, their fondness towards me and the respect they accorded me. All this disturbed my mind until the long night's sleep descended on me.

I rose late in the morning. I went out of the house. The weather, which was not contaminated by smoke of the type in towns, looked fine. Shepherds were seen leading their cattle to the fields. Women who rose late in the morning were milking their cows. Others were cleaning dung from stables. Still others were busy collecting firewood to prepare lunch. All this was new to me, a city-bred girl.



While I stood fixedly, grandmother came. She looked very much concerned about my sleep the night before. She greeted me and asked me if I had passed the night well. She deeply regretted the fact that I slept on the bare floor. "The countryside lacks comfortable beds to sleep on," she murmured, saddened by the situation. I told her not to worry as if this would comfort her.

At this moment people on horseback arrived suddenly. I soon learned that they were my uncles and aunts coming from a faraway place to visit me. They kissed my cheeks and asked me how my parents and the rest of the family were. They looked at me in astonishment and said that I was a replica of my father, Yismashewa.

Their coming from a distance for my sake surprised me greatly. The country people respect city dwellers, whereas urban people even detest writing a short personal letter once in a while. They don't accord them a friendly welcome when they come to town. The best lodging they offer them is their kitchen. They even abhor the mere sight of them. Poor and innocent countryside people!

I had also other relatives who had not heard of my arrival. I set out to visit them together with my aunts.

On my way, I saw people gazing at me fixedly. Was it due to my way of dressing? My gait? I could produce no answer, except looking at them in perplexity.

We returned to my grandparents' house. A big fat sheep had been killed for me. Every relative around was invited. All of us feasted together in a warm and happy atmosphere.

When the feasting was over my grandmother took me behind the partition, dressed my hair and applied fresh butter to it. It was a great treat for me to stay with them. Butter, milk and honey were on the menu at meals.

The journey and the short time I stayed with my grandparents helped me to learn a lot. I never knew how difficult it was to grow teff, a common grain out of which teff injera, the bread, is made. I came to know that this was the product of the fertile land of the countryside plus the sweat of the toiling farmer and his family.

It was unfortunate that it was time for me to wind up my visit. My relations and their friends accompanied me for quite a long way, to see me off. I left them with mixed feelings of sorrow and happiness. All my way back, I was thinking of the time I passed with them. It was sweet and unforgettable.

Azeb Gebre Christos





1976

IF I WERE A LETTER

If I were a letter I would travel in the postman's pouch, restless, impatient to arrive at my destination; the way would be long and tiring, but I would be anxiously awaited; often my news would bring joy and pleasure, at other times tears and sadness.

I would fly in an aircraft, I would sail in the seas, bringing pleasant or, sometimes, unpleasant news to the friend whom I esteem.... advice to an absent comrade.... greetings..... I would speak to the loved ones who waited for me for reassurance and to stop having to live in constant anxiety. How sad I would feel if, by mistake, I was left forgotten because the postman had delivered me to a place that was not my destination! And if I arrive at my destination, what a pleasure to be able to transmit a message, to be the means of bringing together people long separated.... reconcile.... bring words of forgiveness, or of apology. Yes! If I were a letter and I was sent as an urgent and important message, I would feel proud to be of use although, later, my fate was to be kept in the souvenir bag or, with more luck, to be shown to other people who would read with interest what was written in me.

If I were a letter I would feel happy to be written for a child who anxiously asks Father Christmas for toys, because I know that I would be helping him to be happy. And if I were the humble letter sent to a peasant, I would be glad to be able to bring him encouraging news; and if, after he had read me, he returned singing to his work, I would be pleased to go into his poor dwelling.

If I were a letter I would be proud to be a loyal confidante..... to travel..... to know many places.... to go by rail, by bus, by boat, or to cross the seas in a jet aircraft.... to ascend higher than Everest or Aconcagua into the clouds – with my feet on the green fields; going in a funicular and seeing the snow-capped mountains ranged at my feet, the herds of animals disappearing into the forests.... but I would not like to be destroyed afterwards or thrown into the fire. No! I would rather be written for an important person in order to be kept or shown to everyone and thus to be able one day to become a museum exhibit, put on view after several years, to enable other people to see a type of letter no longer used.

If I were a letter I would not like to be long or boring, so that no-one would get tired when reading me; I would like to be brief and yet rich in content, and to be given an emotional kiss after being read.



Bertha Rodriguez Sánchez
14 years old, Mexico

I would be beautiful if I were a letter; the kind of letter I was would matter little: commercial, congratulatory, offering condolences, whatever I was, my task would be communication and that would make me happy.

It is a pity that I am not a letter, but I would like to become one and.... what a surprise.... I can be one and so can you! I have read many things on the faces of other people, in their eyes, in their appearance, in their ways..... I have learned many things.... I have come to the conclusion that I, that you, that

all of us can be an open letter with messages to be read by others.... May our messages be sincere, messages of joy..... of love..... of delight.... of peace.

I was going to end by saying: What a pity not to be able to be a letter! But now I know that I can be one and that I must become.... a letter open to everyone.

Bertha Rodriguez Sánchez



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If I were a letter I would be proud to be a loyal confidante, to travel, to know many places... to go by rail, by bus, by boat, or to cross the seas in a jet plane... to ascend higher than Everest or Aconcagua into the clouds or with my feet on the green fields; going in a funicular and seeing the snow-capped mountains roll on at my feet, the herds of animals disappearing into the forest...

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1977

A POSTAGE STAMP SPEAKS



In spite of myself I felt enthralled by it and drawn to it... It had something of the pride of the conquerors and the greatness of the Caesars in it. I could not prevent myself from asking the question: Who are you?

All I could see around me were faces bent over me, awaiting my birth. I felt with certainty that the effort made to bring me into the world and out of the womb of my mother the printing machine, in that form at once beautiful and delicate, had been arduous.

The moment of my birth was one of love and caresses. I was passed from hand to hand, all eyes were upon me and all fingers stroked me. And why not? My colours were attractive, my lines stylish and my shape pleasing. I was overtaken by a feeling of pride and vanity. I did not then know that the way would be hard and the voyage long.

The celebration of my birth was ended. The team dispersed. We were then put together tidily in series. We spent that first night of our existence in a dark metal cupboard, bosom to bosom, and we whispered ceaselessly in the quietness of the night. What was to become of us?

The grating of doors opening and the sound of voices rising and falling were the signals for our departure. We were taken in series in folders to unknown destinations. Lord! How difficult it is to part and how hard it is to prepare to leave and bid farewell to parents and cradle. I was then seized with a fit of fainting – I do not know for how long – and when I recovered consciousness I was lying with a number of comrades in the drawer of a post office.

During the first few days of my infancy I saw my companions depart one after the other. At last came the morning on which destiny willed it that my infant days should end and I felt fingers that trembled as they offered me towards a new face.

I was overwhelmed by a feeling of fear mixed with joy for I again went out, this time alone, towards the light. My sole consolation was that the first steps I took along the way enabled me to show my teeth which now appeared.



Nivine Ahmed Khairi Mahdi
13 years old, Egypt

The person who acquired me stuck me on the envelope of a letter which I first thought would be my last sanctuary. I did not then know that I was beginning a new phase of my life which, if it had to be defined, could be called the phase of my youth.

Yes! I had just started a new phase which made me aware of the extent of my responsibility and the value and gravity of my mission.

To begin with, it is I who give life to the letter. Without my presence it would be nothing more than a body without a soul, forced to stay in one place, being unable to move or attract the attention of those who looked at it.

I am the passport, the visa and the seal of quality which enables it to go on its way, from country to country and from one body to another, until it reaches its destination. During my youth I experienced every kind of transportation. Above the clouds I lived through minutes of security and peace and moments of fear and distress, I have spent days and nights on the waves, sounding the depths of the oceans and ploughing through the seas... I have devoted many hours to travelling the continent from city to city in order to carry out the wishes of men.

When, exhausted, I arrive at my destination and I achieve my purpose, the person to whom the letter was addressed greets me




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To begin with, it is I who give life to the letter. Without my presence it would be nothing more than a body without a soul, forced to stay in one place, being unable to move or attract the attention of those who looked at it. I am the passport, the visa and the seal of quality which enables it to go its way, from country to country and from one body to another, until it reaches its destination.

”



1977



even before opening and reading it, then murmurs a few words of thanks for the mission I have accomplished. After reading the letter the recipient again turns to me and, like a skilled surgeon devoted to his art and handling the knife with dexterity and cleverness, he gently and delicately separates me from the envelope. Then there follows a period in which he pays court to me, caresses me and asks me questions to which I cannot reply, being plagued by tiredness, exhausted by the voyage and having thus reached old age. My friend then puts me with others like me.

A big surprise awaits me! Brothers from the same country, friends of every race and different nationalities. A range of shapes and sizes, contrasting colours and different designs. Every comrade represents a story or a memory. This one tells an episode of history, another has something to say about art, a third illustrates a scientific achievement and a fourth... in short the various stamps issued by each country are natural links in a chain related to the history of the people and its struggle for security.

There is one strange thing about us. All beings fear old age and flee from its darkness, with the exception of us. As we grow older and the years pass, we increase in value, we are surrounded by admirers and enthusiasts who boast of possessing us. Thus do I achieve my objective?

As I remembered these words and again looked at the postage stamp stuck on the letter which I had just received and which had brought me good wishes, I asked myself:

“What would have become of this letter if it had been posted without my friend the postage stamp?”

Nivine Ahmed Khairi Mahdi







1978



THE POSTMAN, MY BEST FRIEND

My dear Uncle P:

Since I advanced to the fifth form, I've been busy with my schoolwork, coming home late from school. There is of course nothing I dislike about it, except that I can't see you as much as I used to. I've known you for a long time and you're a very good friend of mine. But somehow I haven't been able to tell you about me. So please let me take this opportunity to do so. Would you please hear me out?

I once had a father myself. But he passed away when I was in my first year of elementary school. Strangely enough, I was not so sad then. It was simply beyond me to believe that he died forever. I thought he would come back in a few days. But he never returned. As days passed, I longed for my father. When my friends happily talked about their fathers, I was sad and envied them. I even hated my father for being dead.

One day, we studied about writing letters at school. Our teacher taught us that letters were a wonderful thing that carried our message to people far away. It occurred to me that it might be possible for me to write to my father in heaven and receive answers from him. That day our teacher gave us homework. It was writing a letter to someone we hadn't seen for a long time and wanted to see.

I wrote one to my father. Since I didn't know his address, I just wrote "To Heaven" on the envelope. When other kids looked at the address of my letter, they made fun of me, saying "How can a dead man receive a letter? And who delivers it to heaven?" I was so ashamed of myself that I did not give it to the teacher. I lied to her, saying that I hadn't done my homework. But now that I had learned to write letters, I wrote to my father almost every day after that.

One afternoon, I was playing on the playground when I saw a postman walking over to the school with his large letter bag. I was so glad and excited to see him that I cried, "Excuse me!" but then I was unable to continue. The postman stopped and, like my own uncle, asked to know what the matter was.

"Sir, can a letter go even to heaven?"

"Who's in heaven?"

"My father."

"Bring me your letter tomorrow. I'll write the address of heaven on it and send it to your father."

I can't tell how happy I was then. Everyday after that, I brought a letter and gave it to him. It was about a week later when I first received an answer from my father. I was beside myself with happiness. But unfortunately I didn't dare let my mother know this, for she wept whenever my father was mentioned.



Mi-kyong Ryu
11 years old, Korea (Rep.)

He never failed to answer my letters. He asked me to be a good girl. I studied hard, for I didn't want to disappoint my father.

About a couple of months had passed when the postman stopped coming to our school. A new man had taken over. My father's letters also stopped coming. I complained to my teacher about the new postman not bringing my letters.

"Are you waiting for a letter from someone?"

"Yes, letters from my father."

"Your father is dead, isn't he?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Have you been receiving letters from him?"

"Yes ma'am."

She looked at me for a while. Then she gently seized my hands and told me that it was impossible to send a letter to heaven.

I must be old enough to know that. The former postman must have been very kind, for he answered all my letters not to disappoint me, to make me happy, just like other kids in school. He acted for my father.

After listening to my teacher, I slowly began to realize what had actually happened. I cried loudly in front of her. I wanted to call the kind postman my father. I loved him just as much as I loved my father in heaven.

My dear Uncle P, if you were I, could you forget about that postman? My heart will always be with the man who must be trotting along some street somewhere even at this very moment.

Yours sincerely,

Mi-kyong Ryu



21

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She looked at me for a while. Then she gently seized my hands and told me that it was impossible to send a letter to heaven. The former postman must have been very kind, for he answered all my letters not to disappoint me, to make me happy, just like other kids in school. He acted for my father.

”



1979

PLACES TO VISIT IN MY COUNTRY

Dearest little Martian,

I am writing to you with much love and I hope all your little friends are well.

As I promised, I am inviting you to come for a walk in a beautiful place where life is hard and almost cruel, although, as you can imagine, it is not as modern as your planet, Joy. You know, I really loved that trip and I don't regret having gone up with you in a flying saucer, although when I got back no one believed me when I told them you existed. But what does it matter? I had a very good time.

The name of the town where you are going is Sewell. It's also called the "Town of Steps."

It is nearly always covered in snow, and the beautiful hills stand out clearly because they are so white. When the sky is clear, you can see what look like moonbeams reflected in the snow; the purity of nature shines in all its splendour.

Deep inside the hills is one of the world's biggest copper mines. The miners are tough, strong and devoted, and this gives a bitter-sweet taste to life; I say this with tenderness and pain, seeing how they sweat, suffer and die. They sacrifice everything for their homeland and their families. That is the courage of Chileans.

There are many places like Sewell in our country, but I chose the white town because that is where I was born.

When I was small, I used to play in this snow that makes everyone happy; I used to run excitedly down these steps to meet my father when he came back from work.

I was happy here. It is the place where I spent my childhood and so I think you should get to know it.

There are many things I haven't told you about; I won't talk about them now, but when you come I shall tell you everything in detail.

I will tell you what the journey was like! There is a road that goes to a place called Colón, where the labourers stop for a drink or a sandwich. The place has an excellent hospital with a maternity ward where my sister-in-law gave birth to my sturdy nephews.

The roads then lead to a railway. During the train journey you can see the mountains with lofty peaks.



Liliana Concha Lagos
13 years old, Chile

These roads are rather lonely, but nature, the traveller's companion, makes you forget your solitude. It has inspired many Chilean writers. The transparency of the sky and the pure air of the Cordillera instill feelings of friendship and brotherhood.

Years ago, Sewell resembled a star-studded sky, a multitude of lights shone in its buildings; it was like a little Christmas tree with its lighted decorations. It has changed a bit since then, but it is still beautiful.

Little Martian, I hope you will be able to come during the winter holidays so that we can enjoy this landscape together.

I will tell you that all went well at school. "What is that?" you will ask. That is where we are taught; I know that on your planet there are no schools, because you learn things in other ways, but we have to be educated in places called "schools".



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You know, I remember that you asked me once whether peace and love existed on my planet, and I didn't reply. Now I will be frank with you. I have to tell you that the only people for whom we feel love and peace in our hearts are the children, and I think that all of us hope to be able to forge in our world this message which we keep sealed up for fear that someone may take away from us these two things which are so important for happiness.

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1979

You know, I remember that you asked me once whether peace and love existed on my planet, and I didn't reply. Now I will be frank with you. I have to tell you that the only people for whom we feel love and peace in our hearts are the children, and I think that all of us hope to be able to forge in our world this message which we keep sealed up for fear that someone may take away from us these two things which are so important for happiness.

You may be asking yourself why we don't say anything. We do, but the world is blind and deaf to our words and people kill each other for things that are worth nothing in

comparison to the peace and love that the universe could have.

This pains me and makes me sad, but that's why I love Nature. Because of her, I hope you will love the place that I am going to show you. Maybe later you can get to know other regions, but we'll start with my hometown. OK?

I'm sending you this letter by laser rays.

Liliana Concha Lagos







1980



A LETTER TO A PEN FRIEND IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY

*Sabah Salem El Sabah,
20 March 1980*

Dear Ahmad,

I was very happy to meet you through the pages of your letter, which enabled me to get to know you as a person and to discover with pleasure that we have similar interests and hopes.

To build the bridge of our friendship, I shall begin by introducing myself so as to acquaint you with my feelings and sentiments. I am a sensitive person who detests force and cannot bear the sight of blood. I find it especially difficult to get to sleep if I have seen during the day a sick child, a beggar woman clothed in rags which give her no protection against the winter's cold or the summer's heat, or a man bent with age and crippled by disease.

My favourite pastimes are reading and listening to the radio. It makes me so sad to read about the consequences of wars throughout the world: thousands of dead people who leave behind them orphans, widows and mothers whose grief and suffering break my heart because the voice of justice and mercy cannot be heard through force and oppression. Although I

like travelling in my imagination by following radio programmes and newspaper articles, I also love making real journeys to different countries. I cannot describe the immense joy and pleasure I feel when I am in an aeroplane flying through the air above the clouds, soaring over the earth which looks so small with its mountains, valleys, seas and rivers. I think then that if man would only raise up his feelings and raise himself above life's pettiness, he would see that the world is tiny and that the conflicts and hostilities that arise among its inhabitants have no justification whatsoever.

When I am on board a ship sailing over the sea, it is my great happiness and delight to listen to the waves breaking against the sides of the vessel; this gives me the idea that man must be strong in order to face up to the events of life and its difficulties.

I like gazing at the distant horizon where the blue of the sea merges into that of the sky in a magnificent spectacle embellished by flocks of birds, skimming on the surface of the water in quest of their food and then soaring in the air, a living symbol of the greatness of God, the creator of the world and of life.



Hani Ahmad Abdel Aziz
12 years old, Kuwait

Dear friend,
 My love of reading has forged a close link between books and myself. They go with me on all my travels by land, sea or air. The one I like best is the book of God which I always read in the evening or before dawn, when silence reigns over the noisy world; at those times I feel an immense calm and extreme grace.

I feel at great peace when I listen to light music and songs with a message, recorded on magnetic tapes. At such times it is as though I was flying above a calm world freed from the noise and rumours from which I have suffered throughout the day.

You might ask me, dear friend, whether the future finds a place in my thoughts?

I would answer: yes, and I hope to become a famous nuclear physicist so that I can devote my science to those fields which would bring back a smile to the lips of sick people who have lost all hope in life, and food to those fields which would provide food for the millions of starving children in the world who will die because they cannot find anything to satisfy their hunger or fill their empty stomachs.



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If you feel, in your personality and your interests, an affinity with what I myself experience, I should like us to outline our aspirations together in our next letters with a view to achieving a better future for mankind.

”



1980



I am all the more strongly impelled to realize my personal aspirations by the sight of the desolation caused by the bombs and explosives made by physicists and chemists, who must certainly regret the crimes they have committed against humanity when they see with their own eyes the consequences of the misuse of their inventions by men in order to do harm to others. That reminds me, dear friend, of the feelings I have for my human brothers, for, as an Arab poet said, "things are distinguished by their opposites."

If you feel, in your personality and your interests, an affinity with what I myself experience, I should like us to outline our aspirations together in our next letters with a view to achieving a better future for mankind.

When I have the opportunity to meet you and clasp your hand — very soon, I hope — our meeting will be the extension of our correspondence and the beginning of the realization of our joint hopes. At that moment I will feel victorious for two reasons: firstly because I have chosen you as my friend and correspondent, and secondly because I have shared with you the hope of working to banish despair from the lives of the mothers and fathers of the people of the future — the children of the present.

I am looking forward to receiving your reply and seeing what effect my letter has had on you. I would be so happy if you felt, like me, doubly victorious.

Peace be with you.

Hani Ahmad Abdel Aziz







1981

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A MAIL CARRIER

Dear Cousin,

When your letter arrived, I had just come back from making my deliveries. Now I imagine a myriad lights are twinkling in the city.

Awul is a small, out-of-the-way mountain village, ten kilometers from our post office. To get to it, I have to cross several mountains. When dawn breaks, I begin to climb with a bulky bag and a water bottle by my side. On the top of the mountains is a dense forest of pine trees. Through the thick, luxuriant leaves, the sunlight casts shadows on to the path. I often feel afraid walking here alone. To boost my courage, I usually hum a Kazakh song I learned from the local folk. Out of the forest and across another mountain, I can see flocks of sheep belonging to Awul Village.

The old Shepard Jiangbur, seeing me, called, "Aha, my wild goose comes here again!" I went over to him and sat on a rock rubbing my hands along one of the sheep's backs, which relieved my fatigue a lot. Then, pointing at my perspiring face he added, "You must be tired, lass. Only after many flights can an eagle's wings become strong. A girl like you from the city has to get used to your daily work. By the way, today's my wife's birthday. After your work, come and have lunch with us, will you?"

Uncle Jiangbur's words encouraged me. I delivered letters along the tree-lined street. A group of children caught sight of me calling, "Auntie's coming!" They wanted to drag me to their home to drink milk. I made a promise before going to Aunt Paxiahan's. She asked me to read her a letter and write a reply for her, then, pouring me a cup of milk, commented, "Yakexi!"¹

After delivering another few letters, I realized there were some boiled corn cobs in my bag. I never knew put them there. When I looked at my watch, I knew it was time for me to go and give a lesson to the children in the village school. They wanted to have a Han language teacher, but they couldn't find one. So I, a high-school graduate, promised the schoolmaster that I would teach them one class every letter-delivering time. After class and a discussion with some of the pupils, I found my bag even weightier than before, when I picked it up. Apart from their homework, it contained some cheese, dried apricots and apples. There was nothing I could do about it. They must have been slipped in there on the sly by those little rascals.

¹ "Marvelous!" in Uighur

Zhao Shuang*15 years old, China (People's Rep.)*

When I finished my delivery, smoke from the village's kitchen chimneys hovered in the air. It was time for lunch. At the entrance to the village, I saw Uncle Jiangbur driving his steep homeward. "Sorry, uncle," I stopped him, "I'll go and see auntie tomorrow. OK?" "Tomorrow? Tomorrow isn't my wife's birthday." Before I could say anything, he had dragged me to his home. While eating, I glanced from time to time at my watch. Auntie said to me gleefully, "Don't worry, lass. My old man'll take you back." As I was about to say no, he whispered, "Don't. Otherwise she'll blame me." She pretended to be angry, scolding, "Hum, you must be saying something bad about me...."

"Oh no" retorted the old man waving his hands quickly. "Would I dare do that? Especially on your birthday." His wife burst out laughing. So did I.

Just after he brought me home and the clatter of his horse's hoofs had faded away, I wrote you this letter. I feel I will never be able to tear myself away from this place. I'd like to know what you think. With all best wishes,

Yours,

Zhao Shuang



31

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When dawn breaks I begin to climb, with a bulky bag and a water bottle by my side. On the top of the mountains is a dense forest of pine trees. Through the thick, luxuriant leaves, the sunlight casts shadows onto the path. I often feel afraid walking here alone. To boost my courage, I usually hum a Kazakh song I learned from the local people.

”



1982

LETTER TO A CHILD IN THE YEAR 2000

Dear Xifot,

I am very sorry for not writing to you for a long time. Well, it wasn't my fault; the GSPS¹ shuttle, Omega, was out of order. The G.S.P.S had switched to "Damien," but as you know, it does not have as much capacity as the Omega and only a few letters are posted every day.

In your last letter you had asked about the happenings on Earth. Well, as usual, the USSR and the USA are again in conflict with each other, one supporting Jupiter's attack on Mars and the other against it. All the planets had stood resolutely in the UPO.² condemning Jupiter's action.

How are things up there on Venus?
You know the population of Earth is still increasing. This problem is not yet solved even after the migration of people to other planets. It is very hot here. My nuclear electro-air conditioner is out of order. Its parts are not available on Earth because it is of a Saturnian make. We are thinking of moving to the Pacific Ocean, in the Sea View – Apartments under water. I had gone to see them in the Hydro-Solar subhovercraft³. These apartments are right in the centre of the ocean. The building's façade is made of a special substance, canasadion, which is imported from Mercury. This material glows in water and the building acts as an underwater lighthouse. It is cup-shaped in appearance and has a spoon-shaped structure made of radium, projecting from its top, with its name written on it. At night

it is really a treat to watch. Each room has a beautiful view of the sea with its different species of fish. Occasionally, one or two fish come close to the window and give you a drunken look.

Pho!⁴ I forgot to tell you about the new weapon created for once by the combined efforts of both the USA and the USSR. Invented by the USA, Decoder 1 is capable of destroying any object from 55,000 miles away. The Recorder, devised by the USSR, has the most advanced computer system, which gives the precise position of the object and is programmed to manoeuvre the rocket out of danger. Its sensitive eyes give the nature, size and speed of the object. When the two operate simultaneously, their combined action will be effective enough to overcome the Robot Army and Pluto's flying Tanka bombers.

My father tells me about the good old days when Earth was the sole homeland of humans. They used to have human teachers and not robots like ours. Speaking of robots, those in America went on strike. These robots were demanding their leader should be allowed to run in the presidential elections. President Alfred E. Neuman tried to get it into their steel heads to reconsider their demands. He even promised them better oil and the new D2 Robot Sauce, but in vain. In the end they had no choice but to short-circuit their leader. The others were surrounded and assured that no action would be taken against them if they behaved like robots. As it is, Earth is facing

1 General Space Postal Service

2 United Planets Organization (the United Nations of planets)

3 A machine that is capable of both flying through the air and navigating underwater. It runs on solar energy and is even capable of using water as fuel.

4 An exclamation

5 Interplanetary Olympic Federation

6 Goodbye.

Faisal Muneeb
14 years old, Pakistan

various threats from other planets; these robots are not making things any better. It is good that no robot has yet been promoted in the army.

You must have heard of the 2000 Olympics held here last week. The opening ceremony was a sight to watch. The sky was brightly coloured by strontium, barium and potassium fireworks. The participants marched in their gaily coloured uniforms. The Olympics were boycotted by Uranus and Mars because of their conflict with Jupiter.

After the opening ceremony, the president of the IOF⁵, Mr. Spookes, gave a speech in which he welcomed all participants. Then the games began. We Earthlings outclassed every other planetarian. The best athlete of the Olympics was a robot, Gruptana 100A. We won 48 gold-plated moonstone medals, 5 silver-coated granite medals and 6 copper medals. I felt sorry to hear that your planet only succeeded in getting 2 ounces of graphite dust.

I think I have already taken a lot of your time. Please write to me or tell your robot, Zephyde, to do so. Till then, *shulalay*⁶.

Yours earthly,

Fits Amanullah



33

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You must have heard of the 2000 Olympics held here last week. The opening ceremony was a sight to watch. The sky was brightly coloured by strontium, barium and potassium fireworks. The participants marched in their gaily coloured uniforms. The Olympics were boycotted by Uranus and Mars because of their conflict with Jupiter.

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1983

THE POST IS A LINK BETWEEN NATIONS

Dear Little Eskimo Friend,

How are you!

The letter addressed to “a little friend who loves writing letters” was received by me — a Chinese boy with yellow skin and black hair. As soon as I got the letter, I wondered about the words on the envelope, “from the North Pole”, and thought to myself: “How could somebody be writing me from a place full of ice and snow?” When I read it, I understood: It’s from you, a little Eskimo friend who loves writing letters.

You say in your letter: The North Pole, where we live, is a long way from many other countries. Here, everything is white. A white sky, white ice, white animals, even our houses are white houses. But we hope that the link of postal communication will bring us closer together! Let letters be sent to all the countries in the world through this link, and add more colour to our lives!”

After reading your letter, I was overjoyed. My mother, father and sister work for the post office and I also want to be a postman when I grow up. My parents tell me that every day the post office receives letters from all over the world, from Australia, the “home of the kangaroos”, from Africa, a continent spanning the equator, and even more by long-distance flights from European countries and from America. And not long ago they received your letter from the “White North Pole”. It is true that the postal service is like a beautiful link which can be seen in tropical forests, on mild plateaus as well as in the cold North Pole where you live. Don’t you think this link is really miraculous!



Wang Zhongqun,
13 years old, China (People's Rep.)

I would like to tell you something interesting! One night I had a dream. I dreamt that I was sitting on this "postal link" following a north wind whistling to the North Pole. You were standing on a white icy shore, clapping your hands to welcome me. I also saw a polar bear splashing about in the icy river, as though to receive me, this little Chinese guest. I walked down from the link and went into a glistening igloo with you. Everyone sang and danced, even the polar bear came into the igloo, playing an accordion, and we had a wonderful time!

Dear little Eskimo friend, you are very welcome to visit China. Our Chinese people are like you, very industrious and very hospitable. If you would like to come, then get on "the postal link" and come to China to see me! Then, I could take you to visit the Great Wall and the beautiful West Lake—do come soon! I am waiting for you! The Chinese people are waiting for you!

Wishing you a pleasant journey!

Yours sincerely,

Wang Zhongqun
(a little friend who also loves writing letters)



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It is true that the postal service is like a beautiful link which can be seen in tropical forests and on mild plateaus as well as in the cold North Pole where you live. Don't you think this link is really miraculous? I would like to tell you something interesting! One night I had a dream. I dreamt that I was sitting on this 'postal link' following a north wind whistling to the North Pole.

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1984

WHAT IF THE POST DID NOT EXIST?

Beloved Samira,

It's not dawn yet. The birds, awakened from their slumber of the night, are chirping and singing, but they have not yet left their nests. Veiled by the morning fog, Jaflong is still quiet in the heavenly world of sleep. The splendid colour of oranges in the orchards is sparkling through the mist. The buds have not been awakened by the early morning sunshine. At this wonderful hour I only think of you. Very deeply.

You are so far away from me — you in Japan, the land of the rising sun, and I in Bangladesh, the green riverside country. But it seems to me as if just across these hills in front of me lies your Mount Fuji. You must be enjoying the rich cherry blossoms now, while our air is fragrant with the falling leaves of pear trees. The morning sun has not yet touched our Jaflong hills, but your windowpane must be lighted by now. It seems I can touch you if I stretch my arms. Your cherry blossoms will smile at me if I only open my eyelids. All my thoughts, on the wings of a pigeon, will reach you in a small envelope. My colourful imaginings of today will mingle with yours tomorrow. Thanks to God and thanks to the postal authorities!

Geographically, we are far apart. The globe in front of me is really frightening. It has been years since I saw you. I am sure that this letter of mine will reach your precincts in a few days. This small envelope of mine will overcome all the barriers of distance between us. This small letter is never lost in the vast world. Like a miracle and by the grace of an invisible power it reaches the addressee.

It has been three years since you have gone abroad. But every week your blue envelope has been conveying to me the warmth of your presence. Who is this golden soul who has helped me be with you in spite of the insurmountable barriers of time and space? The postal authorities of course! This is what I thought of the whole day and I can't but convey my hearty thanks to the postal authorities for this.

Let us imagine, just for the sake of imagination that there were no post offices in the world. Oh! What a disaster it would have been! All of us would be permanently detached from each other. I would have lost your beautiful face into oblivion. Three years of distance would have separated me from you. The world would seem abundantly larger. All my thoughts and dreams would remain mine only; they could never be communicated to you.



Sharmini Abbasi,
15 years old, Bangladesh

In the absence of the postal service our lives would become stagnant. The world would look like an inaccessible forest. We would have been deprived of instant happy news from the telegraph, like the news of the birth of nephews. God has not created men to be like islands, separated from each other. The objective and fulfillment of creation lie in the friendship between man and man. Without any postal service this inner object of creation would not be realized. The postal service is the milestone of communication. Had there been no postal service, many deserving students would not

get the opportunity to study. The money orders would stop. Sick and elderly parents who depend on their son's income would starve to death. Many, many sweet presents, calendars and diaries would not delight us through parcels anymore. The wonderful news of the birth of my niece would not have made me happy. The life-saving medicines sent through the post office would not reach a dying patient. A man who is counting his last hours would fail to receive the drugs sent to him from a more advanced foreign country. And every city and port would become isolated from each



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”



1984

other like islands. Brotherhood and mutual understanding would stop forever. I am sure you cannot even imagine such a disastrous situation.

The noble soul, in sympathy for the distress of mankind, sheds his teardrops which turn into lotus in the lake, transform into a pearl drop, into mother-of-pearl. Similarly, the postal service, the noble soul of this universe, has stretched its open arms for the benefit of human beings, for the expansion of brotherhood. It brings joy and peace into the poor huts of millions. The letter of a son brings in the beauty of the silvery glow of a moonlit night to a sleepless mother, worried for his welfare. The old father living at the feet of the Himalayan Mountains gets heavenly pleasure in hearing from his married daughter, a thousand miles away. The postal service makes all these dreams come true.

The young eager man who is going from the city to his village to see his mother for the last time, would have been deprived of her last blessings and sweet kisses, had there been no telegram service to inform him of his mother's illness. His entire life has been purified by this single last kiss. Likewise many people would have missed the last touch of their beloved ones. So, we must admit that the postal system is one of the greatest blessings of modern science.

The world seems to be in our grips today. Crossing over seven seas and hundreds of rivers, our best wishes and greetings reach the destination in a few moments. It seems like a dream. The land where we have never been or will ever be is at our reach through a letter or a telegram.



Just as a river is connected with the sea, with its every small droplet of water, all the countries of the world are similarly linked intimately with each other. Had there been no communication link amongst the nations of the world, the nations would have remained isolated from one another in the absence of telegrams, telephones, letters, parcels, etc. We would also be deprived of the daily colourful news of the other countries of the world. A father could not get the heavenly delight at the news of the extraordinary success of his son. And a soldier could not thus write his mother from the battlefield:

*"Mother, I am well
I shall return quickly with
much thrilling news.
They say we wouldn't be
allowed to speak in Bengali,
To listen to stories in your lap
Mother, can that ever be?!"*

My colourful imaginings of this morning have been illuminated by the thought that you are sharing them with me. All the cheerful words and music of my soul are like winged butterflies, flying happily to your destination. If this letter of mine gives you a moment of ecstasy, a moment of sheer pleasure, then you should be grateful not to me or my letter, but to the postal authorities who have done so much for the welfare and happiness of mankind.

Waiting to hear from you soon,

Yours sincerely,

Sharmini Abbasi





1985

LETTER TO A HANDICAPPED CHILD

Dear Teresa,

Hi, remember me? I'm Rose-Mary Davidson, the girl who was pushing her sister's wheelchair at the Fredericton Mall last weekend and nearly ran you over. You weren't even angry at me. Instead you took my arm and we sat down on a bench and you asked me why I was in such a big hurry.

I told you about the women that were snickering and pointing their fingers at my sister, Cindy. They called her a freak and said she should be locked away.

I know Cindy didn't understand them. She thought they wanted to play so she smiled and waved. Then I started to hurt, really bad. All I wanted to do was to get Cindy away from those terrible people. How can people be so cruel? That's when my tears blinded me and I almost ran over you. I'm sorry.

You see, Cindy isn't a freak. She's our miracle baby. When she was born the doctor told Mom and Dad that Cindy wouldn't live to see her first birthday. Cindy sure fooled him, she lived to see ten birthdays and I hope she'll live to see a hundred more. The doctors say that she's mongoloid. This means that she is mentally handicapped and is unable to walk. Some people say she's a burden and should be locked away somewhere. But I don't think so. I think she

needs to live a normal life and I know she wants to. So what if she can't walk — her wheelchair gets her around!

My sister may never be able to do all the things other girls her age do, such as skipping rope, riding a bike or playing hopscotch, but she can hum and sing songs better than anybody I know! She likes me to tell her stories and take her for walks. She calls me "sissy" because she cannot say Rose-Mary. When I get close to her she hugs me and says, "I luv Sissy."

She has so much love to give it makes me tremble to think anyone could be mean to her.

Cindy's different, she's special, she's a gift, a miracle, but she's certainly not a freak! My sister has as much right to be a part of this world and go anywhere she wants without being called names as anyone else does. Maybe the people that make fun of her are the ones that are really sick and should be locked away. You agreed with me. I think we have a lot in common, because you seem to understand my anger and my frustration. Somehow, strange as it may seem I think we share an understanding about disabled people.



Rose-Mary Davidson,
15 years old, Canada

I especially like you for reaching out and holding Cindy's hand. You weren't afraid of her. You even spoke to her like she was a person, a special person. Cindy likes you too, I could tell. I think that this world needs more people like you. The Cindys of this world don't need sympathy, name-calling, ridicule, belittling or to be locked away. They need to live in a normal environment with love, kindness, and understanding for them to grow and reach their fullest potential.

Thank you for being there when I needed someone. I know Cindy thanks you too. We would like you to be our friend, please say

yes. The world needs more people like you to make this a better place.

Sincerely

Rose-Mary and Cindy Davidson

P.S. When you got up to walk away I noticed your "unusual" shoes and the braces on both of your legs. Then I realized that you were a special person too.

God bless you
Xoxo



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1986

LETTER TO A REFUGEE CHILD IN WHICH YOU EXPLAIN THE POST'S ROLE IN BUILDING PEACE

Dear refugee,

Sadly this letter will not bring you food, or freedom, or save you from persecution, famine or violence. But it can bring you inner peace, as many letters do. It may not bring physical well-being but it can bring psychological satisfaction. And that is exactly where peace can be found because it is not a material idea; it can only be discovered in the mind. If it does bring you that inner peace, then the post will have truly justified its existence.

You can be forgiven for not believing me, for not believing that something scrawled on a piece of paper could be of any help whatsoever. It is understandable because you who have suffered so, who have perhaps been embittered, could hardly be expected to believe that a letter could help alleviate your inevitable pain. What I do say, or rather write, to you is that people do exist who haven't suffered like you, haven't hungered for food or justice, but still feel sorrow and shame. You are not alone in your plight because there are people who know, understand and sympathize with your feelings. You have this moral support, this mental staff to lean on, and perhaps this knowledge will be able to help you in your search for truth and peace.

The post is one of the oldest ways of communicating a message to someone you can't see or talk to. And without communication there can be no understanding, no dialogue and thus no peace. When people communicate there is hope; when there is no communication there can be no peace. When Gorbachev asked Reagan for a summit, he wrote to him. The contents of the letter might not have been mutually agreeable, but at least it meant that they were talking, that there was a chance, a possibility. Communication is a basic, fundamental, intrinsic part of peace—peace cannot exist without it—and letter writing is a vital part of communication.

Why is it so important? Why does the post still exist when the phone, radio, television and satellite are all more efficient? Simply because a letter is something tangible and real, something a person can hold with his own two hands. Anything else is no more substantial than a mirage. Nothing remains to prove that what you saw or thought you saw or heard was really what you saw or heard. There is nothing you can go back to in a few days or weeks or years and smile to yourself and glow with an inner happiness.



Richard Nash,
15 years old, Ireland

That letter might be from an estranged husband who slammed the door many years ago. One can remember one's anger, fear and frustration beforehand and then the joy, relief and satisfaction. A letter is solid and palpable. Click goes the telephone receiver, flick goes the TV switch and nothing is left but vague, uncertain half-memories. You can hear a voice only once but you can recite a letter in your mind for as long as you want peace of mind. It, unlike anything else, is something you can put in a drawer or under a pillow and treasure.

The letter is also a symbol of individuality, something private and personal. Television and radio are directed at the masses; they are public and impersonal. It takes nothing to switch on the TV or radio or dial a number. But a letter requires thought, effort and preparation. It is directed at you and only you. One has to get a pen, paper, envelope and stamp; one has to sit down and spend time writing. It may seem little enough, but the person will appreciate the trouble taken for his sake only. The recipient's heart beats with pleasure knowing he was worth the time and effort spent. Immediately the reader can sense a genuine generosity and there an inner peace.



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The Post is one of the oldest ways of communicating a message to someone you can't see or talk to. And without communication there can be no understanding, no dialogue and thus no peace. When people communicate there is hope; when there is no communication there can be no peace.

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1986



One classic example of how the post brings peace to people in this way was the great importance soldiers attached to their mail. During the world wars, Korea, and Vietnam letters were often the only barrier left between sanity and insanity. It helped them to hang on to reality; it was their life link with the real world. Letters were oases of peace in bleak deserts of violence. The post let them know that people do exist in this world who despise the lunacy of war. The post was their only link with the part of humanity who hadn't gone crazy with killing. Letters from parents, wives, girlfriends, brothers, sisters, classmates gave them moral support because they knew they still had something to fight and hope for, not a nation or an ideology or any -ology but for peace and friendship.

Letter-writing may not end the arms race, it may not stop terrorism and it may not end the suffering that caused you, dear refugee, to leave your country. What it can do is forge a link and a bond between man and man, between different individuals. It won't open the Iron Curtain between the USSR and the USA, but it can open the mental iron curtain of prejudice between the souls of Marvin and Ivan.

And if an epitaph should be written on the gravestone of Samantha, the young American girl who wrote a plea for peace to Andropov and who tragically died in an airplane crash several months ago, perhaps that epitaph should be:

*She hoped
She wrote
She conquered a monolithic bureaucracy
And she brought hope of peace to
the hearts of all.*

Yours in peace,

Richard Nash







1987

LETTER TO A HOMELESS CHILD IN WHICH YOU SET FORTH THE HUMAN DUTIES AND OBLIGATIONS TO IMPROVE THE LIVING CONDITIONS OF THE HOMELESS

Dear homeless child,

You long for a home. Not the wet street in the heel of a Winter Wednesday or the steel pipe cold of a wrecker's yard on Thursday. Not the huddled cardboard comfort of soiled newspapers on Friday's doorstep. You long for a place where you can go in and say, "This is mine. This is where I belong. This is where I can shelter from the rain and hide from the cold. This is where I am safe in the warmth of human love and care." A home is many things — a place of shelter, a social unit and a caring environment. A home protects from the harshness of nature and the pain of man's callous indifference. A home is where physical, and also spiritual and emotional needs are fulfilled. It is the sense of belonging and mutual care, the bond that exists between humans living together. A real home is that which gives courage and hope in the face of harshness and despair, even hunger and poverty. To be homeless is to be without all this.

A home is a basic instinct. Each Spring, beak-twigg'd birds build their homes with patient accuracy. Animals, too, create their own homes, whether it be the intricate delicacy of a spider's web or the simple cave shelter of the bear. "Home" is the first instinctive place of refuge for an animal in danger or in pain — even animals see the home as solace and comfort-giving. Little can exist without a strong anchor. Every plant has its root and lifeline to security. From this root, the plant draws its nourishment and becomes part of the soil) and its environment. Every human, too, craves a root and a home — it is a physical need and an emotional necessity.



Deirdre Clancy,
15 years old, Ireland

Homelessness is the result of many factors. Natural disasters like those in Mexico and Colombia leave the silent shocked orphaned in their wake. Homes are swept away in the scorch of war and the homeless cringe under the lash of blood and gun. But it is the great disproportion in the distribution of wealth and the greed of man that are the seeds of homelessness and injustice. We can sense this deep-seated cause in a city like Calcutta, where over two million are homeless, while the elite few live in undreamed of luxury. War, too, can be the active demonstration of man's urge for money and power. Such social and economic conditions isolate and

reject leaving unknown millions homeless behind the dazzle of city lights.

Everyone has a right to a home. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights acknowledges the right to "food, clothing and housing". We have a responsibility to ensure this right for all people. As I write to you, I sit in the comfort of my kitchen in Ireland, conscious of fifteen years of love and care within my family. But somewhere in the slums of Mexico City, you crouch on a refuse tip or you thread stuttering steps through the shouts of a Dublin Dockside — unnamed, uncounted, rejected and alone.



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All over the world, there are those who work towards a peaceful revolution to grant you the dignity and a home that is your right. Although you still crouch on the sordid shambles of society's rejection, I hope that you will be strengthened by the home that I offer you – a place in my active belief in justice and brotherhood – a place in my heart.

”



1987



Is this gross contrast 'equality'? "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and human rights" (Universal Declaration of Human Rights). But is equality the homeless child wandering, wondering beside the steel-silvered skyscraper? We are called by the basic precepts of justice and human rights to "act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood" (Universal Declaration of Human Rights). "Equality" and "brotherhood" mean actively working to improve the living conditions of the homeless.

Living conditions mean conditions for Life. Life is not just survival in the physical sense. It is a human being living with dignity and self worth fostered by contact with the love of others. If anywhere on earth, a mother says to her thirteen year old daughter, "You must go. I can no longer support you," and she is left to scavenge in the steamy streets, we know that we have failed in our obligation to Life.

How can I fulfill this obligation? How can I ensure the essential elements of life and human rights for all?

I can alert others to an awareness of the plight of homelessness. I can impress on them my belief in the equality and dignity of all and the right of everyone to a home. It is only when we make an open acknowledgement of the great needs of others that we can actively work on their behalf.

I can support wholeheartedly, with practical and economic help, the agencies and concerned people working for peace, equality and justice ail over the world. Trocaire, concern, UNICEF, Oxfam, social workers, soup kitchens, hostels and community groups and many more, all work to bring hope and a new life to the homeless.

I can persuade our leaders to recognise the real human needs within the social and economic structures of today. I can encourage them to look with compassion on the cry of the homeless.

I hope my letter has given you courage for your future. I do care about you and wish I could share my home with you. All over the world, there are those who work towards a peaceful revolution to grant you the dignity and home that is your right. Although you still crouch on the sordid shambles of society's rejection, I hope that you will be strengthened by the home that I offer you — a place in my active belief in justice and brotherhood — a place in my heart.

Deirdre







1988

HOW DO YOU IMAGINE THE JOURNEY OF A LETTER?

Hello there, children, young people, old people and adults!

I am the oldest means of communication.

I know the whole world, the snow-covered mountains, the cities, the shores and the plains. I travel throughout the world bringing my news, curing homesickness... And people laugh, sigh and cry.

I announce births, deaths, birthdays, marriages and many other things. I enter palaces, offices, poor houses, rich houses, prisons and farms.

I will tell you about one of my journeys:

I was written with much tenderness, love and sensitivity, and a few tears were even shed. I was born at Belo Horizonte, of a young girl who wanted to send news to a beloved person.

I was dated, sealed and adorned with a beautiful stamp. How proud I was! I was so pretty! Then I was posted. An incredible journey was about to begin. I had to leave the gentle hands of my creator and was dropped inside a huge box at the post office, full of letters all just like me. They greeted me by the thousands and new friends kept on arriving all the time. At last the enormous box was full; I was picked up with other letters and sent to the airport. I loved that! I flew in an aero plane for the first time. I went across the sky and through the clouds and passed close to the stars. At last I arrived in

another city. Tireless, I continued my journey. We arrived at São Paulo, from where I was sent to Curitiba by bus.

There we rested for a while. We were to continue our journey next day and I took the opportunity to have a nap. Very early in the morning I was taken to the station and put directly into the goods wagon of a comfortable train which was going to climb into the sierra as far as Paranaguá. From where I was, I could see the whole sierra and its beauties: the flowers, the birds and a little church nestling right in the middle of the woods. After many waterfalls and tunnels, I finally reached my destination — the town to which I had been sent. I was put into a young postman's pouch and I almost died with fright when he rode his powerful motorbike.

Oh my goodness! What a wind! How tightly I clung to his pouch, terrified of falling! At last I was put very gently into a small box. Shortly afterwards gentle hands took me out; I was caressed and nearly soaked by tears. Then the little old lady who was holding me breathed in my scent and clasped me very tenderly to her breast before sitting down in a rocking chair. Half smiling and half weeping, she put on her spectacles and very softly began to read: "Dearest Granny."



Andréa Guimarães de Oliveira,
15 years old, Brazil

After I had been read and reread, I was put together with the other letters which came from other regions and other countries.

There were very old letters, some of which were crumpled and even torn and yellow with age. I felt sorry for them. There was one from 1915, when Granny had received a request for her hand in marriage. There was another from 1973 announcing the birth of a child, who was later to give birth to me.

This letter welcomed me with a tender smile, for it too wanted to have news of the girl who had created me. I have grown used to my new home now, despite my yearning for travel. I have crept into a corner and gone to sleep, to awake — who knows? — only when my heart is seized with homesickness.

Andréa Guimarães de Oliveira



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I was put very gently into a small box. Shortly afterwards gentle hands took me out; I was caressed and nearly soaked by tears. Then the little old lady who was holding me breathed in my scent and clasped me very tenderly to her breast before sitting down in a rocking chair. Half smiling and half weeping, she put on her spectacles and very softly began to read: ‘Dearest Granny’.

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1989

TELL ME HOW WE CAN PROTECT NATURE AND DECORATE THE EARTH WITH FLOWERS AND GREENERY?

4 September, 2092

My dear little sister,

I guess you don't know why we are celebrating Naturalibra so enthusiastically today, so I'll explain to you what happened on Earth exactly one hundred years ago.

On 4 September 1982, the news was disastrous as usual. A problem had arisen that was undoubtedly going to bring about the end of the world if we did not react: pollution. For several months this fearsome word, printed thousands of millions of times in millions of newspapers, had been terrorizing the inhabitants of the Earth. The sea had turned black as ink, while oil tankers and oil rigs had poisoned marine life by accidentally spilling their products into an ocean that long ago used to surround the continents with its azure blue. The Earth was enveloped in suffocating clouds of gases spewed out by motor vehicles, fouling the atmosphere. In cities like Tokyo the people had to wear oxygen masks. The desert was continually encroaching and many countries were suffering from famine. One particularly scorching summer had caused numerous fires. In addition, the construction of the Trans-Amazonian highway and the sale of wood from that immense forest had greatly

damaged our Earth's "lungs". Men hunted more and more, and several hundred species of animals were on the verge of extinction. And whether in Venice, where stinking algae had invaded that formerly splendid city, or on the smallest oceanic island, where people who lived by fishing were dying of hunger, whether in Peru or in Eurasia, countries were now faced with a very grave problem with catastrophic consequences. So the government of each state elected its representatives and formed a super-government to fight pollution. Every means was employed, but without success. The Eskimos did not want to stop hunting whales or the Africans to stop killing elephants.

Economically, each country wanted to keep its advantages and privileges. As a last hope, young people, for whom money was not the main concern, were appointed instead of adults. Power rested in their hands and people gradually realized that only children were reasonable and well-intentioned. First of all they got together, discussed the problem and came to the conclusion that it was necessary at all costs to limit the destruction of forests as much as possible, to equip motor vehicles with antipollution exhaust devices, to halt the extinction of animal species and to inspect nuclear power stations more strictly. Then they asked



Caroline Naddeo,
15 years old, France

each state for a certain sum of money and, despite protests, brought together the most famous research scientists, scholars and engineers working in the field of ecology.

People started using only non-polluting cars, and the cloud of smoke enveloping the surface of the globe quickly dispersed. The sun's rays once again reached the plants, which revived and grew. Greenery spread out and flowers blossomed. The animals returned to their natural environment, reproduced and were saved. The cities sparkled again; the ocean and the sky were blue as never before. Several years of relentless struggle were necessary to enable the Earth's inhabitants to find a normal, peaceful life again. All the scientists and young people were then thanked.

Today, in 2092, on all the continents, the safe guarding of our Earth is celebrated and tribute is paid to all those people who have fought to enable us to live in a natural environment bedecked with flowers and teeming with animals.

I hope, little sister, that you understand now why we here care SO much about our dear old Earth, and when you come to us on holiday from the world you live in, which is so different from ours, you will appreciate all our wonders a little more.

Your loving sister,

Délia



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Today in 2092, on all the continents, the safeguarding of our Earth is celebrated and tribute is paid to all those people who have fought to enable us to live in a natural environment bedecked with flowers and teeming with animals.

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1990

WHAT CAN YOUNG PEOPLE DO TO HELP FIGHT HUNGER IN THE WORLD?

My dear friend Sonia,

It is He who has leveled the obstacles of the Earth. Walk then on its slopes and eat the provisions which He has lavished upon you. (The Koran-LXVII-15)

About your question on the role of us young people in the fight against hunger, I say...

Food and man are two inseparable entities, because they symbolize the continuity and security of human life and the very survival of mankind as a whole. God created man and gave him the means of survival to ensure his continuity.

It remains for man to try to find food. Every stage of the history of mankind is full of examples of struggles which show the importance of obtaining sources of food. And now, with the constant increase in the number of inhabitants of this world, the need to improve and develop the means of acquiring sources of food for all races has become more urgent. This problem is further aggravated by the lack

of food products in some regions, while we see cases of overabundance in other parts of the world. The publications of the organizations involved in the problems of food illustrate this difference between the various regions of the world. These organizations make every effort to achieve balance among these regions from the point of view of the optimum distribution of food products or the development of the sources thereof in some regions, as well as seeking solutions for eliminating famines which decimate whole societies, as was the case in Sudan because of the drought.

Hunger is a specter threatening all the developing peoples and the poor sections of the population who do not have the resources to produce food.

This problem is still waiting for a solution at the world level. The direction of this solution is represented by the proverb: "Woe betide a nation which eats what it does not grow and wears what it does not make!"



Rasha Saleh Al-Atum,
15 years old, Jordan

The solution of the problem is thus focused on the search for sources of food in the country itself, avoiding partial solutions which depend, at best, on aid tainted with elements of dependency and subordination which, in turn, prevent the peoples from progressing and developing.

As regards the field of searching for solutions to hunger, it has always been linked to the earth, to the pursuit of the best scientific means of increasing its productivity and exploiting its neglected resources. This is linked to obtaining sources of water, which is the main element of agriculture. So long

as the world population grows — which makes it imperative to find adequate food resources to meet the constant needs of this growth — and so long as these resources cannot do without water, the solution of the food problem will remain closely linked to water.

To master urgent economic problems and provide future generations with the best chance of avoiding poverty and hunger, man today must endeavour to control water and maintain it wisely, because water is our lifeblood.



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We are the decisive force in this world; we are the nerves of development, rebirth and progress. We are the future with everything that this future contains in the way of hope.

Can we protect our future? Can we, the young, unite throughout the world, joining hands for the common wealth, the general interest, assistance and partnership?

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1990



Improving agricultural production plays a key role in this area, requiring all the means, methods and essential modern techniques to increase agricultural production. Preventing agricultural pests is a factor in increasing production, as is organizing pasture in rich areas, keeping cattle, and taking an interest in quality and quantity; all these suggestions could contribute to the fight against hunger on this planet.

Where does the role of us young people fit in all this? I see it in everything I have just said and even more. We are the decisive force in this world; we are the nerves of development, rebirth and progress. We are the future with everything that this future contains in the way of hope.

Can we protect our future? Can we, the young, unite throughout the world, joining hands for the common wealth, the general interest, assistance and partnership? If all this can be done, in all sincerity and objectivity, we shall succeed in eliminating hunger and disease and overcome all the problems threatening our world for which we wish all the best, beauty and peace.

What can we do? Once again, I repeat: a great deal. Let us start by taking the first step: let us start with ourselves and then with our friends until the circle extends to include us all.

With all my love and best wishes,

Your friend,

Rasha







1991



WHY AM I WRITING TO MY MOTHER TODAY?

Just another day of living

I am writing this letter without naming you, because I don't know what to call you. My mother, my suffering or my darling? All these words jostle each other in my deepest being and their meanings become confused, then sink into the mist and are lost in the depths of existence.

Now I am walking the dark alleys of the city; I stop at a corner and lean back against a wall...The square is littered with dirt and refuse. Black walls and doors rusted like autumn leaves. Oh Mother, I remember those days we spent with Father. That happiness which sheltered us under its branches whose fruits we picked, and which allowed us to flutter about under its skies on wings of hopes and dreams. I weep for those days, I miss them and long for them as night yearns for dawn and drought for rain.

Days and days that have so far been the best days of my life, but the wind can turn against the ship's desires. I was shattered by the appearance of that crack which violently shook our life and completely demolished it. Constant arguments that usually ended by making you and my father nervous and tense. As for me, I would burst out sobbing and go to bed without supper. How could I

eat when I had already had my fill of cries, weeping and moaning? My father would leave the house roaring like an erupting volcano and you would go into your room and close the door behind you.

This situation went on for months, until divorce severed the bonds of the marriage. I was happy to be able to stay with you and I hoped that you would devote your life to me from then on. But the divorce created an emptiness in you, the effects of which I felt in your words and in your attitude towards me. You became nervous and irritable, but I was patient, hoping for better days. However, fate decreed that you should get to know another man, marry him and forget me in the tumult of your happiness. Your husband, on the other hand, did not forget me. He began to count every step I took, every word I spoke and every mouthful I ate.

At that period of my life I detested and resented you. I hated in you the mother who had renounced her maternal love. You could see the hostility in my face, but the hatred concealed in my heart was even greater. In the midst of this unhappy atmosphere, I decided to run away. I resolved to escape to freedom, wherever it was.



Amir Mechria,
13 years old, Tunisia

I went towards the crowds of people and climbed onto a bus without knowing where it was going. I was moving around at that time like a lifeless old robot swathed in rags, walking in silence, caked with dust. The motley patches on my clothes were like figures by which I counted my nights of suffering. My black hair became dusty and the face that it framed became pale like a false coin and elongated like a moon in eclipse. During my first days of flight I wandered and wandered in the alleys,

looking for someone who could show me a little kindness and affection. Oh Mother, oh sadness, the arrow of suffering pierced my body and left a wound that time will never be able to heal. I wept then, wept for the radiant hope I had placed in you even though it was not allowed to shine, wept for my soul and my being which sought happiness and could not find it.



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Mother, you are guilty on my account, but I have come back to kneel before you and say these words to you. Oh Mother, I have wandered and gone astray, but I could never bear your estrangement. This separation has left in me a distress which blows and then drops anchor in order to tear out my entrails and encircle my heart filled with sorrow.

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1991

The days passed, but not quickly enough to heal my deep wound. Misfortune surrounded me, poverty seized me in its jaws and happiness abandoned me. Nowhere did I find a compassionate bosom on which to rest my head, nor an affectionate heart that might show tenderness toward me. I began to weep again, to miss a mother's love. Oh Mother, you are the source of my suffering; you are the cause of my end and my death. You made me an orphan — this is true, because an orphan is not a child whose parents die and leave him humble and submissive; no, an orphan is a child whose mother has relinquished her duties or whose father is busy elsewhere. You, when you failed to live in peace with my father and his tyranny, you destroyed me. Wasn't I worthy of a sacrifice on your part? You should have struggled patiently, for patience is the key to happiness.

Mother, you are guilty on my account, but I have come back to kneel before you and say these words to you. Oh Mother, I have wandered and gone astray, but I could never bear your estrangement. This separation has left in me a distress which blows and then drops anchor in order to tear out my entrails and encircle my heart filled with sorrow. Mother, I could not bear your absence. I miss you, Mother. I yearn for you just as someone who is thirsty is drawn towards an expanse of water. How hard is wandering and how bitter solitude! I hate this separation, Mother darling — write to me, write to me, Mother, write a few lines of faith and devotion, write to me and my eyes will rejoice at the sight of your hand! Wait for me one day — the day when I have an address.

Your lost son







1992

LETTER TO A 20th-CENTURY CHILD FROM A SAILOR WHO ACCOMPANIED CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS WHEN HE DISCOVERED AMERICA

I am a Spanish sailor who accompanied Christopher Columbus, an Italian working in Spain who was obsessed with the idea that the world was round. The Spaniards urged him to put out to sea to find a new route to India, and so we landed in a new world that we thought was the east coast of India.

During the crossing, ideas and questions came to me about the generations who would people the world in the centuries to come. I decided to write you a letter describing my impressions, the difficulties of our voyage and the emotions we felt on our discovery, in the hope that I can give a glimpse of the situation to the 20th-century world.

Our voyage began in the summer of 1492, in the 15th century of the Gregorian era, at a time when more and more geographical discoveries were being made, when rivalry between the big powers started to emerge, leaving clear and obvious traces on the weak peoples throughout this immense world.

So I left Spain, my homeland which was always present in my heart, and crossed the waters of the oceans, struggling against the waves which I sometimes succeeded in mastering but which mostly mastered me. My food came from the sea, which provided us with sweet-tasting animals. The sea, my dear child, is a world of its own, containing marvelous animals of all kinds, small, big, weak, strong, those that eat and those that are eaten, those that live in safety and those that live in fear, those that are calm and those that are restless ... The will of God is clearly visible in this impressive place.

But I must not forget to tell you about the marine plants, seaweed and magnificently coloured coral atolls, artistically created by the hand of a mighty engineer whom no one could emulate in the arrangement of this captivating beauty and this majestic organization of the world. We sailed the whole day and part of the night until we reached one of the islands, where we dropped anchor until the morning and then continued our crossing.



Mervette Ali Ahmed Jawarna,
15 years old, Jordan

It is the spirit of inquiry in each individual that urges us to face terrible dangers and expose ourselves repeatedly to certain death, to ultimate deliverance.

It was then I raised my hands to God, begging him to protect us. Do not be surprised, my child, I believe in the existence of God, the creator of this world.

I am writing to you as you live in a new world which will come five centuries after me. Your civilization will certainly have developed. Who knows, you may have attained a specific superiority in communications, education, nutrition and human rights.

Dear child of the 20th century, here I am, setting foot with Columbus on one of God's vast countries. I see strange people, alone or in groups, and one question comes to mind: what will happen to these people following



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I see the world in your times, child of the 20th century, with the feeling that you condemn civilization and that you feel anger and suffering. I do not know why I feel this sensation and this tension. I see that, with the start of the geographical discoveries, the colonial power struggle began to spread its wings, casting a shadow on the earth and preventing the light of liberty from reaching human souls.

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1992

the coming of civilization? Will they be happy or unhappy? Will progress bring them luxury or death and destruction? Will they drink the elixir of freedom or will they bend under the yoke of slavery?

I stand there watching them as they pass in front of me and I envy their simplicity and calmness. A voice inside me whispers all the time: I do not know what the days after our arrival in your country will bring you. Who is to know? We may have come to you with destructive dynamite which will cause you to curse the progress and the technology you may attain later.

I am writing to you, child of the 20th century, with the feeling that you condemn civilization and that you feel anger and suffering. I do not know why I feel this sensation and this tension. I see that, with the start of the geographical discoveries, the colonial power struggle began to spread its wings, casting a shadow on the earth and preventing the light of liberty from reaching human souls. I see that each strong nation tries to conquer the unknown world in order to seize vast areas of the earth, even at the expense of weak and peaceable peoples.

I see the world in your times, child of the 20th century, divided between the strong and the weak, conquerors and conquered. I also see it on fire; I see the earth bursting with earthquakes and volcanoes; I see your face before me, your eyes full of tears and the unanswered question on your lips: why all this violence in this fevered world? Do not be surprised, my child. I already mentioned, at the beginning of my letter, the world of the sea in which the strong eat the weak. The only way of ending this rule is by putting a brake on the appetites of the strong, by helping the weak to get strong and by training them so that they reach the level of the strong and can emulate them. I am writing to you as fear hampers my movements and dread links my words, making scattered letters which cannot easily be put on paper. I am writing to you as my feelings are disrupted, my ideas lack clarity and my trembling fingers fail to control the pen.



I am trying to visualize this distant future, but I see, dear child, between the lines, your face which rejects what the pen has written and what thought can imagine. I am sure that knowledge is a two-edged sword, sometimes useful and sometimes fatal. I see your scattered dreams, your desires destroyed, and your limbs torn off. I try to erase your features, but they remain in front of me. What should I do? If only I could live with you in the 20th century so that I could see whether this sad face really reflects your actual experience or whether it is just a mad illusion that shatters against the door of your real life.

You will dream, my child, of a peaceful world filled with warmth, love mixed with passion and where there is no suffering. A world of joy which showers honours on your head, raises you on the steps to glory, scatters flowers on your path and brings to your life happy experiences which implant in you the eternity of the immortals. I do not know whether you will achieve this dream or not. But it is what I wish for you.

Mervette Ali Ahmed Jawarna





1993

TELL ME, MY FRIEND, HOW WE YOUNG PEOPLE CAN HELP THE CHILDREN OF A COUNTRY AT WAR

Mexico, Spring 1993

Dear Friend,

When we hear on the radio or television news that there's a war in such and such a country, we never stop to think what this really means. We have lost our sense of wonder and compassion to such an extent that we spend our lives without concerning ourselves with what goes on elsewhere.

It is a blessing to be able to live in Mexico, a country in which, despite its mistakes and faults, we live in peace and in which, rich or poor, we can enjoy what we have.

Personally, I had the opportunity some three years ago to witness the dramatic case of two children from the Republic of El Salvador who had been the victims of a cruel and terrible war.

When they were smaller, these children had lived with their father, their mother Mericia, a little brother six months old and their grandmother, in a little village in the south of El Salvador.

They were poor peasants but they had a few hens and turkeys, a sow and a piece of land on which they grew maize, peppers and squash. In this country at war, the peasants quickly became the worst-placed because they were between two fires: on the one hand, the soldiers ready to rob them and mistreat them; on the other, the guerillas, who, not content with robbing them and beating them, took any male old enough to hold a rifle, killing any that refused to go. With each side fighting for its own ends, the people endured years of martyrdom, suffering and hunger.



Tania Garcia De La Cruz,
13 years old, Mexico

One night, the guerillas took the father of these children. They never heard from him again and they don't know whether he's really dead. They were told that the soldiers had hanged him together with ten other men at the end of a road. Animals and seed were gone. All they had to eat were a few badly cooked plants, wild mangos and guavas, occasionally a bird, a monkey or an iguana. Without medicine, clothing and proper food, the children fell ill and the baby died of diarrhea.

Filled with fear and despair, Mericia, the mother of the little ones, decided to set out alone to find work in the capital. She had to walk for two days to get there. There she met dozens of peasant women in the street who like her were looking for work and hundreds of men, old men and crippled children, orphans fighting over dustbins after the market in the hope of finding something to eat in them. Mericia also had to fight to get some refuse to eat. The most disgusting part is the way in which some heartless people take advantage of these human



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I should, however, like to place my voice at the service of all these little children and make myself heard by all adults. I should like to organize a campaign proposing that all children – in primary school and high school – write a letter to the UN to act as spokespeople for these other children. I should like these thousands of letters to be collected in a big square and handed to the president to be sent in a special airplane.

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1993

beings, of their ignorance, their suffering and their misfortune. Mericia and many other women were deceived; after being promised work, they were made to climb into the back of a trailer, half dead of heat, hunger and thirst, heading for a brothel in Tijuana, Mexico.

Mericia managed to escape from that place and succeeded in one way or another in reaching the United States where she went to my cousin, whom she knew and who employed her as a servant. She put money aside and decided to return to El Salvador to look for her children. After a thousand difficulties, she succeeded in returning to her home village where she discovered that the house had been burned down and the grandmother and the children had been raped by a band of soldiers. The little ones thought their mother was dead and the grandmother realized that, for the children's safety, she had to part from them. She was very old and did not have the strength to survive the journey to the United States. And, she said, she could not leave her dead alone. Mericia and the children said goodbye to her forever and walked for eight days before they reached the Mexican

border, where my father was waiting to bring them to our house. Crawling along the ground under cover of darkness, they managed to cross the border illegally. When I got to know these children, who were more or less my age, I was struck by the suffering that could be read on their faces. Thin, fearful, mistrustful, they would not let anybody go near them. They slept with me in my room and, after two days without speaking, they started to ask me how many times we had been attacked by the guerillas and the soldiers. They were astonished not to hear the sound of sub-machine guns, and ran and hid whenever they heard an aeroplane, thinking it was an attack. At mealtimes they put scraps of food in their pockets to be sure, they said, to have something to eat the next day. They could not read, write or play; they never cried but they never smiled either. Today, Mericia and her children live in Los Angeles. Their lives have changed but I do not think they will ever be able to forget that terrible war. They write to us regularly because they consider us to be part of their family. Their grandmother is dead.



During the month that I lived with them, I understood what it meant to have a house, food, clothing, a family and, above all, PEACE AND FREEDOM!

When I ask myself what I could do as a young person for the children in a country at war where suffering and misery reign, I think of those children and I say to myself: nothing! These wounds of the spirit, these damaged minds, these shattered hearts can never be healed!

I should, however, like to place my voice at the service of all these little children and make myself heard by all adults. I should like to be able to organize a campaign proposing that all children — in primary school and in high school — write a letter to the UN to act as spokespeople for these other children.

I should like these thousands of letters to be collected in a big square and handed to the president to be sent in a special aeroplane. I should like every television station in the world to speak about this event so that all we children can unite and make ourselves heard. Let thousands of young voices cry out for those children who are suffering:

We are cold, we are hungry,
we are frightened!
We want to play again!
We want to smile again!
Give us the chance to grow up!
Save us!

We are children!

Tania Garcia De La Cruz





1994



EVEN LITTLE LETTERS TRAVEL FAR

24 February 1994

My dearest Daddy,

It's very late and I'm writing this letter by moonlight, as I'm too excited to sleep knowing that in a few days you will have to say goodbye to the post office, take off your faded green uniform and retire.

You were the senior postman in our town. Riding your bicycle along big streets and narrow lanes, knocking on doors and bringing news from a relative, warm greetings from afar, news of a bumper harvest, each envelope containing long-awaited news. I want you to know how much I love you and admire the work you have done for all the countless people whom you have helped to link with your letters. When I try to think of the thousands of miles you must have cycled carrying a heavy postbag, day after day, year after year, through rain or shine, my heart swells with pride, as I imagine the joy you must have brought to those longing for news of their loved ones, bridging hearts like a rainbow.

Dearest Daddy, how can I ever forget that winter, five years ago — I was only eight — when my own parents were killed in a car accident. I spent the last two coins I had to buy a stamp and post a letter telling them to come back to me. The next morning, much to my surprise, a “dad” really came. You held me up and pressed your cheek against mine and I felt your tears on my face. It was you, the dad that my letter had brought, and my life began again.

Daddy, you have delivered letters all your life but have never received a single one. I suppose it was because you were an orphan, like me... You must have wished at times that you would get one. But now you have an adopted daughter and I'm writing you your first letter to thank you for the father's love and care you have given me. To make it a real letter I'm going to the city tomorrow morning to post it from there. But before I do, I want you to know my secret. When I grow up, I'm going to carry your postbag, ride along the same familiar green route you have done and be the bearer of news to those waiting for letters.

Don't worry, Daddy, I will take up where you have left off and try to be as good a postman as you have been.

Your loving daughter,

Xiao Jun



Wang Xujun,
13 years old, China (People's Rep.)

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When I try to think of the thousands of miles you must have cycled carrying a heavy postbag, day after day, year after year, through rain or shine, my heart swells with pride, as I imagine the joy you must have brought to those longing for news of their loved ones, bridging hearts like a rainbow.

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I AM WRITING TO A FRIEND EXPLAINING WHY HE/SHE SHOULD DISCOVER MY COUNTRY

**Let the grass grow high and
shelter the herds like a wall.
Let all people admire the beauty
of their native land!**
Beimbet Mailin¹

Hello Maria!

I was very happy and interested to read your letter in which you described your country. I could clearly imagine the snowcapped mountain peaks and the cold breeze from the North Sea, and I even caught the fresh smell of your country's pine forests. I understood how much you cherish every corner of your country and what a great love you have for your land and its people.

After reading your letter, I felt an immense desire to reply to you and, in turn, to describe my country which is so wonderful, incomparable and unique for me.

One's native country... What is it? For you, it's snowdrifts, hard frosts, the northern lights with their shimmering rainbow colours; it's the dense forest smelling of pinecones and resin. For someone else, it's the sound of the waves breaking and murmuring on the warm sand and the pebbles, it's the warm, gentle, soaking rain that bathes the foliage of the trees and brings freshness to the

earth. Another person will remember his little wooden house with the slender silver birch outside the window and the rowan tree laden with clusters of blood-red berries. For each and every one, no matter where they live or where life has cast them up, the native country will always be this place where they took their first steps and first said "Mama." Everyone will always remember their native land with love, tenderness and deep devotion.

My native country is sunny Kazakhstan. We feel the scorching wind from the desert, we see the dazzling snowcapped peaks of the mountains, we hear the sound of the rivers tumbling from the heights and we marvel at the beauty of a bird taking wing.

I love my native land for its endless steppes that are so beautiful in spring and summer, when the caressing breeze rocks the silvery strip where the red poppies bloom amid the green grass. The flowers glitter over the vast infinite spaces and adorn the earth with their diversity.

¹ Kazakh poet. In the original Russian, this little poem is written in rhymed verse. (Trans.)

² In the original Russian this little poem is written in rhymed verse. Kulans (which resemble small donkeys) and saigas (an endangered species of small antelope unique to Central Asia) are animals of the steppes. (Trans.)

Irina Kislova,
14 years old, Kazakhstan

Beside the immense, cold, ice-clad, snow-covered mountains, at the foot of the green hills, scarlet, yellow and pink tulips proudly sway in the soft spring breeze. The first streams descend from the mountains, their crystal-clear voices murmuring and chiming as if wanting to wake the earth from its deep winter slumber. The joyous twittering of the birds echoes across the steppe.

The verses of the great Kazakh poet Ibrai Altynsarin about the spring come to mind:

Happy because the tall grasses have bloomed once more, the kulans and saigas will bound across the spaces of the springtime earth. The swans and cranes will alight, calling, on the pure waters of the lakes. And at the hour when the sun dazzles the human eye, the seductive mirage will quiver in the shining distance.²



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I love my native land for its endless steppes that are so beautiful in spring and summer, when the caressing breeze rocks the silvery strip where the red poppies bloom amid the green grass. The flowers glitter over the vast infinite spaces and adorn the earth with their diversity.

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How full of love and affection is this poem about the native land!

During the torrid summer months, when the panoply of vivid colours pales beneath the sun's rays which scorch the earth pitilessly, it is good to rest in the coolness of the lakes surrounded by mountains clad with sparse vegetation. The sun's reflections tremble, quiver and run joyously over the surface of the brackish waters.

How beautiful Kazakhstan is in autumn! Nature has not been sparing with the yellows, reds and deep crimsons and has bestowed them on the trees, bushes, grasses and flowers. The wheat fields spread out like a golden sea. The big ripe ears of wheat rustle in conversation with the cornflowers and white daisies lost among the fields of wheat.

The apples are full of juice. The autumn wind carries the scent of fruit everywhere. Try to find a more succulent fruit than the Almaty *aport*³ anywhere else! Juicy peaches, golden grapes, perfumed pears — all these fruits are autumn gifts of Kazakhstan.

How silent nature is in winter! Everything goes to sleep; only the green fir trees remind us that soon nature will once more blossom forth and become fragrant, that it will begin to sing and chime and come to life again.

How good it is to relax in winter in the mountains of Alatau! The fresh air, the icy cold, the scent of the pines make the soul

happy, and one wants to live, love, rejoice and offer this joy to the whole world.

Kazakhstan is rich not only because of its marvelous, picturesque and varied flora and fauna and its minerals, but also by virtue of its glorious past which has left a significant mark on history.

So many devastating wars and fires, so much destruction, famine and sickness have crossed Kazakh soil. Many cities have sunk into oblivion, leaving only nameless ruins to us and our descendants; others have burnt down more than once but have always risen again from their ashes to dazzle the world with their riches, with the blue of their cupolas and the openwork carvings of their mausoleums and mosques.

History has not preserved many things for us. The dust of centuries has carried away ancient cities, but the skilful hands of our archaeologists and restorers have succeeded in retrieving and restoring the rare treasures of our ancient cultures: the mysterious Akyr-Tas edifice, the Aisha-Bibi mausoleum, cities with their citadels, their mosques decorated with mosaics, their caravanserais, their little inside courtyards, their artisans' workshops — all this transports us as in a fairytale from our modern cities back to the 15th—18th centuries. Many eminent people have left an indelible mark on the history of my native country.

3 A variety of apple unique to the region around Almaty. (Ed.)

4 In the original Russian this little poem is written in rhymed verse. An aul is a village of mountain dwellers. Saxauls and batyrs are Central Asian shrubs. (Trans.)

5 Kazakh poet, composer and philosopher.

Here was born the great and sainted scholar Al-Farabi, here lived outstanding poets and singers whose works celebrated the beauty of their native land and who were happy to offer them to the whole world — Chokan Valikhanov, Ibrai Altynsarin, Abai Kunanbaev, the great Zhambyl Zhabaev and many others who, in their works, brought to life the past, present and future of Kazakhstan.

The poems celebrating nature in my native land are especially beautiful. They evoke love of life, of the country and its people:

*Sweet-smelling flowers sparkle among the succulent, silky grasses of the steppe. An aul has pitched camp this morning near the rushing river... Tulips and poets grow and flourish in this steppe. Here the lightning is like the curved sabres of our ancestors. The white and blue tints of the salt flats glitter like stars. In this steppe saxauls and batyrs proudly grow.*⁴

My Kazakhstan is famous for its deserts and endless steppes; all my life I shall remember the blue of the mountain lakes, the dazzling snow-capped peaks, the fast-flowing rivers and the strange, narrow canyons.

I have often travelled across the Kazakh lands by train and car with my parents. I have seen the South, the North, the West and the East. I have sat transfixed with wonder, looking out of the carriage or car window at the boundless spaces of the

steppes and the sand dunes beside the Aral Sea, on which ships of the desert — camels — sailed past. I have gazed at the multicoloured carpets of flowers and grasses, contemplated the endless wheat fields in the north of Kazakhstan and admired the southern mountain Zaiiskii Alatau, the pearl and pride of the Kazakhs, the mysterious Lake Balkhash, the forested steppes of the north and the many picturesque nature reserves.

Not to mention the name of the great poet Zhambyl Zhabaev, who has entered the pantheon of world literature, would be to leave out part of our history. The verses of the great Kazakh poet have been translated into many languages.

This year is rightly regarded as the year of Abai⁵, the 150th anniversary of whose birth will be celebrated throughout the world, by decision of UNESCO. Our whole country is preparing for this celebration.

I am proud to have been born and to have grown up in this splendid country, I am happy that my nearest and dearest live and work here and that I am studying here with my friends.

I think that my life will forever be bound up with this ancient and glorious Kazakh land and its people.






1995

You know, Maria, an idea has occurred to me — I think it's a very good one. If all the letters from young people of our age were collected and put together, they would make a remarkable and very interesting book which could be used as a geography textbook. Only it would be different, because instead of containing dry texts like a schoolbook, this book would be imbued with the immense love each one of us feels for his or her native country. It would be our shared love for this common house of mankind — our Earth, this little particle of the universe that's so dear to us and is the only one we have. I would like to say: let us take ourselves in hand, my friends, and

preserve the Earth for our descendants — indeed, let us go further and multiply its riches and its beauties, let us leave our mark upon the Earth.

I will say goodbye now, Maria, but I would so much like you to be able to imagine my Kazakhstan. Put on the record I am sending you, close your eyes and you will see the endless steppe, you will hear its voice. It's my native land.

Irina







1996

THE PLEASURE OF WRITING A LETTER

Dear Elizabeth,

Last week I was rummaging in the attic when I found a letter my grandfather wrote to his father in 1945 when he was in the Royal Navy. It was a crumpled, much-fingered piece of yellow paper. In it my grandpa announced that he was soon returning home as the war was nearly over. Such a letter that can easily rekindle the emotions felt by those who read it. I can imagine my great-grandparents' overjoyed faces as they read the news! Such memorable messages are like priceless crystals that glitter forever. Who knows, maybe this letter will be kept in your attic for your great-grandchildren to read! In this letter we will remain forever fifteen years of age and the ravages of time will be to little avail. This event set me thinking about the preciousness of letter-writing.

Writing a letter is an experience in sharing. It can help cement a friendship, even between people who barely meet each other. As I sit writing to you on the veranda with a cold breeze stroking my face, I cannot help but keep you at the forefront of my thoughts as if I am talking to you. I am giving you a part of myself; my thoughts, my time, my handwriting and my feelings.

What can be more personal than a message sent to you only in a sealed and stamped envelope? We cannot be overheard as when we are on the telephone, or hacked by some computer genius as when using electronic mail. Dear friend, as long as you want it, it's you and me only.

Come to think of it we are also beating time and place. I can write this letter when I choose to, and in the most convenient place I like. You can read it whenever you want, wherever you are. Besides, in this world everyone is continually hurrying and scurrying, while in letter-writing there need be no haste. Tomorrow I can always continue where I finished off today, and even re-write if better if need be. For this, there is no time charge or impatient person awaiting his turn!

Letter-writing can also be relaxing. Using our own words and expressions can bring a sense of serenity. Moreover, writing our emotions on paper can be a therapy when we feel unhappy, angry or guilty. Even a prisoner is not stopped from writing a letter. At least his living can be made more worth it! Fear, the scourge of the persecuted can also be conquered. Think of Anne Frank's letters to her diary. In them she forgot the harsh reality she was living, and her hopes and dreams still linger on to future generations. I like to compare the unburdening of emotions that letter-writing stimulates to a poem or a painting. As I am no poet or painter I fall upon the humbler



Mariana A. Baldacchino,
15 years old, Malta

idea of writing a letter. At least I know to whom I'm writing and trust that my feelings will be understood.

Maybe you think I'm being too serious in this letter. It's just that I'm sharing my reflections on our "letter-friendship". Indeed, I think that the greatest invention that seals a friendship is the stamp by Sir Rowland Hill.

What about that other pleasure of writing a letter — sharing a joke. There is the advantage that its written form will prevent it from slipping out of mind easily. Did you ever hear of the chap who wanted to send an urgent letter but could not obtain any stamps to send it? He just taped a coin to the envelope, wrote "PLEASE!" underneath it and dropped it into the post-box. The following week he received a plain, white

envelope, and inside, taped to a card, there was the change. Beneath it a post office employee had written "JUST THIS ONCE!" Shall we try it out sometime and see if we come across this kind postman?

If I were phoning right now, I would be showered with complaints that I have exceeded my allotted time and that the bill is running high. Thank God I need only attach a simple stamp to reach you. The postman is only too pleased with it!

See you soon in your letter.

All my love,

Mariana



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Writing a letter is an experience in sharing. It can help cement a friendship, even between people who barely meet each other. As I sit writing to you on the veranda with a cold breeze stroking my face, I cannot help but keep you at the forefront of my thoughts as if I am talking to you.

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1997

LETTER TO A PERSON I ADMIRE THE MOST

To one of the greatest writers of all time. To a patient, brave, thoughtful, caring person. To a young, persecuted Jewess. To Anne Frank!

You have millions of fans in the world, Anne, people who love you from the very depths of their souls; I am one of them. Your courage, your very life has shown me that there is always a way to overcome the impossible.

Despite being so young and of an age when one is at the beginning of life, you took the cruel fate thrust upon you and dealt with it, using the greatest courage one could ever be blessed with. I'm the same age as you were when you went into hiding, 14. I spend my time doing things you used to do when you were free: complaining about clothes, wanting more clothes and music, gossiping with friends and other trivial things in life. Then you had no more time to do this. You had to continuously summon up courage and patience to go on living. When I think of this, I feel so sad and sorry that you had to spend the last years of your life in such pain and misery, while I'm free to go to school, living, doing the things you always hoped to do again after the war. Yet, in the short time you have lived, you made the most of it.

As anyone can plainly see when they read your diary, you were blessed with the gift of writing. Through my experience, most people never realize what their potential is until later on in life. Yet you realized it at the age of 13!

In my opinion, writing is probably one of the best talents one could be blessed with. I say this because it's a means of communication. You can express what you feel— love, hate, passion, pain etc. — and you did just that. I have read many books about the plights and the horrors that Jews have gone through. They've all been very informative but none of them have told me how they felt, the pain they went through. In your diary, you told us exactly what you felt about all the situations you were in. If it weren't for you, I wouldn't have fully understood what people really felt, the real mental as well as physical torture they went through. I can't thank you enough for showing me this.



Jyoti Menon,
14 years old, Zambia

When you first began to use your diary, Kitty, you probably never knew that it would be your closest friend in the years to follow. Kitty knew all your sorrows and pains, the joy of experiencing love, the frightening threat of being found out in the "Secret Annex" and the fear you felt when you were finally captured.

Kitty survived the war and her pages, which contain your life story, have been published throughout the world to tell your sorrowful tale.

Your diary, Anne, is one of the most haunting and moving ever to be written. Your life was destroyed as were your home and friends, your freedom lost and your religion taunted. Yet you lived through these things, never letting it crush your spirit. You always kept the vision of you going back to school, never having to hide again, being free! This vision stayed with you when you and your family were betrayed to the Gestapo and even in the notorious concentration camp, Auschwitz. You managed to live through Auschwitz, you willed yourself to live so that one day you would be free! The only time you ever lost vision and your tremendous courage was



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My dear Anne, if I could have a tenth of your noble heart and the love that shone from you, if I could have a fraction of your talent, spirit and courage, I would be entirely grateful. Your life can never be compared to those of us living. You are unique, and I'm grateful to be given this chance to write to you.

”



1997



when your dear sister, Margot, died. This did to you what all other things had failed to do, crush your spirit. You lost your faith and your will to live so that, in the end, you died. My dear Anne, had you lived another two months, you would have been free and alive to see the liberation of Holland. Had you lived another three months, you would have turned sixteen.

Despite you never making it to freedom, you were so close to it. Your courage and bravery have shown and will continue to show all mankind that there is always a way to overcome the impossible, if you have the will to do so.

My dear Anne, if I could have a tenth of your noble heart and the love that shone from you, if I could have a fraction of your talent, spirit and courage, I would be eternally grateful. Your life can never be compared to those of us living. You are unique, and I'm grateful to be given this chance to write to you.

You said you wanted to go on living, even after your death. Well Anne, your wish is granted. You have gone on living, through the minds and hearts of the living and the dead and will continue to do so for all time. You go on living in the minds of men; you go on living in my mind.

With all the love and admiration in the world,

Yours sincerely,

Jyoti Jude Menon







1998

I AM WRITING TO A FRIEND GIVING MY VIEWS ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Dear Maya,

I hope this letter finds you in good health and cheer. I am sorry that I could not write to you earlier since I had been busy with my nerve-wracking final examinations. I am sure you received the small gift I sent you for your birthday. Did you like it? It gave me no end of joy on hearing that you had won 1st prize in an essay-writing competition held by RNAC! It must have been a matter of pride and flattering for you to have heard your name on the news. Guess what? I have cut out your picture from the newspaper and stuck it in my room!

Maya! In the midst of all this happy talk, I have to break in with another bit of news which I am sure you will be very sorry to hear. Kepil, my neighbour and our grade-school friend, is no more. His sudden and untimely death has spread shock waves among our neighbourhood and community. The cause of his death is not due to a disease or an accident. Maya, it was murder.

You must know very well that Kepil was a social worker and enjoyed serving the poor. One day, while Kepil was on his way back home from one of his frequent visits to the orphanage, he saw a poor boy being beaten up by his employer. Unable to withstand the pathetic scene, he intervened to make things work for good, but unfortunately

he became a victim of a man's brutal act himself. He was stabbed to death by the employer. Not one soul nearby came to the rescue of the poor man and as it was a murder case it was put forwards to the authorities concerned, but surprisingly, they took no interest in this subject.

Though his parents took an initiative of intimating at higher levels to take suitable action, not much heed was paid and the case was closed abruptly, with a declaration that "the employer was drunk and he was not mentally stable."

Though much is spoken about human rights, when it comes to reality none of these principles work out.

The innocent suffer for no reason. In developing countries like Sri Lanka and Bhutan, people are no longer happy and they have that initiative to question back asking what human rights are. Though human rights in all the countries are the same, there may be some disparity according to the needs and conditions of the country to which one belongs.

Taking into consideration our dear friend, we can find that his rights to save the life of a child made him lose his own. Why is it that the concerned authorities are unable to understand and to produce a suitable



Shira Timilsina,
15 years old, Nepal

verdict? The jury system of our country is polluted and highly unreasonable is the judgment it gives.

What about the innocent who are held in jail for no cause or fault? Though there are many international organizations working out suitable procedures and fighting for human rights, still concrete action is not taken.

It is a burning problem, especially in the Asian countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal, where there are a lot of street dwellers and juvenile delinquents. Do they know what human rights means?

In my opinion I feel that although we cannot do as much as UN organizations, at least

we should try to help the people in our community or neighbourhood by fighting for justice and serving those in need.

So my sincere request to you is that we, as the future citizens of our country, should take this as an important issue and solve the problem by making the higher authorities eat humble pie and give suitable justification.

I hope we can join hands and help those who are really in need.

Your loving,

Shira Timilsina



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Though much is spoken about human rights, when it comes to reality none of these principles work out... I feel that although we cannot do as much as UN organizations, at least we should try to help the people in our community or neighbourhood by fighting for justice and serving those in need.

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1999

WRITING TO A FRIEND TO SAY WHAT THE POST MEANS TO YOU IN EVERYDAY LIFE

March 1, 1999

Dear Cousin Helen,

How are you? Thank you very much for the postcard you sent me. I am eager to write to you, because I want you to share the happy news that my foreign friend Shunji's condition is improving.

Shunji is a friend I met at the 1996 International Summer Camp. She is a beautiful, gentle and quiet Korean girl, whose sweet songs and graceful dance won applause from everyone. Perhaps because she spoke fluent Chinese, we became close friends soon after we got acquainted. Seeing that we Chinese children were so enthusiastic, she hooked her little finger in mine and said, "Let's be friends forever." She told me that her hometown was in a Korean mountain region, where the scenery was extremely fascinating, with white and red azaleas blossoming everywhere in spring each year. But when it was time for us to part and leave for home, she cried, tears streaming down her cheeks. Hugging me tightly, she said, "Don't forget me, Xinyi. Please write to me often after you return to your country." Also in tears, I nodded my head, as I was filled with deep emotion.

After I returned to my country, I did not forget to carry out my promise, although I was very busy with my studies. I wrote to her every month, and she answered my letters every time. Strangely, as if by prior agreement, we both used the same light green paper when we wrote to each other. On my letter paper was a design of bamboo in light green, while on hers was an azalea of the same colour. Looking forward to the arrival of each other's letters became a part of life for both of us. Every day after school, I went to the letter box downstairs to see if there was any letter from my good foreign friend Shunji.

Autumn went, and winter came. Shunji stopped writing to me all of a sudden. For more than half a year, there was no letter from her. Although I kept writing to her regularly, I got no reply. I waited impatiently, hoping a green postal service truck¹ would bring cheerful news. Finally, on a snowy day, a letter came from Shunji. It was written on white paper this time: "Xinyi, my good sister, I am writing this letter on my sickbed, as I am suffering from leukemia. Although everyone tries to hide it from me, I guess I've become incurable. I'm struggling for existence. I want to live on. Though I don't want to be a burden to my family, I don't want to give up my life either..." Reading the letter, I was stunned: "No, Shunji, you can't die! You are a lively kindhearted girl of only 14; why are you afflicted with such a chronic disease?" Shunji's plight broke my heart.

¹ Green is the colour of the Chinese post. (Trans.)

Xinyi Chen,
12 years old, China (People's Rep.)

How I wished I could take wings and fly to her! That same evening, in tears, I wrote her a letter ten pages long on bright green paper I had chosen specially. My hope was that Shunji would not give up her life lightly when she saw the colour of hope.

Having posted the letter, I turned my thoughts to traditional Chinese medicine. Was it possible to find a formula to cure Shunji's leukemia? I told my idea to my dad and mum, and the whole family immediately began to help me search for information. Eventually, we found out from an old newspaper that a veteran practitioner of Chinese medicine in Guizhou Province had developed a kind of Chinese medicine specifically for leukemia. I quickly took out

my postal savings card, on which there was 2,400 yuan I had saved for years from the money given to me as lunar New Year gifts. I drew the whole lot without the slightest hesitation, and Dad and Mum helped me buy the medicine by mail-order in the shortest possible time. Putting the medicine into a large parcel, I hastened to the post office. The post office clerk told me it would take twenty days if I sent the parcel to Korea by ordinary mail. "That won't do!" I exclaimed. I then explained Shunji's situation. After listening to my story, the post office uncles and aunts proposed that I send the medicine by EMS, in which way it could reach Korea in 24 hours. After sending off the medicine, I felt as relieved as if a big burden had been removed from my mind.

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Dear Cousin Helen... don't you feel as I do, that the green-coloured postal service is a link that connects everyone the world over and plays an incomparable role in our daily life? It carries our lives, friendship and heartfelt longings... We must treasure it.

”



1999

How I hoped the medicine could save Shunji's life!

In spring, when the flowers came into bloom, Shunji began to write again. This time, she used light green paper. In the letter, she told me her condition had greatly improved after taking the medicine I had sent her. She also told me that the azaleas had blossomed again on the mountain slopes in her hometown. She wanted to ask her mum to pick one and send it to me, but was afraid that the flower might wither on the way, so she only put a few petals in the letter. Holding the golden petals that wafted a delicate fragrance in my hands, I seemed to see Shunji's hope for life. With great joy, I sent her another parcel of medicine by express mail service.

One morning in May, I got another letter from Shunji. Written on bright green paper, the letter was rather long. It said, "Xinyi, I have good news: I am much better now. Even the doctors say it is a miracle. I have a better appetite and go for walks on the nearby hill. I look at myself in the mirror and find that my face is as ruddy as a red apple again. In the days when I was in despair, it was you who wrote to me and sent me medicine. My Mum says it

was your sincerity that moved God, who turned the medicine you sent to me from far away into a miraculous cure. I am also very grateful to the green-coloured postal service for sending me friendship, love and hope for life..." Shunji was saved! I was wild with joy, my eyes brimming with happy tears. I seemed to see my dear sister Shunji appear among the azaleas growing on the mountains and plains and, waving green letters, racing towards me, her face looking as beautiful as an azalea in the sunshine.

Dear Cousin Helen, now that I have told you the story about Shunji and me, don't you feel, as I do, that the green-coloured postal service is a link that connects everyone the world over and plays an incomparable role in our daily life? It carries our lives, friendship and heartfelt longings... We must treasure it. I hope that you will write to me more often, and on green letter paper too.

Wishing you happiness.

Yours sincerely,

Xinyi







2000

A LETTER TO SAY THANK YOU

Dear Mandy,

There are people who spend their whole lives searching for happiness, or the feeling that gives a real meaning to their lives here on Earth. Each of us, at some point in our lives, looks for the moment when we can say we have not lived in vain. Yet only very few people ever experience this moment, because human beings tend to forget that it is the little things that make life wonderful, like a sunrise, a flower which has just bloomed or raindrops pattering on the windowpane. It's only with your help that I've noticed how even everyday things can be exceptional. You showed me that it is not the amount of money people have or the clothes they wear which counts but the people themselves and their character. On each of our many walks, you always found something, somewhere to make us happy. And every time, some of your joy in being alive rubbed off on me. I learned to see the world through other eyes – your eyes.

How often have I lost hope in recent years! Any number of times, but every time you managed to instill me with fresh courage, even when I was totally desperate and everything seemed hopeless and senseless. With your help, I've begun to have confidence in my dreams again and have regained the certainty of being able to make them come true. Over and over, you explained how important it was not to lose hope. You told me a thousand times that you only have to believe in yourself and then, the world's your oyster. And in the end I was convinced that you were right and started to live by this motto. Thank you!

You've never worried about what other people think about you. Each day, you live life to the fullest. Your whole life, you've hated conforming and bowing to others and their philosophies. You tried to explain to me that this would restrict you. I understood what you meant and started to gear my life more to my own ideas. With your help, I've managed to become that bit more my own person and I've started to set myself really important goals. But I can't attain them on my own. For that, I need you and your friendship. Because our friendship is something truly exceptional – the deepest tie that I've known in my life so far. With you, I can discuss everything. I can pour out my soul or just sit there, listening to music and dreaming.



Kristina Wöllner,
15 years old, Germany (joint winner)

We understand each other, even without words if necessary. The one always knows what the other is thinking or feeling. We know right away when one of us is not in good shape or something is worrying her. We're always there for each other.

You're the only person I can talk to about absolutely everything. You're the only one in whom I have so much trust. I'm writing

this letter to say thank you – for never failing to understand me, even when I don't understand myself. Thank you for your sound advice, even in the most desperate situations. Thank you for just being there when I need you. You're the best sister a girl could hope to have! I love you!

Kristina



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You're the only person I can talk to about absolutely everything. You're the only one in whom I have so much trust. I'm writing this letter to say thank you – for never failing to understand me, even when I don't understand myself. You're the best sister a girl could hope to have!

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2000

A LETTER TO SAY THANK YOU

Dear Grandfather,

It may be that you will never get to read this letter because I don't know quite whereabouts you are in heaven or even if letters exist up there, but you always said my imagination knew no bounds so I'm using it to send this to you.

I imagine you sitting in your armchair with your old plaid blanket on your knees, your gray eyes filled with tenderness, waiting impatiently for news from me. I'll speak to you slowly (for age must surely dull the ears as it does the rest of the body) to thank you for the long walks we used to have in the park, never minding the cold which reddened our ears.

Thank you for the evenings when you sat on the edge of my bed and told me endless tales of magicians, bandits, pirates, genies and giants... fertile ground for my dreams, infallible talismans against my troubles and fears.

Thank you for having been the trustworthy confidant of my joys and sorrow – an effective salve against my sufferings and a healing potion for my wounds. You discovered the knack of aging with kindness and understanding, and that is how you stayed so young; you lived your life looking towards the future while never turning away from the past.

Thank you for having taught me to admire rather than envy, to congratulate the winner without myself giving up on the idea of one day savouring the sweet taste of victory.

Thank you for having explained the strange way in which grown-ups behave, for having warned me of the danger of easy contagion from their sometimes hidebound and prejudiced ideas.

Thank you for having become a little boy again to join me in my games, and later for having shared my teenage preoccupations; for having tempered my excesses and for having been the knight in shining armour who put my wrongs to right.

Thank you for having shown me, through your accounts of the absurdity of the war you fought in, what a terrible mistake, what a dreadful fiasco it was for humanity.

Thank you for being yourself – father, mother, guardian-angel, voice of my conscience, a mixture more powerful than the one my mother uses to wash down the floors, one which waxes, polishes and cleanses all at the same time.



Manuel Bermejo Poza,
14 years old, Spain (joint winner)

Thank you for having revealed to me the true meaning of the words, love, courage, solidarity.

Grandfather, thank you for everything. You did it all so well for ever remain in my heart and – as my father, being a son worthy of you, says – for a long as I go on remembering you, you will never truly be dead.

For all this, in closing this letter I will write neither goodbye nor any of those pompous formal expressions of farewell I have seen but simply a sincere and affectionate wish that we will be in touch soon again soon.

Thank you!

Manolo



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Dear Grandfather... Thank you for the evenings you sat on the edge of my bed and told me endless tales of magicians, bandits, pirates, genies and giants... fertile ground for my dreams, infallible talismans against my troubles and fears. Thank you for having become a little boy again to join me in my games, and later for having shared my teenage preoccupations; for having tempered my excesses and for having been the knight in shining armour who put my wrongs to right.

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2001

A LETTER ABOUT OUR FRIENDSHIP AND THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN US

Dear Brahim,

Today, looking at the photos of you, I remember the time you spent with us during the “peace vacation” months. I remember when you arrived in the summer of 1997, so weak you looked as though you were about to faint, after eight hours crossing the desert in a truck, a two-hour flight and a few more hours’ bus ride until you reached, together with another five children, what was to be your place to stay. That I will never forget. It was the day I first got to know you: you came to our house, Mother gave you a bath, took off all your old, rough clothing and dressed you in cleaner, newer clothes. You said nothing, just lowered your head and the tears ran down your cheeks; too many emotions for an eight-year-old boy separated from his family and taken to another country without knowing what awaited him there. The first days were very difficult, and it was hard for us to get to know anything about you: your name, your age. You only talked to my father; we eventually found out that it was perhaps because you didn’t have a father, for your own was imprisoned in Morocco. But the days went by, and after a couple of weeks you became one more in the family. I remember all the nights I had to go to sleep with your hand in mine, or the others when

you started singing and tickling me to stop me going to sleep so that I would play with you.

Your smile is engraved on my mind, as is your gaze – the innocent gaze of a child forced to grow up in a hurry, to become a man before being a child, a childhood fractured by exile. At sunset you would start to tell us about your life in your country: what they did to you at school if you hadn’t learnt your lessons, how they hit you with a ruler and still you didn’t complain. How does a boy of only eight live through this? Do you remember the first time we went to the beach? You said you weren’t going to come out of the water, yet when you first saw it you didn’t even want to put your swimming trunks on. I suppose that it must have surprised you to see so much water all at once. But the two months went by in a flash, almost in a breath, and the day came when you had to say your good-byes for the first time. You told me not to cry, that you were leaving very happy because you were going back to your family and taking lots of things back with you – clothes, food, toys. But it just wasn’t possible. Of course I wept! Even though I hoped to see you again.



María del Mar Criado Jiménez,
15 years old, Spain

The year 1998 arrived and we learnt that no Saharawi children were coming over. We couldn't go on without knowing how you were, so my father and mother decided to go over to the Tindouf refugee camps and visit you. How I would have liked to be able to go, too! I am looking at the photographs: sand, nomad tents and yet more sand. Oh, and a magnificent sky! But what most catches my eye is that in all the photos you have the most marvelous smile. Yet I look around me now and see children crying because their parents won't buy them the latest video game, and then you are over there with toy cars made out of old wire and

cans, and it's as though you have the world in your hands. Now I understand what's meant by "the more you have, the more you want."

Each time a flight came in we continued to receive letters from you, and in one of them you told us that perhaps you would come over in 1999. This dream came true and you came back, and I had to contain my emotion at seeing you again, with your backpack full of presents for us and your torn clothes. I remember that when my father came in, you only had to hear him open the door and you went running to him. These two months



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Your smile is engraved on my mind, as is your gaze – the innocent gaze of a child forced to grow up in a hurry, to become a man before being a child, a childhood fractured by exile... The best memory I have is the night when you called me sister for the first time – ‘sister’, a word that doesn’t mean much perhaps but for me it had greater meaning and greater sentiment than the best phrase written by the best poet.

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2001



were far better than the first two. The best memory I have of this time is the night when you called me sister for the first time—“sister,” a word that doesn’t mean much perhaps but for me it had greater meaning and greater sentiment than the best phrase written by the best poet.

Since you had gone back, your father had been released. I remember one evening you started to talk as usual and tell us what they had done to your father; you spoke of it as though it were natural, which I found not so much surprising as frightening to think that a people could be used to living such horror. Once again the time came for you to leave, and you kept saying with increasing certainty that you didn’t want to go. I remember the time you spent crying, or when you saw other Saharawi children you didn’t know and you lied and said you were Spanish, and sometimes you even joked and gave yourself the surnames of my father (Criado) and mother (Jiménez). But the

day finally came and we could do nothing to stop you going. It is already a year and a half since I last saw you and still there is the illusion that in six months you’ll be back with us, sharing your lost child smile and innocence. Well, right now you will be there drinking the three teas as is the custom in your land. These three teas are: one as bitter as life, the next as sweet as love, and the last as smooth as death.

I could go on writing this letter but I doubt that everything I would say to you I could express in words. After this I can only say that I hope I will see you again very soon, and a big hug from your Spanish family, especially from your little sister. We will never forget you or your people – the Saharawi people.

María







2002

A LETTER TO SOMEONE YOU MISS

Caracas, 27 February 2002

Dear Grandad:

I am writing you these few lines to tell you how much I have been missing you.

I am sad that I cannot see you, nor hug you like a dear grandfather, but I am happy to know you are in heaven and have the good fortune to be with God, the Virgin and all the saints. I miss you very much; I wish you were here with me right now. If only I could have had more time with you when you were alive! At home we often think of you and talk about your interesting life and family adventures.

I am happy and proud to be your granddaughter. I miss you very much. I remember how we used to play together, and watch TV together, and so on.

Whenever I see pictures of you I long to have you with me. When Granny comes to the house, she tells me you were a very good man. She talks about you a lot.

On the day of my First Communion, I missed you a lot, but I didn't forget you. We celebrated it very well with the family and some friends, and although you weren't there physically, you were there in my heart.

Everything is going very well at school; I have lots of friends and we are all very close.

I have a new dog; she is called Nena. She is very affectionate and we love her very much. She is a black and brown dachshund.

When you passed away, my brother and sister were children, but now they have grown up. My brother is starting university.

The world is not a happy place at the moment. There are wars and political injustices. There are many poor people who have nothing to eat and nowhere to live, and many children are suffering.

I have grown very big, my mother's and sister's shoes fit me. Everyone says I look like Dad and Granny Gloria, but I don't think I look like anyone. My brother looks more and more like you every day.

A month ago I started doing yoga; it's going very well and I am discovering how flexible I am. I'm the smallest one in the class and I like yoga very much.

Technology is advancing very fast. When you passed away the things we have today didn't exist.



Sofia Fernández,
10 years old, Venezuela (joint winner)

Here on Earth we are fighting to keep our planet clean, for world peace and for other things. We are fighting because we love our world.

So, Grandad, that's the news from Planet Earth. I would like to hear some news from your world as well; it must be very interesting.

If only there was some way I could get this letter to you.

I will never forget you, because you were very special to me. I want you to know that we wish you were still here on Earth, we love you very much, we miss you a lot and above all we hope you never forget us. Grandad, I know I will never see or hear you again, but I can still love you very much. Goodbye Grandad, I will never forget you.

I love you very much. Although you are no longer here, you will always be my Grandad.

Sofia



99

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**I will never forget you
because you were very
special to me. I love you very
much. Although you are no
longer here, you will always
be my Grandad.**

”





2002

A LETTER TO SOMEONE YOU MISS

Dear Chrissy,

I decided to write this letter to tell you that I miss you! How are you? I'm OK, but it's a bit lonely in this cupboard. Missy Mops comes to visit me once in a while and a few spiders and tiny little ants come scuttling past from time to time, but mostly it's just me alone with my thoughts. I still remember that day, that day you put me away!

It was a warm summer's morning and you had just woken up. I had been sitting at the end of the bed watching you. I remember you reached underneath your bed and very carefully pulled out the most beautiful box I had ever seen. It was decorated with such love and care. All around the box there was pasta spray-painted gold and tiny little sequins.

You opened it up and inside you placed material of all shapes and sizes and some scented tissues. Then I was placed in, you gave me a long kiss, said goodbye and a tear trickled down your cheek and fell onto my nose. I didn't see you for a long time after that; you closed the box and I heard the rustling of some paper and then nothing. I could feel you carrying me somewhere and then I heard the familiar creak of the cupboard door and I could feel you putting me down.

There was darkness all around me. After a while I knew you weren't coming back so I stayed there. I'm not sure how long it

was but one day I decided to look for you. I climbed over books, ran through spider webs, got lost in moth-eaten blankets and toppled over building blocks until I reached the cupboard door.

I peered into a hole, which termites that once had infested the house had made, and I saw your room, how different it looked. Your dressing table was cluttered with things I had never seen before, coloured circles and squares and things that looked like Mr. Horse's tail. They were funny things; there was stuff that made you look like a ghost and other stuff that made you look like you were hot and tired. There were lots of different colors of that stuff you put on your eyes, but you seemed to like the blue the most. I don't know why though, because it made you look like your brother when he has been in a fight.

Then there was that black goo on that tiny little brush that you used to brush your eyelashes with and make one eyelash look like three. Then there was wet messy stuff that you stuck to your lips. I heard the phone ring and you answered and said hello to a very familiar name but I couldn't think who it was. Then I remembered it was the boy down the street, Jared. I didn't understand why you wanted to talk; I mean, you two are so different. He likes things that make noise and damage and you like Barbie dolls; what would there be to talk about?



Candice Balletta,
13 years old, South Africa (joint winner)

If I remember correctly he used to punch you and put dead bugs in your hair. I thought you hated him! I heard you giggle and then there was one click of the receiver. I saw you flop onto your bed. What happened? Had you fainted? What was wrong with you? What should I do? A million thoughts were buzzing around my head! Then I saw you skipping out of your room. All these things were too much for me to handle so I went back to my box and slept.

When I was in my box half asleep-half awake I thought about all the good times we had together, the times we cried together, the times we laughed together. As I was thinking

about those things all I wanted to do was rush out of the cupboard and give you a hug and once again you would place me at the bottom of your bed. I knew it wouldn't happen though! Now I am going to place this letter in our old secret hiding place, and if you find it I hope you will read it. Maybe, just maybe, you'll have a change of heart and once again you'll place me at the end of your bed.

Love from

Mr. Teddy Bear



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I thought about all the good times we had together: the times we cried, the times we laughed... All I wanted to do was give you a hug... Now I am going to place this letter in our old secret hiding place, and if you find it, I hope you will read it. Maybe, just maybe, you'll have a change of heart and once again you'll place me at the end of your bed. Love from Mr. Teddy Bear.

”



2003

HOW WE CAN BUILD A BETTER FUTURE

My dear old friend,

I only saw you once, in the full bloom of the countryside. You were gazing with delight and amazement at a black and yellow swallowtail.

"What a miracle!" you thought.

I understood your thoughts and replied, "It's a butterfly. You see butterflies all the time."

"Your planet is amazing!"

"Your planet? You're not from here?"

"No. I'm from a planet called Blue Star.

We're studying interplanetary relations and the history of civilizations. I'm preparing for a presentation on your planet. We want to help you."

It's strange but you didn't want to hurt my feelings, even with your thoughts. You knew it would have been difficult for me to read your thoughts, since I am only a small part of my planet.

"You realize that we have no right to interfere in your life, this being the rule of cosmic coexistence. But I see your children suffering."

I thought of all the children who suffer because of war and terrorism. Will their calm and faith be restored through forgiveness? I saw small children, abandoned by their parents. Their mother's voice will never comfort them in the silence of the night; their mother's hands will never caress them when they are ill. Who can they talk to about their troubles? Who can they tell their secrets to?

There are children who are strangers in their own families. Their parents have forgotten them because they have been exchanged for the degenerate life of a drunk. Parents often forget about their children because they only think about material things, the result of which is terrible: people who don't know what happiness is will have difficulty building a better future.

You understood my thoughts. You didn't tap into this delicate chamber of my soul again.

Suddenly, I wanted to invite you to my home. "Yes, yes, I'd love to," you replied. You looked at our furniture and clothes and said, "I've seen similar things in the history museum. Five hundred years ago, our ancestors wore similar clothes and their furniture was like yours."



Victoria Danilovich,
14 years old, Belarus

I switched on the television set and saw the films shown on TV here, films about violence, gangsters settling scores, fighting and extremists. According to these films, we can only survive through brute force and modern weapons. Even children's cartoons are violent. You watched the television and I could see the horror in your eyes.
"Do children watch these films too?"
"Yes, sometimes. For example, I watch them, but I don't pay any attention to them. It's only make-believe."

"It seems this has been made up by someone with a sick imagination. I think this kind of information provokes wars and violence."

"Doesn't your life seem the same to you?"
"Come home with me! I have so many things to tell and show you!"

And off we went, hurtling towards distant stars. I saw a beautiful silver planet.



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We cannot expect to have a happy life without doing something to achieve it... Everything that children see and everything that they receive from adults today will be given back to society tomorrow, as children are the link between the past and the future.

”



2003



"It's even more beautiful up close, but we can't get near it because it has been polluted by a horrific virus. A scientist created this virus, which destroyed all life on the planet. Nobody will ever be able to cure it... Look! We're approaching my planet!" I was very surprised to see your friends coming to meet us. Their thoughts were kind, sincere and lucid.

"Welcome."

"Are you a foreigner? We're so pleased to meet you!"

"Let's be friends!"

"Are you tired? Have a rest!"

I was so touched and so happy! Everyone was so pleased to see me. I visited your school. What struck me though was that I didn't want to leave!

The teacher illustrated what he was saying with pictures. I listened carefully, forgetting everything that existed anywhere else. His calm voice echoed around the classroom. "Dear children, I am going to talk to you about how roads are developed in our town. Our main objective is to safeguard the planet. We must think about the future. Everything we do, we do for the generations to come. We must keep our planet clean for them."

Then, my friend, you explained to me the laws of life on Blue Star:

"On our planet, children are one of the greatest riches, while motherhood is the most important job. It is a great honour to bring a person into the world. Each child is a person. Listen to what grown-ups say; they tell the truth."

Not far away, workmen were building a house. I went nearer and heard one of them talking.

"I'm building this house for you, my child. Soon, you will come into this world. I want you to know that this world is a beautiful and amazing place. I want your house to be warm and comfortable."

Then I approached an old man planting a small tree. I felt his warm thoughts wash over me.

"My dear child, I've planted this tree for you, so that it grows up with you. One day, it will bear delicious fruit for you. You will be able to rest in the shade of its branches. This tree will be a lovely reminder of me."

Dear friend, how I wanted to be in your shoes! But I had to return home.

"Will you come here again?"

"Yes, I will. Perhaps we could do something together to make life on Earth happy. But for now, just look at the sky from time to time and remember me. Goodbye!"

"Goodbye my friend!"



Suddenly, I woke up. It was only a dream, a beautiful, vivid dream that seemed like a fairytale.

Do you know what I realized? Government reforms are not enough to build a better future. Reforms alone cannot tackle drunkenness, boorishness, obscenity and irresponsibility. We cannot expect to have a happy life without doing something to achieve it. Each person must understand that it is up to him or her to create and build a better future. They must know that all actions, good and bad, will be noticed and noted. Everything that children see and everything that they receive from adults today will be given back to society tomorrow, as children are the link between the past and the future.

People must understand the following: we must not waste energy on war and conflicts. In each country, there is so much to be done!

Perhaps one day, peace, calm and humanity will reign over our planet. Then, our friends, the inhabitants of Blue Star, will offer us the hand of friendship.

One day, not in a dream but in reality, I will see a silver spaceship land in the full bloom of the countryside and you will say to me, "Hello dear friend."

For now however, for now I will study, write poetry, grow flowers and think about what career I am going to choose. Every night I will look to the sky and gaze at a distant, sparkling blue star and direct my thoughts to you.

"Goodbye my friend. See you soon!"

Your friend,

Victoria





2004

HOW YOUNG PEOPLE CAN HELP REDUCE POVERTY

When we say that humans are at the highest stage of development in terms of the study of life on Earth, we are not referring only to the skills we have that other animals do not. We are also referring to the fact that humans are necessarily social, that they are molded by prevailing social realities, and that they are part and parcel of the traditions, cultures and customs of the societies they form.

We cannot imagine the young generation in isolation from the customs, traditions, and level of development of a society. It plays a pivotal role in society in expanding knowledge, growth, and development. There is no doubt, therefore, that the young generation makes a tremendous contribution to the alleviation of poverty as well.

Obviously, poverty degrades a society morally and psychologically. It is shameful and can even result in identity crises among the youth. It is thus imperative that the youth, including you and I, should:

- teach and initiate people to develop a culture of work by playing an exemplary role.
- take the initiative and responsibility to actively use our knowledge and labour in the development endeavours of our country.
- develop skills, by engaging in educational and inventive activities in groups or individually, to alleviate poverty.
- participate in assessing and enriching poverty alleviation programs and policies.
- play an exemplary role in fighting harmful traditions and customs by teaching people to act in productive ways.
- play our own part in improving the use of rivers, acquiring selected seeds, and developing and safeguarding forest reserves.
- organize ourselves to contribute towards creating professional and technical job opportunities that will reduce unemployment and enhance development.



Anuar Yasin,
13 years old, Ethiopia

demonstrate in concrete terms our allegiance to society by refraining from drug addiction and exposing immoral acts that worsen poverty, such as bribery, theft and corruption.

enhance development by safeguarding ourselves from HIV and other diseases and by fighting injustice and war.

In general, I mean to tell you that we are the basis for development and growth. We are the hope of the future and we take responsibility for the present as well. The prosperous world of tomorrow can only be the result of the active, all-around participation of the young generation today. Therefore, the young generation all over the world, including you and I, should work together, putting aside our differences of religion, race, and gender, to realize a world free from poverty.

Anuar Yasin



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The prosperous world of tomorrow can only be the result of the active, all-around participation of the young generation today. Therefore, the young generation all over the world, including you and I, should work together, putting aside our differences of religion, race, and gender, to realize a world free from poverty.

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2005

A LETTER TO MY FAVOURITE FAIRYTALE CHARACTER

Havana, 20 March 2005

For you my little "golden"
tin soldier!

My life floats swiftly down the river of time, glides along and cascades like a waterfall in full flow. Adulthood beckons, but I am fully confident that the child's innocence and sweet fantasy that still beats in my heart will not stop running through my veins.

Yes, that's what you're thinking, and you're not wrong. These words reflect my true self: a fourteen-year-old girl who can't stop reading wonderful tales. That's precisely why I'm writing to you, and in this simple letter I wish to express what I feel for you, my favourite character from Hans Christian Andersen's fabulous tales.

I discovered you when I was very little. One-legged, you accompanied my mother's voice one very dark night, when the moon's gaze couldn't woo me to sleep. My imagination drew a world of beautiful toys on my pupils, amongst which stood out a brave little soldier, a beautiful ballerina and a horrible goblin that would suddenly spring from its box when it felt the time was right.

The years passed by until I knew each letter of the alphabet, at which point I returned to the tale and was able to comprehend the infinite love that had permeated the innermost feelings of the ballerina and the soldier. I understood that the goblin in the jack-in-the-box was trying to quash the romance between the soldier and the little dancer. I was truly touched when, in the end, love prevailed over death. I feel sure that as they were consumed by the flames in the fireplace, tenderness shone in both their eyes, and they were forever shrouded in a halo of love.

I continued to grow, and so did my passion for the theatre. When I read Romeo and Juliet, you came back to me, and my thoughts grew wings. What a lot the two stories have in common! The young lovers from Verona faced countless obstacles along the road of love, just like the ballerina and you. Both they and you embody the purest love.

Since then, it is clear that every book I read adds a new dimension to my outlook on life. The lessons I draw from my reading leave their mark on me and give me an ever-greater understanding of daily life and the human universe.



Lysbeth Daumont Robles,
14 years old, Cuba

Your book inspired deep thoughts in me, some of which are as follows:

You were the last of a box of little toy soldiers, and one of your legs remained unfinished, because the tin ran out, but you weren't in the least daunted. You and your brothers went to a home where you were loved, by a boy and a paper ballerina. Your heart overcame the fear of the goblin in the jack-in-the-box and the dangers you faced on your eventful journey through the sewers in a paper boat, during which you encountered foul-smelling rats and the fish that gobbled you up. Fate would bring that

fish back to the same house, and the maid would find you in its belly as she was about to cook it. You embraced all the happy moments and stored them in your cast-iron memory, transcending the searing flames that sealed a beautiful love story.

You remind me, my dear little soldier, of the young Romeo and of Ernest Hemingway's old fisherman. The American writer rightly said: "A man can be destroyed but not defeated."



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‘Life is full of necessary risks,’ I heard someone say. Each day brings us new challenges. Some people shy away from them, while others grow tall in the face of adversity, refusing to be stopped by either psychological or mental constraints.

”



2005

"Life is full of necessary risks," I heard someone say. Each day brings us new challenges. Some people shy away from them, while others grow tall in the face of adversity, refusing to be stopped by either physical or mental constraints. Such is your case, and that of the young Canadian, Terry Fox, who ran one-legged down a thousand roads. How can I not recall the words of our apostle, José Martí?

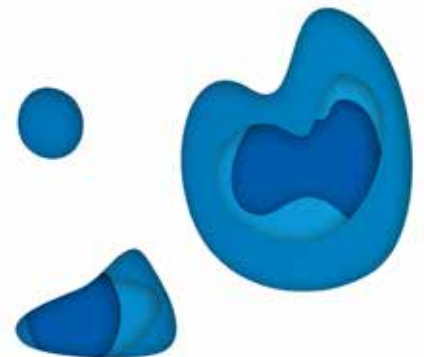
*There are mountains,
and high mountains
Have to be climbed, and then,
We will see who it is, my soul,
Who put you in me as I die.*

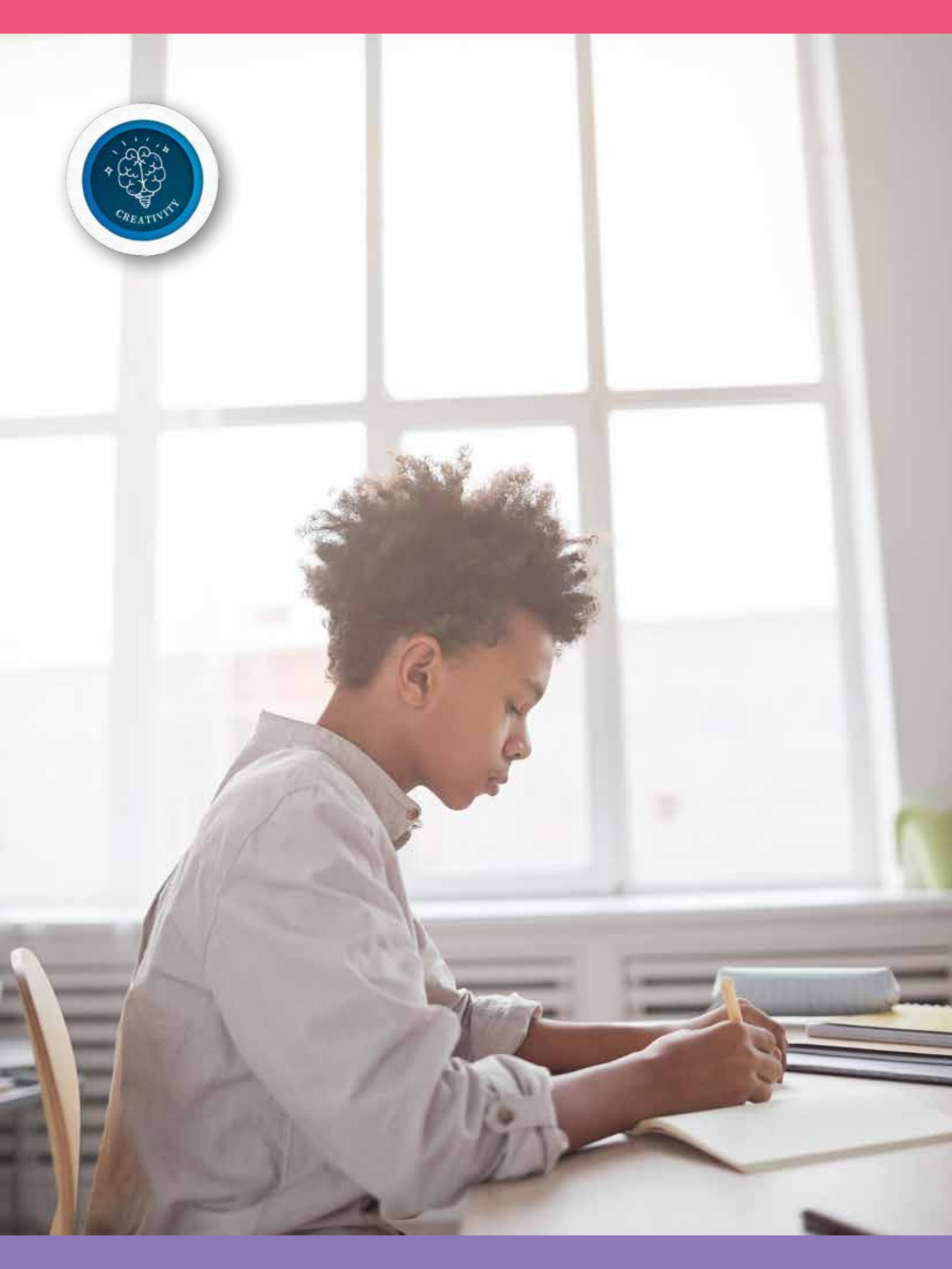
I thank Andersen for dashing our expectations that children's stories have happy endings. We children live in a real world, in which there are war, drugs, poverty, pain... It is precisely because negative realities exist that we must know about them in order to effectively tackle them to build a better world.

I say goodbye with a kiss and a flower
of love,

Lysbeth

P.S. Our paths will cross again in new reading adventures. I am sure that you will also be my children's favourite!







2006

HOW THE POSTAL SERVICE HELPS ME CONNECT WITH THE WORLD

Chico Mendes, Amazonas
19 March 2006

Dear Jessica,

This letter is especially for you, but it is also intended to serve as a lesson for all those who are so immersed in the new technologies that they neglect other means of communication, which are just as important as the latest innovations.

Through this letter, I would like to share with you what I have learned since I came here to Amazonia.

No sooner had I arrived than the locals – such friendly and hospitable people – took me and showed me around. I loved everything I saw. I met new and interesting people, with different ways of life. Nature is all around me, and the calm that reigns is quite the opposite to the hustle and bustle of São Paulo. I love living here.

Once I had settled in, I wanted to get in touch with my family. I looked for a telephone, but when I found one, it didn't work! So I set off in search of a computer with Internet access. There was nothing doing. They weren't yet connected to the Internet in that remote locality, which was almost off the map and not included in any statistics.

I was most disappointed. All I wanted to do was to go back to São Paulo.

How could I contact my family, with a telephone that was out of order and no Internet in sight? I was lost. Fortunately, someone came up with a very simple and traditional solution: the letter.

I must admit that I had to learn how to write letters, which had not been a part of my life.



Laura de Paula Silva,
14 years old, Brazil

As my course in Amazonas was to last around six months, I wanted to learn more about the postal service, my only means of communicating with the “civilized world”.

Carlos Faria is a teacher and biologist here in the Community. He is very knowledgeable, and everybody respects him. He told me about the importance of the postal service, particularly for the poorest people.

I’m going to tell you what I learned. I hope that you’re as interested as I am in a means of communication that has been around since 3,000 B.C.

In those days, the postal service was only used by governors and people who could read and write. Messages were written on materials such as parchment and papyrus, and were delivered by relay teams of fleet-footed messengers or horsemen. They had to be fit!

Today we have postmen, who have the difficult task of delivering mail to the correct address, and who sometimes face hidden dangers, such as fierce dogs.



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Jaimie is a remarkable boy... He is visually impaired. The wonderful thing is that the Post provides a special service – postal materials for the blind – for people like him, with materials printed in Braille. Thanks to the service, Jaimie can keep in touch with his parents who live in the south of the country.

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2006

The postal service consists of the receipt, dispatch, transport and delivery of letter-post items, valuables and parcels.

In Chico Mendes, people earn their living through handicrafts, which they sell via the postal network. Each week, postmen have to overcome all sorts of obstacles to get here and to the neighbouring communities. As there is no post office in the nearest town, the postmen use a truck hired by a post office in a larger town, then, after an hour's journey by boat along the Solimões River, they reach our community. Afterwards, they load the boat with the goods sold by the community and make the return journey via the same route.

If the postal service didn't exist, how would these families survive? How would they sell their products? In this community, the postal service is the only means of selling goods and of keeping in touch with the world.

One thing which has particularly struck me is that the postal service is universal, which means that it belongs to everybody, even to the most vulnerable.

Jaime is a remarkable boy. We made friends immediately. He is visually impaired. The wonderful thing is that the Post provides a special service – literature for the blind – for people like him, with materials printed in Braille. Thanks to this service, Jaime can keep in touch with his parents who live in the south of the country.

The postal system was once widely used for business, and to send messages that conveyed feelings.

Today, it tends to be used more for sending and receiving parcels and paying bills than for sending messages.

Nowadays, people send messages via their computers or mobile phones, but I would rather receive letters and postcards, as they have sentimental value and can be kept and re-read.



The postal service was very important at the time when Brazil was discovered, as it enabled Pero Vaz de Caminha, the messenger who accompanied the Portuguese fleet, to describe the new land to the King of Portugal. Letters, which used to be the only means of communication between Brazil and Portugal, would travel by boat for several months before reaching their destination.

The postal system reaches everyone, everywhere. It is an efficient and universal service. In fact, it is the world's oldest communication tool, which has evolved over the years, in line with the needs of society.

Sometimes, people don't even realize that the postal service is part of their daily lives, but it is very important to the population.

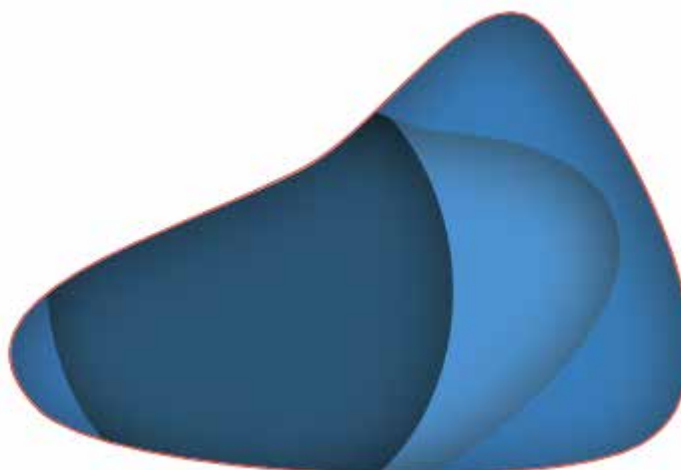
In this letter, I have tried to share my experiences with you, everything that I've learned here.

At a time when new technologies are emerging by the day, people often think that the postal service is outdated, but I now know that it helps me to connect with the world!

I miss you all a great deal. Please write back soon with all your news!

With love from your best friend,

Laura





2007



IMAGINE YOU ARE A WILD ANIMAL WHOSE HABITAT IS THREATENED BY ENVIRONMENTAL OR CLIMATE CHANGE. WRITE A LETTER TO THE PEOPLE OF THE WORLD, EXPLAINING TO THEM WHAT THEY CAN DO TO HELP YOU SURVIVE.

Dear People of the World,

Don't be surprised when you see this letter. Let me introduce myself. My name is Cody, a tiger cub who lives in the rainforest of Malaysia. I may be small but I have seen horrific things done to the creatures of the Earth. I couldn't sleep for days when I heard about what had happened to my cousin Nikki. Luckily, he was rescued from the cooking pot just in time. Kind people have since then taken good care of him. So I have many words to say to the people of this planet.

I want to congratulate you all. Many of you have a good education and live in your so-called world of modernization. Does this mean that humans are civilized? Yet why do humans still need to invade our jungle besides hunting us like in those primitive days? Dear people of the world, don't burn our homes and occupy the area, our natural habitat. We have no other place to go.



Sze Ee Lee,
14 years old, Malaysia

With advanced technology, you can build multi-storey sky scrapers. One day, man may even build an underground city (but please, not under the sea). So why do you still require our land? Please, please leave our habitat alone.

If you want to help us, don't throw waste products into the river. Oh, dear farmers. Be advised to use organic fertilizers, so that chemical fertilizers which are harmful will not flow into the river. The river is your and our source of water. Aquatic life like prawns and

fish are consumed by you and other animals. Don't poison yourselves indirectly.

The most important way to help us survive is to protect our habitat. Although wildlife preservation is recommended by the government, people are still not co-operating with the organizations to help us. Why is this so? Join some of the conservation organizations like the WAF (World Animal Foundation) and the WWF (World Wildlife Fund) and you will realize our plight – acid rain that is destroying the forest



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My friends the crocodiles shed tears when they heard about the demise of the great Steve Irwin, a.k.a. the Crocodile Hunter... He was truly a great man who reached out to people with the message 'These creatures are beautiful, fascinating, wonderful.' He handled them with great respect, cared for them and most importantly was concerned that they remain in their habitat.

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2007



and wildlife, illegal logging and hunters hunting for our skins or – ugh ! – meat for exotic dishes. Please protect our habitat. Reserve parts of the great big jungles of the world for national parks and nature reserves so that we won't be extinct from this world – just as we animals of the world would not want you humans to become extinct either.

Children by nature love animals. Expose and educate the young generation to continue to love and protect wildlife. It is also not too late to create awareness and educate the present generation. As long as Man is willing to open his heart and seriously look into conservation of nature and wildlife, there is hope for us.

My friends the crocodiles shed tears when they heard about the demise of the great Steve Irwin, a.k.a. the Crocodile Hunter. Mind you, these were not the idiomatic "crocodile tears." Here was a truly great man who reached out to people with the message, "These creatures are beautiful, fascinating, wonderful." He handled them with great respect, cared for them and most importantly was concerned that they remain in their habitat. We need more people like Steve Irwin. Most realistically, if humans can love and care for the well-being of their pets, with knowledge and information about wildlife, more people of the world should be concerned about our well-being.

Scientists and environmentalists should put their heads together to solve problems like acid rain, global warming and the depletion of the ozone layer, and also do more research to propagate our species.



Whatever man has destroyed is a thing of the past. Let's look forward to a bright future. Let the governments of the world work together to enforce laws against poaching, illegal logging and mass destruction of our habitat – directly or indirectly. In view of this, I suggest an awareness campaign be carried out via the mass media, over the Internet and across nations. It has to be ongoing so that information and messages to conserve wildlife get the attention of a wide cross-section of the people of the world, young and old alike.

It is said that "the pen is mightier than the sword." So please publish more books, magazines, pamphlets. I believe many people of the world are still ignorant or lack information about wildlife. There is a Malay saying, Tak kenal maka tak cinta. It means, to know you is to love you. So please get as many people to know us and consequently to love us. We are helpless. We depend on you, the people of the world, to save us. Many concerned organizations also need your funding. So donate generously for a good cause. Don't allow us to become extinct. Thank you.

P.S.: This letter carries 1,000 paws prints of concerned tigers.

Yours sincerely,

Cody





2008

WHY THE WORLD NEEDS TOLERANCE

Bangui

To: Raphaël Dufun

Post Box

Washington

United States of America

Dear friend,

I am really pleased to be given the opportunity to write you this letter. I know you are well and that it will reach you. I would like to offer you my moral support, as you know no peace, only the nostalgia for peace brought on by wars, decisions and hatred. I also know that for you every day that passes is an ordeal and a great struggle in your country. As time goes by evolution, development, progress, pride, hatred and war have all opened up huge divisions, differences, confrontations and mutual contradictions between men, countries, peoples and continents.

Have you never, ever asked yourself why there are so many changes and differences, so many decisions and reasons for hate?

Well, simply because people are not used to putting up with or tolerating what could be banned, rejected or accepted, nor are they willing to do so. If we all could just adopt, accept and analyze one another's opinions, we would be stronger and more tightly knit, standing shoulder to shoulder. "United we stand," as they say – solid countries based on tolerance make much faster progress than countries that steadfastly reject other

people's opinions and values. Do people in your country accept their differences? Are they united? Do they come together to vote for effective decisions?

Yes! The world really needs more tolerance, because tolerance has for so long enabled nations to come together in reconciliation, creating a more mixed community based on differences and shared values. Tolerance is usually seen as a virtue, because it tends to help us avoid conflicts. It has also enabled many people to escape the scourge and anger of revenge and given them a second chance in life – promoting different races and nations, the unifying culture of languages, the survival of traditions and the consolidation of countries. In today's world tolerance should be a goal in life. It still has not been adopted by everyone and maybe there is a problem of information and awareness – we have yet to see more of the virtue of bearing or tolerating what we can accept or pardon. We need it for ensuring the stability of future generations, for promoting and sustaining cultures, traditions and the wealth and variety of values. We need the mutual trust that results from bringing people closer together, above all, to lead the world to its highest point.

Dear friend, I know that, like everyone, you too have been hurt and traumatized by this war. Like many others you have lost dear ones to this conflict, one of the nastiest consequences of intolerance. And I sense that the flames of revenge burn in your heart. But calm down, get a grip on yourself



Moïse Luther Hoza,
15 years old, Central African Republic

and forgive their intolerance! Poor things! Tolerate them and give them a second chance to redeem themselves and you will see the results of tolerance! They will be grateful to you and you will know peace, not only because you avoided a conflict but also because you did not have to spill blood. Since kind deeds are never wasted, you will make new friends and have so much to share with them: your culture, your traditions, your values and your language – and vice versa. You and they will discover the virtues of peace as a weapon.

I send you my best wishes. Try and tell everyone you know about tolerance, give them information and documentation, hold meetings with your family, friends and neighbours, and talk about tolerance. I hope you will answer this letter. I also hope that you will come and spend your summer vacation with me.

From your friend,

Moïse Luther Hoza



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Forgive their intolerance! Poor things! Tolerate them and give them a second chance to redeem themselves and you will see the results of tolerance! Since kind deeds are never wasted, you will make new friends and have so much to share with them... You and they will discover the virtues of peace as a weapon.

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2009

HOW DECENT WORKING CONDITIONS CAN LEAD TO A BETTER LIFE

Frýdek-Místek, 22 February 2009

Dear Markéta,

How are you? How is school going this year? And tell me about London. You haven't been back home to Frýdek for ages. All the family would love to see you. I know you are in the middle of your exams – fingers crossed – and I hope that once they are over you will come home for a while. Maybe you'll fly back (I still can't get used to you living so far away). I haven't written to you for a long time, and as I am your sister I decided to remedy that now. I had a very interesting experience – something that got me thinking. And I wanted to tell you all about it.

It all began last Tuesday. I really wanted to eat some chocolate and I came across the bar you gave me not so long ago. There was nothing unusual about it apart from the fact it was not made in the Czech Republic. You reassured me that there was nothing special about it. But you did tell me something about this chocolate and, as a rule, I listen to what you say – but, sorry, this time I didn't think it was very interesting and I didn't pay

any attention. At the time I didn't get what you were telling me. But then I looked at the wrapper to see if there was any information on it. I was surprised to see some words in English which meant something like: "Do your bit – Buy free-trade goods". I thought it was a bit weird to find that slogan on some chocolate. But that was all I could find out, apart from the ingredients and the country of origin: Zambia. By then I was hungry for information rather than chocolate so I left the bar to one side and went on to the Internet to satisfy my curiosity.

To my great surprise I found an Internet page on the same subject in Czech – it was a translation from English, which made it easier for me. I started reading and before long I had learned all kinds of interesting stuff. The chocolate I had just been eating was no ordinary chocolate. The Zambian producer who made it received enough money to give him and his family a decent living. It didn't seem that strange, but then I read that lots of people all over Africa, including children, work in inhuman conditions and their wages are really low. Hardly anyone earns a decent wage. This fact grabbed my attention. I was happy to find out that there are organizations that



Dominika Koflerová,
14 years old, Czech Republic

look after people, buying up their produce and selling it in Europe at a higher price and making sure the workers get a proper wage for their hard work. I tried to imagine how those people live. They work really hard all day long and yet they are paid so little that they are still hungry. I can't imagine how hard it must be for them. Then I thought about it and told myself that most people here just don't appreciate the good working conditions that we have in our country.

I read another interesting story on the Internet. It was about a family in Kenya living in a hut that was falling apart. The father used to work and so did six of his seven children. The youngest was seven years old. They worked from morning to night and yet they hardly earned enough to eat. The children were undernourished. They worked on cocoa plantations, and their lives were turned around once they joined the international fair-trade market. Their new employer introduced far better working conditions, and thanks to him the family's lives got much, much better. Only the father



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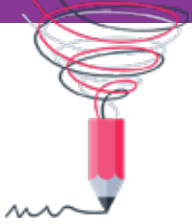
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I can't imagine how hard it must be for them. Then I thought about it and told myself that most people here just don't appreciate the good working conditions that we have in our country.

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2009



and the eldest son had to work. With their earnings they could not only repair their home but they could also afford to pay for the other children to go to school. Living in those conditions is really unusual. These children got the chance to build a better future.

I don't know if you find this story gripping – in any case, I did. I am happy to know that better working conditions can lead to a much better life. Yet I am sad to know that so few people have that chance. I think that in Europe the situation is not so critical. But in Africa, for example, it is really obvious that just improving working conditions gives people's lives a new meaning.

Thank you for buying me that chocolate. It was not just any bar of chocolate. I learned lots of interesting things from it. I was so happy to know that there are people in this world who help others with their fair trade. That way people's living conditions are made better. It is only right that people's lives can be improved by improving their working conditions.

I am sure that you must have already known what I have said in my letter – otherwise, why would you have bought me that chocolate? But I felt I needed to tell someone about it and you were the right person.

I hope to see you soon. Call me when you get a moment!

Dominika







2010

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO TALK ABOUT AIDS AND TO PROTECT YOURSELF AGAINST THE DISEASE

Danang, 20 November 2009

Dear Uncle Zhang Yimou,
filmmaker,

When sending you this letter I counted the days it would take to reach you. Sometimes I worry, as I don't know if you'd be bothered to open a letter from Ho Thi Hieu Hien in Viet Nam. Dear Uncle Zhang, I really hope you can give up some of your precious time to hear my thoughts – perhaps you might find something here that goes beyond the normal feelings that fans might convey to their idol!

Dear Uncle Zhang, I had the idea of writing to you only after hearing at school about the 39th UPU International Letter-writing Competition for Young People and its theme of the fight against AIDS.

In order to find out more about the subject for my composition, I spoke to several people to see how they understand AIDS and protect themselves.

To begin with I asked my grandmother. She told me: "At my age I have no idea what this 'ed' virus is. I heard that it lives in people of loose morals. Do not get near them or you will catch it." Can you imagine? My poor grandmother knows nothing about AIDS.

When I asked my parents about AIDS, they said: "AIDS stands for 'acquired immune deficiency syndrome' and is caused by the HIV virus. This disease is very dangerous and there is no medicine yet to cure it. Whatever you do don't take drugs or have unprotected sex if you want to be safe." My mother even said to me over and over again: "If ever there is someone with AIDS in your class you must tell us right away so that we can move you to another class or school." So you see, even my parents, who are civil servants, are prejudiced against AIDS sufferers.



Ho Thi Hieu Hien,
11 years old, Viet Nam

I asked my little sister, who told me that without a doubt there was nobody in her class with AIDS, and if there was she would wear a mask to school or stay at home for good! It's really funny – my sister thinks that AIDS is like avian flu!

On the way home from school I put the same question to a state sanitation employee. She showed me a pile of empty syringes by the roadside and said: "HIV is in those syringes!" So you see, Uncle Zhang, the road sweeper is also badly informed about the disease.

Then I went into a restaurant and spoke to the owner. "AIDS?" he said. "If you see someone who is very thin and can hardly stand up and has spots all over his body, then you can be sure he has AIDS! But don't worry; I never let them into this place because I am afraid they will give the disease to my customers!" My God, I feel so sorry for the poor people who look like that but do not have the virus! The restaurant owner does not know that HIV cannot be caught from food or by talking to someone with the virus, or that we live our lives alongside AIDS.



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Suddenly it occurred to me: What if I had a talent for film-making? I would start making top quality films about AIDS straight away to raise people's awareness. Uncle Zhang, my first film would be a moving love story. It would be romantic and tragic; main characters would fall madly in love but could not get married because one of them has AIDS.

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2010



At school I talked to my friends, but many of them didn't seem to care and said fighting AIDS is a matter for doctors and hospitals, and since thankfully nobody in our class has it we don't have anything to worry about. This indifference among friends of my age might explain why a thousand children aged 14 or less are infected every day.

I asked other people, too, but most of them did not seem to care about this scourge. So I am really very worried. I wanted to sit down and write a letter calling on everyone to find out more about AIDS and change the way they think about it so they can join the fight and prevent it. I thought about it for some days but still had no idea how or where to begin. So I put my writing paper to one side and went to watch TV. They were showing your film, *Curse of the Golden Flower*. What a beautiful film! Your film has won you such praise! With a series of famous movies – *Red Sorghum*, *To Live*, *Ju Dou*, *Raise the Red Lantern*, *House of Flying Daggers* and *Curse of the Golden Flower* – you have won the hearts of the whole world.

Suddenly it occurred to me: what if I had a talent for film-making like you? I would start making top quality films about AIDS straight away to raise people's awareness. Uncle Zhang, my first film would be about a moving love story. It would be romantic and tragic; the main characters would fall madly in love but could not get married because one of them has AIDS. The following film would be called *To Die* and would be as highly regarded as your *To Live*. The message would be: he does not want to die young but will because he doesn't know that Death lurks in every risk he takes, such as having unsafe sex or sharing needles.

Most of my films would be inspired by real life and the heroes would be AIDS victims. There would be a civil servant who has worked all his life and maintained his dignity but has lost everything in a moment of uncontrolled pleasure; a medical employee who contracted the virus through negligence, someone who has worked hard all his life to build a family and a home but dies alone and abandoned by his loved ones; young people full of life who die because they take drugs; wide-eyed children whose parents die from AIDS or do not know that they are about to be taken away by Death; young girls who know they have AIDS in their bodies and want to sow death among others in order to have their revenge...



Different people with different fates: in my films I would convey love and pain, ingratitude and ignorance while imparting knowledge about AIDS prevention in a gentle yet forceful way in order to awaken human conscience. I would hope for a special power of persuasion to be created to burn hearts, soothe pain, remove hang-ups and awaken the conscience of anyone who remains indifferent to this scourge.

But, dear Uncle Zhang, wanting to do this is one thing, being able is another. Only you could turn these dreams into reality for the sake of all humanity. I hope with all my heart that you will read my letter and understand.

Yours sincerely,

Ho Thi Hieu Hien





2011



IMAGINE YOU ARE A TREE LIVING IN A FOREST. WRITE A LETTER TO SOMEONE TO EXPLAIN WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO PROTECT FORESTS

*Barakat Timbers Limited,
Charity Pomeroon River,
Guyana*

Dear Mr. CEO,

Although this letter is addressed to Barakat Timbers, I am writing to anyone who is willing to listen. You humans constantly rave about your Holocaust, your World Wars and civil unrests, but what of ours? From the beginning we have been murdered, but we were not greatly angered for we understood your necessity. Now you don't just take what you need, but damage our habitats to such an extent that we shall never again thrive in the same location. You heartless beasts who claim superiority yet cannot live in peace as we do? I am a Great Oak in the Windsor Forest of Guyana and I say stop! Not even for my species' sake, but for yours. Do you not see how integral we are for the survival of your kind?

Global Warming is a ubiquitous crisis of this era which stems from several causes. The burning of fossil fuels which produce greenhouse gases, which are by definition gases that trap heat in the atmosphere, has been one of the greatest detrimental factors of global warming. The gases cause an increase in Earth's temperature, damaging the ozone which is the most important layer of atmosphere involved in the protection of life on Earth. It shields you from the true brunt of the sun's rays, absorbing a colossal 97-99% of harmful ultraviolet rays. Greenhouse gases are emitted as a by-product of burning fossil fuels such as coal and crude oil. To ignore this situation is to leave you vulnerable.



Charlée Gittens,
15 years old, Barbados (joint winner)

Other than with the few exceptions of phytoplankton and chemosynthetic organisms, plants are situated in the first trophic level of all food chains. All energy is obtained from the sun by humans indirectly and the only way to gain some of that energy other than from the miniscule part played by the other autotrophic organisms is from plants. Why? Plants use sunlight energy, water and carbon dioxide gas to create energy to sustain ourselves and to grow and develop. Humans cannot obtain energy in this way and neither can any other mammals; therefore you gain this energy indirectly by eating plants, whether by eating the plant itself or an animal somewhere in the food chain through which the energy

flows. To leave us vulnerable or to decimate us is suicidal.

Erosion is becoming a major concern on Earth. Frequent mudslides and avalanches destroying towns, taking lives, and no one would believe if I told them the answer. Go simply au naturel. When walking past a Great Oak such as I, you usually marvel at my height and circumference. Rarely does someone think of what is growing below my torso. I too have legs, though I prefer not to walk. Call it laziness; I see it as an investment in prime real estate. Working along with other materials, roots play a big part in keeping soil compact. When speaking of soil humans are very ignorant of its layers.



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You don't realize it has happened unless you measure your height constantly or until there is such a difference that it is impossible not to have recognized it. Will you only stop when it is too late? Reduce the use of products made in factories that produce greenhouse gases.

”



2011

As topsoil is removed, subsoil is exposed and erosion occurs. Subsoil does not easily support agriculture, flooding occurs more readily and in short, life on Earth increases in hardship. Once again I offer you a simple solution. Let nature do her job.

Many who read this will not take heed. But a word to the wise is enough, so for anyone who should be interested I may offer some suggestions to aid in the continuation of your species. Take a look at Beijing, China, the pollution capital of the world. Look at the fog that surrounds the city and realize that you are on the same path. You may not see it now, a bit like getting taller. You don't realize it has happened unless you measure your height constantly or until there is such a difference that it is impossible not to have recognized it. Will you only stop when it is too late? Reduce the use of products made

in factories that produce greenhouse gases. Don't drive a half-mile to the supermarket for a box of milk. Take a nice walk through the refreshing air we recycle and provide for you. It's therapeutic and healthy. Use reusable plastics. Plant more trees around your homes. In this age of technology use your electronics and less paper. But there will be those who will pay me no mind and I say to you in the words of Gerard Manley Hopkins , 'And for all this nature is never spent'. The sun will continue to rise in the East and set in the West, but should you continue on this hell-bent path you will cease to be. As you take this suicidal walk take note that I will never be conquered and shall rise as you fall.

Yours Sincerely,

Woody Branche







2011



IMAGINE YOU ARE A TREE LIVING IN A FOREST. WRITE A LETTER TO SOMEONE TO EXPLAIN WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO PROTECT FORESTS

*Dear humans, especially my
young friends,*

I am a tiny green sapling living in the midst of a verdant forest on an ancient mountain. I am writing to share with you a story I witnessed with my own eyes.

On one side of my mountain sits the Western Village and on the other is the Eastern Village. In the past, these two villages were both very poor. All they possessed were the trees on this mountain.

One day, the chief of the Western Village proclaimed he would lead the whole village onto the path of prosperity. He invited the Eastern Village to join him, but unexpectedly the Eastern Village turned down his offer. The chief of the Western Village scornfully said, "You poor shortsighted wretch!" With this retort, he stalked away.

The whole of the Western Village, men and women, young and old, climbed up the mountain and began to work very hard for their dream of wealth. They woke up early and returned home late. They felled many of the trees on their side of the mountain. Sure enough, before long they indeed became richer. The villagers discovered the good things from the big money they made by cutting down so many trees. With this cash they bought TV sets, fridges and air conditioners. During the day the Western Village became a bustling construction site, but at night it felt more like a graveyard. As my own branches grew bigger I shed my first little teardrops. I felt my heart was breaking.



Wang Sa,*12 years old, China (People's Rep) (joint winner)*

The affluent Western Village became more disdainful of the Eastern Village.

But the chief of the Eastern Village remained untroubled. He patiently explained to those of his villagers who did not understand, "Forests are the wealth of all our generations – from our ancestors to our great-great-grandchildren. For our descendants' sake, we should not fight over trees with the

Western Village. We will not cut down trees. Instead, we need to plant more trees. We will plant as many trees as they have cut down." When I heard these words, I cried again, this time tears of thanks.



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Ever since then, the two villages have grown adorned with greenery, with flowers blooming and birds singing everywhere. They have become beautiful scenic spots known far and wide. Many environment-conscious tourists are drawn to visit our mountain, and some find it hard to tear themselves away from the serene villages and forests.

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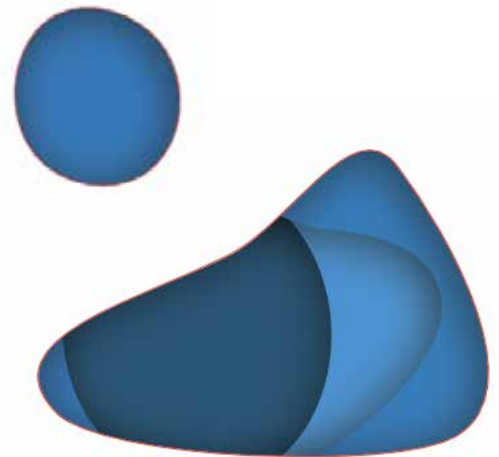
2011

The chief of the Eastern Village did exactly as he said. He led his villagers to add forest on any bare land. As I stood growing taller and leafier at the peak, I looked down to see the mountain by the Western Village grow barer, losing all its green, until not a single blade of grass left. But the mountainside of the Eastern Village has still remained beautiful. That green mountain with clear blue waters is a true fairyland!

That summer turned extremely hot, with the sun scorching the earth. The air conditioners in all the houses of the Western Village were turned on full blast, with the people trapped inside. Meanwhile, in the Eastern Village, people relaxed under the big shady trees, each with a cattail fan in hand, talking and laughing. The children played hide-and-seek, their laughter echoing throughout the

whole village and the forests. I was moved to tears for a third time. This time I shed tears of pure joy.

As a rule, humid hot days are followed by storms. It soon rained heavily for days on end. One evening I felt a sense of doom over the Western Village. The earth below my roots started to loosen, and I saw small stones beginning to roll down the western side of the mountain. The dark skies rained on and on. At midnight the forest finally fell into a dead silence. Suddenly I was woken up by loud cries and screams for help from the Western Village. I was shocked: my worst nightmare was coming true!



It was a huge mudslide.

Torrents of mud with rolling rocks were swiftly sliding down towards the Western Village. All of a sudden, the village became like hell on earth. Pretty new houses came crashing down and recently paved roads were destroyed, with many people buried alive beneath the mud and rubble.

I cast my little eyes to the other side to see the Eastern Village just as it has always been, serene.

As soon as the sun's first clear rays revealed the disaster the next morning, the people of the Eastern Village rushed to the aid of the Western Village. They worked hard to pull the chief of the Western Village out of the terrible mud. They heard the chief say with his last breath, "All my fault... our trees gone..." After saying this, his head fell lifeless to one side. Those were his last words to his people. The chief of the Eastern Village said to the survivors and rescuers all gathered at the site: "It's vital we protect the forests. We should never fell trees haphazardly just to make more money."

Over the next years the Western Village, no longer felling and selling trees, began to learn from the Eastern Village. They first worked together to preserve the environment by planting trees. During the rebuilding and reforestation process everyone in the village grew to understand how they must protect the forests and nature. They made careful steps on a new yet traditional path towards wealth through environmental protection and a lower carbon footprint. Not long after they once again grew wealthier, and this time also healthier and happier.

Ever since then, the two villages have grown adorned with greenery, with flowers blooming and birds singing everywhere. They have become beautiful scenic spots known far and wide. Many environment-conscious tourists are drawn to visit our mountain, and some find it hard to tear themselves away from the serene villages and forests.

This is the end of my story. My dear human friends, my wish is to tell you that preserving the forests is to safeguard the Earth on which you and I live, for the good of your future and mine. To destroy forests by the excessive cutting down of trees is to eventually bring disaster, not just to me, but to you too.

Your true friend,

*A tree prepared to care for
humanity*





2012



WRITE A LETTER TO YOUR FAVOURITE ATHLETE OR SPORTS PERSONALITY TO TELL THEM WHAT THE OLYMPIC GAMES MEANS TO YOU

Mr Roger Federer

Tennis Sport Club of Basel

Switzerland

Dear Roger Federer,

My name is Marios, one of your thousands, I imagine, of fans. A small, insignificant Marios compared to one giant of sports. The reason I am writing; to thank you for making me love sports and tennis!

I follow for years your matches and your efforts in tennis courts; I applaud your victories and admire your persistence when times get rough. You getting on the winner's stand in the Olympic games of Beijing meant the 'service' of my entry in the sport.

I grabbed my brother's abandoned racket and decisively I entered the court, ready to win. Then I realized how different it is, to watch the racket in Federer's hands than to try and swing it in your own. I struggled, sweated, hearing my trainer's shouts, but I did not give up. Your picture on the winner's stand kept me going...

Going on and dreaming... One day, as I hit the ball, with it flew my imagination, far, far away in time and space. I dreamt myself standing in Ancient Olympia, the great sports celebration, the first Olympic games. 776 BC – forerunners around Greece announce the event. Wars stop, because sports unify and conciliate people, or so happened at the time! Young people from all over the land, arriving, upstanding in body and soul, to take part in a 'proper contest', in a "Ευ αγωνίζεσθαι – fair play". What wonderful words, what a magnificent atmosphere!



Marios A. Chatzidimou,
13 years old, Greece

I pictured you there, as well. My historical knowledge disallows it, but my imagination places you there. To contest and to wear the wild olive tree's wreath. To sweat on ancient Olympia's earth and be celebrated with Diagoras of Rhodes, Polidamas, Theagenis...

Yes, I am proud that my country, Greece, set the foundations of modern sports. Athletic spirit initiated and formed through ancient athletic games. The Olympic flame, brilliant by the Greek civilization's values, illuminated the whole world. The fighting spirit, noble

competition, self-control, cooperation through sports, enriched man's attitude towards life...

...You were standing there, wearing the wreath, radiating victory's joy, when I humbly approached, touched your hand, stared in your eyes and asked:

– How do you feel, Roger? What does all this mean to you?



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Participation, entering the contest, is already a great victory, regardless of the trophy. A victory against fears, insecurity and difficulties, of yourself against your own vanity and selfishness.

”



2012



– Listen, young one, you answered with a crystal voice that still rings in my ears. “To contest” means “to win”, and keep that in mind. Participation, entering the contest, is already a great victory, regardless of the trophy. A victory against fears, insecurity and difficulties, of yourself against your own vanity and selfishness. A victory against self-transcendence. And one more thing: “To win” means also “to love”. To love my opponent, who gave me the opportunity to contest, my trainer, who taught me how to play and win, the people that supported my efforts to come first, God that gives me the strength to fight and be the victor!

– Out! Marios, now, concentrate on the game! It was my trainer’s voice that took me suddenly out of my day-dreaming. However, that day it was impossible for me to concentrate on any game. I wanted to narrate what I imagined, of the first Olympic Games. All of us, my trainer and fellow tennis-players felt reborn through the spirit of Olympic Games. We talked about the famous “fair play”, which modern people can define so readily but when they come to apply it, they find it so difficult! Aiming exclusively for the championship, they go into the dirty and dangerous use of anabolic steroids, sacrificing their body’s and soul’s purity on the altar of momentary glory. Ruin of the athlete and libel on sports is the only outcome of such acts.

But for me the first Olympic Games mean neither anabolic steroids nor championship, nor financial benefits, economic crisis nor hate. They do mean the joy of participating, “fair play”, friendship, peace and, I hope, this meaning will apply on this year’s Olympic Games.

I stop my chatter that might have tired you, and I wish you with all my heart, throughout your whole life to contest, win and love, exactly as you taught me. Thank you once again and I will be waiting, where we first met; in ancient Olympia, Greece, home of civilization and sport. In my beautiful and beloved country, which regardless of the difficulties and troubles that goes through these times, “it has no fear” because “on its mast is the watchman, everlasting, the Sun”!

With love and admiration,

Marios A. Chatzidimou







2013

WRITE A LETTER ABOUT WHY WATER IS PRECIOUS

In Ostrava – Polanka nad Odrou on 25 March 2013

Dear Water of the River Odra!

To begin with, I'd like to say hello and start by telling you how much I appreciate you. I will start a tiny bit broad.

You are the water of one of the largest Moravian rivers, and as such you belong to the extended family of all waters in the world. All waters, starting with a small forest brook, up to the vast expanse of endless oceans. As water, you give life, strength, energy, joy as well as suffering. You are both salt and fresh, hot and icy, clear and opaque, simply as we know you.

You, as the water of the river Odra, arise in a large forest close to the village of Kozlovice in the Libavá military zone. We people, because we appreciate you, built a small chapel above your spring so that everyone who wants to find you can find you and have a look at the birth of a river. There, you are still a small, shy and fearful water that avoids every tiny stone. But you strengthen and grow at every stage of your journey. You combine with the waters of small brooks and streams and change into the water of a tiny river.

We people build our houses, farms, flour and saw mills around you to utilize your strength. You flow through small towns and villages, fields and forests until you reach the outskirts of the town of Studenka where the bed you created begins its charms. You twist and turn, hide and peep out again at places unexpected, creating unique rivers, meanders and pools. From Studenka through Jistebnik up to Polanka, we slightly changed the path of your travel, built ponds for you which you, water, fill to the brim and help us create our fishing management.

Sometimes you also trouble us, and that is when you raise your level and leave your bed. As if you are reminding us that you are an element beyond all control, and we respect you as such.

On your journey, you created a unique nature reserve, Polanecká, Niva, sought after by many tourists and lovers of nature. In the river you create, we bathe, fish, children play with you when building stone dams, athletes on boats struggle against your power, and many seek peace and quiet in your whisper. In the reserve near your river, there is your sister, healing water, which is stored deep under the earth and waits to be carried to the nearby spa where it helps heal our ailments.



Daniel Korčák,
15 years old, Czech Republic

You leave the reserve. Now, you are an adult, great water changing into a self-confident river, and slowly flow into the largest city of the Moravian- Silesian Region, Ostrava. You may not even know, but you are again helpful here. You cool the towers of a heat power plant, help us clean streets, irrigate fields, and remove everything that is dirty or unclean. Finally, you flow through water management plants we built for you, and they purify and brighten you so that you

do not mind working for us. In Ostrava, you meet the waters of further two large rivers – the waters form the Odra Hills with those form the Jeseníky and Beskidy Mountains. When you leave Ostrava, you are the water of a powerful, proud river and you head to the next water, and that is the water of the sea.



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My letter to you might end up here, but it will not because this is only the conclusion of your journey as the water of the river Oder and the beginning of another story of yours. Now, you belong to all waters embracing our planet. You may appear as water spurting from the depths of a geyser, as water of rain in a summer storm, as an avalanche at the foot of a hill, as water vapour in the clouds, or as water in my glass ready to quench my thirst.

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2013

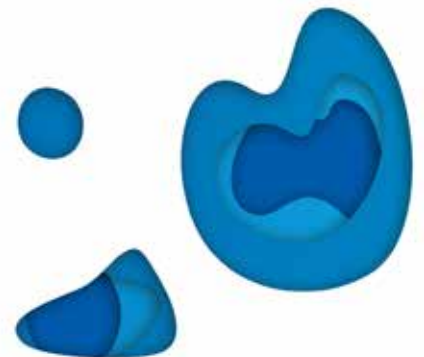


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I could write many other lines about you, but even so not everything could be expressed because your story is endless and your journey has no destination.

Therefore I want to use this letter to thank you that you are, because without you there would be nothing. People, animals, plants, life, world. Thanks to you, water, our planet is called blue. I realize how important you are, I humbly look at you, and am always looking forward to seeing you.

Your friend Dan







2014

WRITE A LETTER DESCRIBING HOW MUSIC CAN TOUCH LIVES

Mostar, 24 March 2014

Dear Spring,

Even though my strings are ragged and out of tune, my hearing still serves me. Only my voice betrays me; and how would it not, when I have been lying here motionless for years in this dusty abandoned shack by the river? I have already lost hope that someone will find me, clear all the dust off me and return me to springtime's orchestra of sounds, which always brought the children from my village running.

I know that you are somewhere nearby, because the sound of the birds singing and the gurgle of the restless river wake me up in the morning. That's why there remains in me a trace of hope, like the sunrays that shine through the cracks of this shack, that I will go out in the daylight and play my first spring melody. I often dream of rain and it always reminds me of my youth, when I travelled to festivals. They would decorate me with freshly picked mimosa, and my violinist was often rewarded with coins and numerous compliments. I remember one sick little girl, who lay in her bed helpless for days, telling her father that the only thing that would return her faith and hope of recovery was the gracious melody of the violin. Her poor father travelled hundreds of kilometres to find the best violinist to help his daughter. That was one of the

most touching moments I had with people. And not just ordinary people, but the most sincere being – a little girl whose bright eyes, the colour of the sea depths, held her tears of joy. I cannot forget the happiest moments of my life, many serenades played under the windows of young women in love, wedding songs that completed my tunes... I heard from some random people passing by that the world is in awe of some new music. Concert halls are less visited, people do not dance as much, there are fewer festivals, and street musicians have almost disappeared.

At last, when I had almost lost all hope, an old fisherman appeared in this old shack looking for his fishing tools. Instead of his tools he found me and, like a true handyman, he carefully pulled me out from under a pile of things, cleared the dust off of my old body, found a tossed away fiddlestick close by, and moved it across my loose strings. When he heard only a blunt sob, he said: "Here is another person my age!"



Nataša Milošević,

13 years old, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Then he smiled like a shrewd merchant and added: "Perhaps I can find another use for it!" At that moment I was frightened that I would end up as an antique or firewood. However, the old man wrapped me in a cloth and took me to his workshop. "I'm in luck!", I thought. This joyful fisherman not only fished, but also had a modest workshop where he built boats. There, he tightened and tuned my strings, repaired and varnished my fiddlestick. Finally, he checked my sound and, to my great delight, played one of my favourite tunes. At that moment,

his wrinkled face became even more pleasant, serene and somewhat pensive, as if adolescent emotions had been reawakened.

He eventually packed me into a box that he had made himself. "He will be so happy when he sees this!", the fisherman thought out loud as he headed towards the village.



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The boy very often dreamed of a beautiful violin, shiny like a diamond in the warm spring sunrays. He usually made mouth organs from smooth green grass and other instruments from wood from the nearby forests of his homeland.

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2014



When he arrived in front of a run-down rustic house, a little blond boy, barefoot and blue-eyed, was waiting at the door. He was clearly the old man's grandson, considering the firm hug and joyous shout: "Grandfather, you're here!" The little boy had only his grandfather, who struggled for both of them, with unselfish love and the fish that fed them. His grandfather knew about his grandson's great love of music and his dream of learning to play. The boy very often dreamed of a beautiful violin, shiny like a diamond in the warm spring sunrays. He usually made mouth organs from smooth green grass and other instruments from wood from the nearby forests of his homeland. He had never had a real instrument until this day when his old grandfather, wishing to cheer up his grandson, pulled a violin out of a box. The boy was so happy when he caught sight of this peculiar instrument, and he immediately took it into his gentle hands and started to play a magical melody that no one had heard before. The local music teacher found out about his talent and sent him for private violin lessons in town. His hard work paid off. At his first competition, he won a prestigious prize that distinguished him among many other musicians.

But fame made him neither arrogant nor ungrateful. As a token of his gratitude, he built a new school in his hometown, which carries his name to this day. He made his grandfather very happy by achieving many successes; the old man spent his last years watching his grandson succeed.

By changing a little boy's life, that is how I, dear Spring, continued my path, bringing joy to people and filling their hearts with love. My role would have been negligible if the world's most famous melodies that are listened to even today did not pour off my strings. The names of the people that brought me back to life are not important. The only important thing is that everybody who loves music and old values creates new melodies that, to them and the attentive listener, bring peace to their soul, faith in a new beginning and eternal life.

Forever your friend,

Violin







2015

WRITE A LETTER ABOUT THE WORLD YOU WANT TO GROW UP IN

Tripoli, Lebanon, 14 February 2015

To all those people working to destroy my dreams and to all those, who have decided to kill the joy in my heart,

I send a greeting soaked with the tears of despair, a greeting filled with both pain and hope, a pain I suffer and a hope for a better future.

From here, this world in which I suffer, I write words that paint a world I see in my imagination, words that I will set down as a letter, so that this picture may come true. From here, this dark world, I dream of living in a bright world, even if it is beyond the horizon. From here, through these words, I seek to knock on the doors of terrorists' consciences, whose humanity sleeps, while war is awake within them. From here come my words, from this war-soaked atmosphere in which we live.

My world is different. It is far from hatred, spite, war and sectarianism. The flag of excellence flutters over my world and united under the skies are the moon of openness and the sun of freedom. Every time I close my eyes, I dream of a world where doves fly and the lights of mountainside villages shine every evening.

My world is a dream that has travelled all roads without exception to reach the boats in the harbour and travel with the sun, sinking with it behind the horizon and touching the rainbow, to travel with the moon on the road returning from the places where people stand under fireworks and finger-like clouds to celebrate their festivals. It is a world where we find civilizations, old markets and houses with rose-coloured windows.



Sara Jadid,
13 years old, Lebanon

In my world, minarets and church bells sing lullabies together, and one elegant star shines bright, with many little stars dancing around it every night. It is a world that opens its arms to everyone, black and white, without discrimination.

I do not want my world to be a gunpowder factory and I do not want its children to be victims of division. I want the world to be a factory that produces humans as purveyors of science, knowledge and culture. I want the world to be a dove carrying an olive branch in a world battered by storms, a lighthouse that guides boats in need of refuge from afar. I want to see the world's light in the clouds and laughter in its tears.




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”



2015



I want my world to be powerful in its eternity, fabulous in its expanse, great through the peaks of its proud mountains. I want the world to be a place where children would not worry, a world that will not be disturbed by the impact of bombs, the crackle of gunfire or the piercing of knives. I want my world to be a strong fortress whose stones are the arms of its children, their heads held high. I want my world to be proud, refusing to bend and lower its arms, an eternal world that would make me feel that daybreak is near.

I dream of one day living in a world where all seasons are spring, in a green world, alive, generous, good and loyal, a world where children seek to do good.

I want a world without equal, where men have no equal, a world where mountaintops are hope, air is love, earth is good, water is generous. I want the best land for planting shoots to feed off its goodness, that breathe its kindness and drink its sense of generosity, to engender better generations for the promising future of our dreams.

I want loyalty in the sky of my world because my land is missing loyalty. I dream of governing a world where love is the emblem and loyalty the foundation, a world where neither treachery nor hatred have meaning.

I do not want conflicts between the people of my world. I want people to be unified and united forever, one with the earth like a mother with her newborn.

I want my world to stand for good, to be refreshed by each drop of water, sweet fruit, warm shadow, lily-scented breeze, song of the river, fresh spring, exciting twilight, scarlet sunset, brilliant stars and healing moon. In my world, the seasons pass uninterrupted, organizing the systems of each living being.

I want my world to be a second mother, warming me in her bosom filled with love, hope and protection. I want it to be a world where bitterness hides behind the doors of the forgotten so that the doves of the future fly through its air, a world that meets moments of paradise in the depths of light, a world that cares for each generation with tenderness, not blasphemy and anger, that puts it to sleep on a mattress of hope, while telling stories of eternity, refreshing them with the rules of the future, and that watches over it before it is too late and all opportunities are lost. This is a powerful world, lofty in its eternity, which guarantees a noble future for its glories. I want my world to be like a father, large and gentle, whom we can be hard on, but who is tender



towards us. We are now required to face the divisions and wars that worked to destroy our dreams and wishes.

Everyone dreams of you, world, but I feel you like warmth in the middle of a winter storm, and I see you like a sun in a hazy sky. You are my world, my refuge, the warm bosom where I take refuge from the cold.

The roads, the squares, the buildings and the large streets of my world will not be polluted by concrete, its families will not be homeless, and nothing will disrupt its union. The day of independence will not lead to disappointment.

I see you, my World, as a rainbow that appears after crises, in which no religion will conquer another and no skin colour will be superior to another. You are a world that transcends human conflict.

Finally, I say to you, now that these words are drawing to a close and my letter is at its end, unlike my dreams which have not ended and will not end, since my world is not Saturn or Venus or Mercury or Jupiter – it's a world that knows no sectarianism or racism. It is safe, stable, and characterized by compassion and the recognition of the rights of others everywhere.

A long life to you and your wishes and desires.

From a citizen who dreams,

Sara Jadid





2016



WRITE A LETTER TO YOUR 45-YEAR-OLD SELF

Heaven, January 1, 2016

*Greetings to my
forty-five-year-old self,*

It has been nearly four months since I left the mortal world. Perhaps such an early departure has made me more mature, mature enough to write this letter to you today. I, Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old Syrian boy who has been known worldwide for my eternal sleep on the Turkish Bodrum Coast, am writing to you, the forty-five-year-old me who is still among the living. Does it sound impossible? If I am gone, you should not exist! But why not, when everything is a dream: both you and I, my forty-five-year-old self. Angels will help me send these words to you.

My beloved self! Now, I am in Heaven. What a shimmering, fantastic world it is. There is neither day nor night. The sun, the moon and the sparkling stars shine together through an atmosphere as clear as crystal. My mother and brother are smiling along with many others. We have no nations, no borders, no migration, no religious discrimination, no terrorism and no violence. Everybody is equal; we are all souls living in harmony and serenity.

It is New Year's Eve now. From this enchanted place, we can see the whole world, watch the splendid fireworks like flowers blooming in the night sky and listen to the ringing bells. Below us, Earth is full of contrasting colors. Some places shine in brilliant light, while others drown in silent darkness. The joyful sound of ringing bells mixes with that of gunfire, happiness is accompanied by sadness, hatred joined hand-in-hand with love. Alas, what a life! Yet, everything has become so far away.

My forty-five-year-old friend, you still remember our story, do you not? We followed our parents to flee from the war and violence of our hometown in Kobani, dreaming of a "promised land" in the European sky. Yet that dream ended only twenty minutes after the ship departed. Immense waves came rushing in, the boat capsized, and my little hands let go of my mother's. I shouted, "Father, please do not leave me!" I struggled in the waves, trying to hold onto a fragile ray of hope, striving in hopelessness. But what could a three-year-old child do in the vast sea, in such blinding darkness? And then, the ocean opened her arms and embraced me gently. The ocean was very kind: she brought me to rest on the sandy shore instead of giving me to the depths. Surely, you remember me that day: small, in a red shirt, blue pants, and shoes; my hands laid down naturally; my face



Nguyen Thi Thu Trang,
15 years old, Viet Nam

buried in the comforting shore as if I were sleeping. The waves pampered me. It was an everlasting sleep.

My photograph was widely shared on social networks and media channels. And what did people say? "A global humanitarian disaster?", "A symbol of the pains that Syrian people suffered as well as the desperate attempt to escape", "Make the world silent", "Awakening conscience". They also drew angel wings for me. This, of course, was not to exaggerate or romanticize the dead.

This was empowerment, resulting from death. This was how they soothed their pain. However, the unshakable truth remains: a life has ended. The boy is forever a three-year-old. My family and I have survived through rains of bullets and storms of bombs in unrest in Syria, but lost our lives on our way to find a more peaceful land in which to live. This death is too painful, irrational. Alas! Three years, a lifetime. If only there was no war and violence, if only I could have gone on a more stable boat, if only my father could have afforded a life vest, if only



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From this enchanted place, we can see the whole world, watch the splendid fireworks like flowers blooming in the night sky and listen to the ringing bells. Below us, Earth is full of contrasting colours. Some places shine in brilliant light, while others drown in silent darkness.

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2016

European countries had opened their hearts and their borders, if only...I did not have to die.

Now, my body has been returned to my hometown. A long homecoming journey, but it was a journey after death, returning to the place from which I ran away, only to return so I could be buried in the ground. It is truly a drifting life, a very measly destiny.

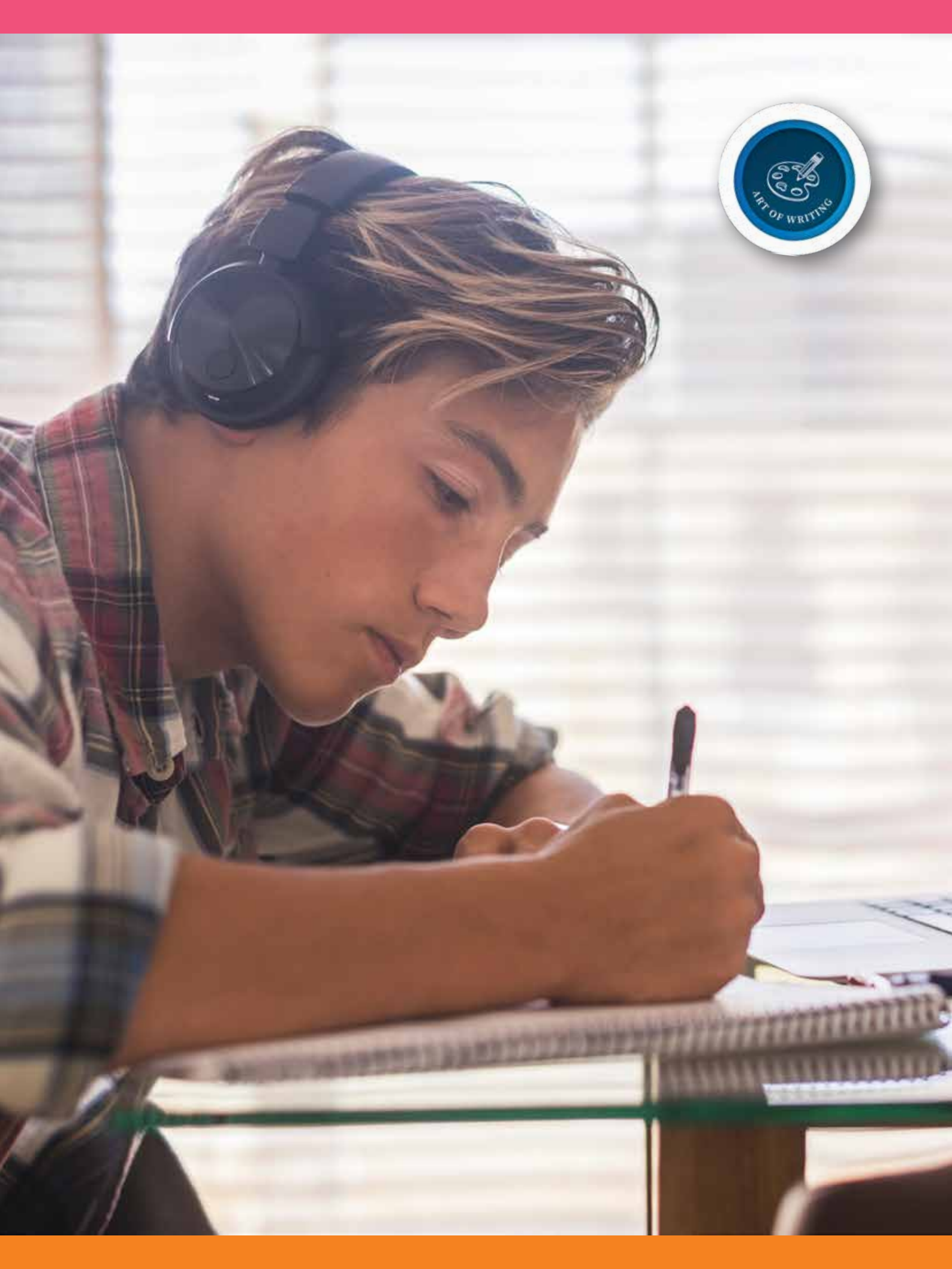
But, my friend, at least I was known and was comforted. What of the other thousands or even millions dead and forgotten? Thousands of migrants have died crossing the Mediterranean Sea, thousands of children have died from hunger, coldness, and disease, and hundreds of people have died from terrorism. One of my fellow compatriots said before drowning, "I thank the ocean for greeting us without asking for a visa, without questioning my religion...". There were deaths being appeased and being remembered, there were deaths being abandoned, being forgotten. Alas, could only death end injustice? Or could it not?

From here, from the excruciating pain of the death of a child, from the relief and serenity of Heaven, I write to you, the forty-five-year-old me still living on Earth. You will ask why I did not choose a different age. My friend, I chose you, at the age of forty-five, as you would have fulfilled yourself in life. If I reached age forty-five, alive, what would I be? A father? An office worker? A character capable of changing the world? You know Apple's CEO, Steve Jobs, is also a migrant. And where would I live? Would I return to our homeland of Syria or live in the promised land of Europe? How would the world be? Would it be similar to my present Heaven? Is it natural to age and reach forty-five? No. For so many, the age of forty-five is forever a dream, a dream which never comes true. Who will give me and other children like me forty-five years? Who will give us life? How could all of us live to forty-five, fifty-five, and beyond? Who can answer this question, my dear self?

With love,

I, you, from Heaven







2017

IMAGINE YOU ARE AN ADVISER TO THE NEW UN SECRETARY GENERAL; WHICH WORLD ISSUE WOULD YOU HELP HIM TACKLE FIRST AND HOW WOULD YOU ADVISE HIM TO SOLVE IT?

20 March 2017

Antonio Guterres

UN Secretary General

Dear Secretary General,

My name is Eva, I am 13 years old and I live in Lomé, Togo. Just like any other young girl, I dream of the perfect wedding, with a dazzling white dress and the perfect gentleman by my side, of an unending buffet and throwing my bouquet, and of two wedding rings that are more beautiful than diamonds. I dream of the perfect wedding, but it's only a dream as I have all the time in the world before I get married, and for that I am happy! It is just a dream for me, but for others it is a horrific reality. Every day it becomes a reality for poor young girls who cannot defend themselves. Each year, more than 15 million girls aged 15 and under are forced to marry men three times their age.

No doubt you have understood, Mr Secretary General, that today I would like to talk to you about child marriage.

Child marriage is the act of marrying a child who has neither legally nor emotionally reached marriageable age. Child marriage is the result of deep-rooted traditions, poverty, ignorance, early pregnancy or a lack of law. Underdeveloped and poor countries are often the most affected, and the victims are usually girls aged 15 and under. They are married to build strategic alliances and partnerships with other families. They are married because of tradition, which leaves their parents with no choice in the matter. They are married because they are seen as a burden and another mouth for their parents to feed. They are married because... because...because...

The solution, the only solution to child marriage, is education. Education allows the children of today, who will be the adults of tomorrow, to understand that age-old traditions which instruct them to marry off their daughters are unfair, and that poverty is no excuse, especially when the men are far too old for them. But education is not possible without means, without money.



Eva Giordano Palacios,
14 years old, Togo

Underdeveloped countries are often poor, lacking the means to build good education facilities and recruit qualified teachers. They settle for low-performing schools. Aid to underdeveloped countries must, therefore, be increased, so these countries can make up lost ground in terms of both their educators and their infrastructure. But for now, these countries must be encouraged to strengthen their laws against child marriage. When families end up in court for having married their child too young, they are often released without charge as they can bribe the judge or police officer. Not to mention how the legal system can often be much too lenient in these types of cases. And ironically, although it was a lack of money that drove them to marry off their daughter in the first

place, parents then have to find the money to bribe the legal authorities. They are trapped in a vicious circle and only you,

Mr Secretary General, have the power to help them break free today.

Mr Secretary General, I hope that my small contribution will help you as you plan your work for the years to come, and that you manage to end once and for all the inhumane and outdated practice that is child marriage.

Kind regards,

Eva Palacios



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2018



IMAGINE YOU ARE A LETTER TRAVELLING THROUGH TIME. WHAT MESSAGE DO YOU WISH TO CONVEY TO YOUR READERS?

*Letter to the United Nations
Afghanistan, February 2011*

Sirs,

I'm a letter. Not just any letter but a widely-travelled letter both in space and time... My adventure started in 2011 in Kandahar, Afghanistan.

Everything was peaceful and harmonious in the small town. I would spend my days carefree at a lonely office. I was a blank paper, impatiently waiting for some wishes and appointments to be written on me. But the next day, everything changed. Television stations stopped broadcasting, communications were interrupted and life entered an endless wait.

Suddenly, a Big Hand took me in order to write on me. At that moment, however, the sirens sounded. Cries and screams were heard everywhere. I felt that something bad was happening, but didn't know what. I had nothing to fear, though, because I was just a blank paper that no one would hurt.

While these thoughts were revolving in my mind, the Big Hand lifted me up and hurriedly put me in the pocket of its pants. A loud noise was then heard behind me, followed by shootings and cries. The Big Hand was holding me so tight that if it had held the world it would have utterly destroyed it. It was trying to save itself and I was listening to its panting. Its large drops of sweat were raining on me.



Chara Phoka,
13 years old, Cyprus

When we finally got away from the cries, and nothing could be heard anymore, the Big Hand began to write while wetting me with its tears. It was 2011. It wrote down its most secret thoughts and fears, while it continued to smudge me with its hopes and dreams. After a while, it became tired of writing and fell asleep, holding me close to its heart. I listened to its heart-beats while feeling its fear and uncertainty about its life. Eventually, it put me in an envelope and it was then that I changed hands.

The Big Hand walked to a bus station. It handed me over to a fragile Little Hand. I burrowed in the inside pocket of its jacket. Then, the Big Hand lifted up the child with the Small Hands and put us on a bus along with other unaccompanied Little Hands. There, other Big Hands were trying to pass some Little Hands on the buses, even through the windows, to save them.



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2018

The Little Hand holding me left behind parents, brothers, sisters, friends, but also the terror from the Big Bloody Hands. It wanted to stop struggling to survive. It wanted an opportunity to a normal life; it wanted to stop fearing.

At some point, the bus stopped. It arrived in Syria. From there, the Little Hand started walking to somewhere else. I shook every time it stumbled its feet on the hard stones. After many weeks, we finally reached Turkey. It was 2013...

There, the Little Hand searched for ways to secure what it could for its survival. Every day, it worked hard, so Big Hands gave it a few banknotes. From time to time the Little Hand was wetting me with the tears of a faded hope that better days would eventually come...

2015 arrived! The Little Hand gathered the money, gathered its hopes and started walking while I was deep inside its wool pocket. I realized that it gave money to devious Big Hands, human traffickers, who promised that a large ship would take it to Cyprus. From there, it would supposedly go to its relatives in Sweden. The Little Hand set out for a trip once again.

We walked all over Turkey, through valleys and deserts. Finally, we reached the coast. I had never seen so much water in my life. There, a small old boat, full of people, with Little and Big Hands who just wanted to stay alive, was waiting.

The Little Hand was squeezed amongst others and held firmly on the gunwale. The wild waves soaked and defaced me. The Little Hand felt my horror so it put me in a glass bottle. There, I was safe.



Days went by and all I could see was the endless blue. The Little Hand wrote with tears on my yellowed surface. It put me back in the bottle. The ship started leaking. I could feel the cold drops of water, passing inside the bottle. The Little Hand dove into the water so that it would not end up at the bottom of the sea. It swam with all its might, trying to save itself and reach the land. It didn't make it...

A few days later, the sea washed us up, on the Cypriot shores. Dozens of lifeless Little and Big Hands. Small children's hands like small shells were washed ashore by the wild waves. Luckily, I did not remain alone for long, since a Big, firm, fearless Hand lifted me out of the sand. When it read the contents, it said, "It must be delivered! Urgently!" I was pleased that I would finally give meaning and identity to the Little Hand and its short, invisible life.

The Big Hand put me in an envelope and sent me to a post office. From there, I travelled until a Big Hand tore the envelope and pulled me out. I was in Sweden.

I wanted to shout loudly that it was my honour to have lived all the things I had, having felt the pain and strength of the Little Hands. It was an honour for me. I was given the unique opportunity to appreciate the greatness of human life, through innocent and unaccompanied Little Hands which had to face the hard reality, at a time when they should've been laughing, carefree; Little Hands with big moral stature...

I'm just a simple letter that has travelled in time... Many other letters have done so. I only wish people would write on every piece of inanimate paper, feelings of joy, hope and love! I only wish!

With affection,

The letter of an Invisible Life





2019

WRITE A LETTER TO YOUR HERO

Xèdomey, 27 March 2019

Dearest Uncle,

I am as happy as the Pacific Ocean is vast to be writing these words to you now to give you my news and to receive yours in return. How are you?

My dear uncle, I think of you as much as I worry for your health, which hasn't had the same spring in its step since the incident with your heart last year. Do not worry, you are first in my prayers every morning. I would dare, though, to recommend you do some exercise. You should take a brisk walk for thirty to forty-five minutes, three times a week. I hope that you stay as strong as Hercules, as feisty as Samson and, finally, as quick as Lucky Luke, my favourite heroes.

My beloved uncle, I have often talked about these characters, who I think of as my role models. You have often teased me about inventing stories, often asked me with a smile why I didn't choose a hero from our country's or our world's history. As I grow older, I'm beginning to think that you were right. In fact, you were completely right! To grow up, humanity needs to take the values of past heroes to heart.

Uncle of mine, I am delighted to tell you that I have another hero in my life, in my mind and in my heart. He is even in my house! You'll never guess, even if I bet the whole of Ali Baba's cave of treasures. His name is Xèviosso, and he is our cat. I know that it will come as a surprise to you to learn that a cat can bear the name of the god of thunder and lightning for the peoples across the south of Benin and Togo through to Ghana. But there you are! I gave this little house cat his name the moment Papa and I bought him at a fair in the suburbs of Cotonou. Mum couldn't believe it! But once I had explained to her that every name brings with it a certain energy and that the cat needed a strong name to get rid of the mice causing us such grief, she understood... I think.

Day after day, Xèviosso shows that he is worthy of his name. Every morning for weeks, he would always leave the remains of a rat in the middle of the veranda. It often made me very happy, for I confess I've had a deep hatred for these little beasts ever since they ate the sleeves off my birthday dress and urinated on my birthday cake. No more rats at home for us now!



Richemelle Francilia Somissou Koukoui,
14 years old, Benin

It gets better, dear uncle; one morning I found a lifeless two-metre-long snake at the foot of my bed. I cried out in fear! I was terrified! However, as if to reassure me that I had nothing to worry about, my sweet cat Xèviosso stretched out his paws and turned the snake's head over, meowing and purring proudly. I knew that he wanted to tell me "this is my masterpiece". When I looked at the snake more closely, I could see that it was injured in several places, especially around its head. Once again, Xèviosso proved himself to be a true champion

and vigilant guard, just like Cerberus! Just imagine what could have happened if the snake had not been killed by this brave cat! I know, right!

Then just last weekend, another heroic deed: the whole family were sitting around the table together on the veranda. The blazing sun was beating down on the treetops. Xèviosso was sleeping at the edge of the veranda, basking in the sun. Two metres away from him, our chicken was digging away madly at the ground, trying to find



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You have often teased me about inventing stories, often asked me with a smile why I didn't choose a hero from our country's or our world's history. As I grow older, I'm beginning to think that you were right. In fact, you were completely right! To grow up, humanity needs to take the values of past heroes to heart.

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2019



something to feed her seven chicks. She reminded me of the “dig and delve” fable by La Fontaine. All of a sudden, the chicken let out a loud, terrified screech and flapped her wings frantically. The chicks were frozen with fear and panic. There was a hawk! But, just as the celestial beast swooped down to imprison one of the poor chicks in its claws, Xèviosso pounced, like a spring unfurling, to grab the bird by its right wing. In a tussle of beating wings, squawks and dust, the attacker was overcome! The bird squirmed, badly injured. Papa jumped up to finish off the bird with a swoop of his stick. The mother chicken, although panicked, was also happy because the cat had saved her and was now her hero. This immediately made me think that in our world, the strong must do more to protect the weak.

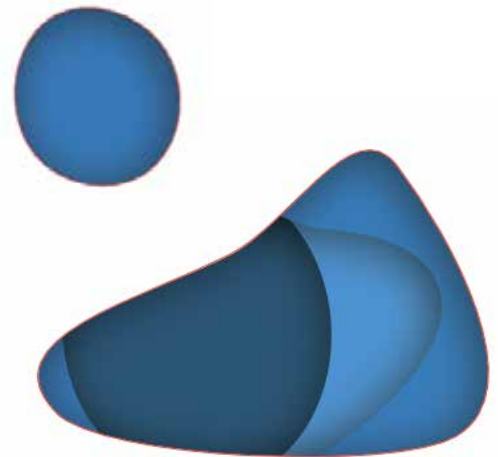
Uncle, do you see now why I am proud to say that my hero is our precious cat Xèviosso? This cat very much deserves all the superlatives and positive accolades afforded to him.

My uncle, my dearest uncle, if this cat could talk, I would give him a mobile phone so he could tell you himself about all of these deeds that have so impressed us. His presence assures us that our chicken is safe.

Pass on my warm wishes to all of my cousins, and do not forget to tell them this story.

See you soon!

Your loving niece







2020

WRITE A MESSAGE TO AN ADULT ABOUT THE WORLD WE LIVE IN

*Hello, my dear
grandfather Mikhail!*

Six months has already passed since your death, but I am still missing you. I need your wise eyes, strong and safe hands, and your affectionate embrace. I miss your long stories about people, life, truth...

You have taught me to believe in miracles, my beloved grandfather! And now I am writing a letter to you hoping that you will magically read it...

You know, I'm very upset today...

Ah, if you were alive, grandfather, I would come to you, sit knee by knee and tell you everything. And perhaps you would stroke me on the head and whisper: "Olenka, you are living in a happy time, living in love and peace, in abundance and joy. Cheer up! Things will get better. Look at the world: it is wonderful!"



"But what do you know, grandfather, about the present, about today's world? - I would stubbornly object and continue: - I met a homeless kitten on the way to school today. In fact, someone has betrayed it. It is hungry and unlucky. And there are plenty of other abandoned animals. People are cruel and unfair.

During the break I accidentally stepped on a classmate's foot and he pushes me and calls me names. I am sad and hurt. I started to cry. How can it be possible? I have stepped on his foot by accident!

Then, when I am coming back from music school, I am scolded by a woman on the bus for not giving away my seat. But that has happened because I have been falling asleep due to fatigue and I just have not noticed her.



Volha Valchkevich,
12 years old, Belarus

And in the evening, I quarrel with my friends because I do not want to sit outside on the bench and play on the phone like them but want to play snowballs. "You are like out of this world", my friends tell me. I walk by myself outside enjoying the long-awaited snow and having a lot of thoughts in my mind... Yes, they are right...I am out of this world...But what is it, "this world"?

It's complicated! People are not able to listen and hear each other. Everybody cares only about himself and his interests. The world is ruled by greed and thirst for profit. People are enslaved by gadgets. They no longer appreciate painting, music, books... The nature is being indefinitely destroyed. The fight of people against terrible diseases has almost lost. It is enough to mention the number of COVID-19 victims."



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I would start to cry then. And at that very moment you would wisely notice, as it has been before: "Granddaughter, do you remember that a medal usually has two sides? Do you remember that the side of the medal that you are wiping shines more?" And then you would tricky wink and snap your fingers, "Turn it over!"

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2020



I would start to cry then. And at that very moment you would wisely notice, as it has been before: "Granddaughter, do you remember that a medal usually has two sides? Do you remember that the side of the medal that you are wiping shines more?" And then you would tricky wink and snap your fingers, "Turn it over!"

I would dry my tears and gather my thoughts and "having turned the medal over" continue the monologue:

"Is the Peace complicated?"

Do people not understand or love each other? Are people not able to listen and hear each other?

But, for example, I have not tried to explain. What if I told that boy who pushes me and calls me names that I have stepped on his foot by accident, if I apologize to him. Maybe our conflict would end in different way?

And what about the woman in the bus? What if I told that I have not noticed her because I have been falling asleep due to fatigue, would she not understand me? Since she is someone's mother, wife, daughter... Probably, she has just been very tired. It never even occurs to me.

And what about the poor kitten? Brutal people have left him homeless without food? But what about me? I will find him tomorrow and will take him home. It will be a good start...

And what about my friends with gadgets? I am angry at them. But after all, the scientific and technical progress, moving forward with seven league steps, helps people easily get the right information, provides the opportunity to communicate with people from different parts of the world, helps to make our life easier, make the world better!



Medicine is developing either! I agree that sometimes it is quite difficult to find the vaccine to cure new diseases, emerging and attacking mankind. But there are many intelligent, brave people, fighting for our health! After all, I see how selflessly and hard my parents are working as doctors. How much they are happy for each recovering person, how hard they are worried when they are not able to help someone.

What about the environment? I agree that from time to time the man unwisely uses wealth and gifts of nature. However, there are plenty of environmental communities, volunteers and just involved people, promoting by actions, as well as by words a protective approach to the nature. For instance, every spring my friends and I plant a tree in our neighborhood...

Guys are good now...

And most of them appreciate art. Many guys go to music schools, like I do; many go to art schools, read, sing, dance... Not all, but many of them!..

Ah, grandfather! So, our world isn't so bad! It's complicated, but how wonderful it is in its diversity! And if you look at the world with the eyes of a man in love, it's easy to see how wonderful it is!!!"



You would give a cunning smile, grandfather, and might say: "Miracles are always surrounding us! The main thing is to be able to feel and see them!"

And then I would become silent being excited...

My dear grandfather, you have taught me to believe in miracles, and even now, after you have gone, I am learning from you to love this world! Is it not a miracle?

With love,

Your granddaughter Olya





2021

WRITE A LETTER TO A FAMILY MEMBER ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH COVID-19

Dear Amal,

I was not jealous of all the attention you'll get when mom and dad told me I was going to have a little sister. Not even when they bought a crib for you where I spent the first two years of my life, sleeping on a floor mattress. But I did envy you when I realized you had a protective womb shielding you from the deadly outside world and I didn't. I still find it hard to believe that you'll be all grown up as you're reading this all and intelligent just like your sister here! I hope you're living a blissful life, for I'm not.

You never know when a slight drizzle can turn into a violent storm.

What seemed to be a two weeks' much needed mid-spring break came to be an incessant imprisonment at our very own home. The suddenness of how life took a U-turn in a matter of weeks makes this even more chilling.

You must know what I'm talking about. You must have books lined up with the struggles of millions others like me. But this is my story; sister to sister, never to be known by anyone else.

Looking back I realize how naïve I was. Pandemic, quarantine, SARS - terms I never heard before. The more everything made sense, the more my heart shrank. I was such blinded by my faith in technology that the thought of a possible outbreak never occurred to me. 193 countries, 7.9 billion people versus a virus. Can you imagine? Is this Mother Nature's rage? Is she being vengeful? Are we being punished for wrecking her world? Does that mean we're being held captives in our very own homes? Or maybe she's ushering us to our senses; making us realize our mindless wrongdoings - just how ma would do if I did something wrong. Maybe this is why nature is a SHE; a mother to the mankind.



Nubaysha Islam,
14 years old, Bangladesh

The virus is deadly and so is losing hope. Numb by the already wrecked up world I didn't know what to do. Those death counts - huge numbers - became something we had to hear every single day. The brushes and paints didn't pique my interests. For the first time I abandoned an unfinished painting.

I didn't know what to do when mom sank into depression. I just stood there motionless as she kept struggling with sleep and appetite. Why didn't I do anything? I could

have stroked her head and comforted her by saying "Ma don't worry everything's going to be fine." Truth be told, I didn't know if things were going to be okay. I couldn't help our mom. What kind of daughter does that make me?

Sometimes I wished all these were a nightmare. That I'd jolt up with the alarm going off and ma telling me I'd be late for school. Once my third grade English teacher had asked what I feared most. I remember answering thunderstorms and spiders. But



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The sun is setting among the foliage, marking the end of the last day of the year and the arrival of a new dawn of a new year. I may have lost Phuppi but I still got the hopes of meeting you soon. Your name means 'hope' Amal. And that is what's unique to you. You've been fueling my hopes for better times.

”



2021

now I'd say it's death as well as the fear of losing someone.

Just when things were being a little easy on us, the unimaginable happened - Phuppi passed away. You may not know her Amal, but she was a great person, the best aunt to me - grandma's only daughter.

A little ill at the morning, grasping for life in evening, and gone by night - that's what COVID does to you.

Phuppi was rested in our family burial ground. Guilt stabbed in the heart when I went near her. I took the times spent with her for granted. I'd never get to see the smile that bloomed on her face every year as I handed her a saree to wear on Eid.

I fled from her funeral to the Woods nearby as I couldn't bear seeing her lifeless face. Amal, she was so excited about you; making these nakshikantha baby quilts, one of which I managed to get from her crowded bedroom. The outlines of the floral motifs on it had been embroidered in black. Fate didn't let her embroider the rest of it. But I've to - to keep you warm as you arrive in the freezing January.

Because the world is a wheel that never stops spinning. You've to carry on what others have left. You have to fight your way through unfortunate times with trust and patience.

The sun is setting among the foliage, marking the end of the last day of the year and the arrival of a new dawn of a new year. I may have lost Phuppi but I still got the hopes of meeting you soon. Your name means 'hope' Amal. And that is what's unique to you. You've been fueling my hopes for better times.

This story doesn't end here. You don't know what's coming next in life. But never lose hope Amal - never.

Your sister,

Nubaysha





UNIVERSAL POSTAL UNION

International Bureau
Weltpoststrasse 4
3015 BERNE
SWITZERLAND

Tel: +41 31 350 31 11
Email: info@upu.int



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