



Women of Letters: Reviving The Lost Art of Correspondence

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In a world of the short and swift, of texts and Twitter, there's something of special value about a carefully composed letter.

In homage to this most civilised of activities, Marieke Hardy and Michaela McGuire created the literary afternoons of Women of Letters. Some of Australia's finest dames of stage, screen and page have delivered missives on a series of themes, collected here for the first time. Claudia Karvan sends 'A love letter' to love itself, Helen Garner contacts ghosts of her past in 'The letter I wish I'd written', Noni Hazlehurst dispatches a stinging rebuke 'To my first boss', and Megan Washington pays tribute to her city and community as she writes 'To the best present I ever received'.

And some gentlemen correspondents – including Paul Kelly, Eddie Perfect and Bob Ellis – have been invited to put pen to paper in a letter 'To the woman who changed my life'.

By turns hilarious, moving and outrageous, this is a diverse and captivating tribute to the art of letter writing.

All royalties for this book will go to Edgar's Mission animal rescue shelter.

Women of Letters: Reviving The Lost Art of Correspondence Details

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From Reader Review Women of Letters: Reviving The Lost Art of Correspondence for online ebook

Tamsien West (Babbling Books) says

Women of Letters is a brilliant book to pick up and read a little of at a time. All profits go to an animal welfare centre and the book is a collection of 'letters' written by famous Australian women (and a few famous men, about the women in their lives). It is a celebration of the art of correspondence, and I enjoyed it immensely.

This book is all about reviving the art of writing letters, the art of sharing stories in more than 140 characters, perhaps even the art of living and appreciating life enough to fill this space. This is also a book filled with the lives of amazing Australian women, so this post is for my aunt Rachel, who is the bravest woman I know.

'Women of Letters' began as a creative fundraising event for Edgar's Mission animal rescue centre and has grown into a monthly event, with an online community, and of course, the book which I just read. Hardy and McGuire invite talented musicians, actresses, politicians, writers and comedians to write a letter to topics as varied as 'the moment it all fell apart' or 'the best present I ever received' and in the process revive the lost art of correspondence. At the monthly events, these writers then read their letters aloud to an audience, which lends a very intimate quality to the letters in this book, as each has a very distinct 'voice'.

This is a difficult book to comment on, as there are so many styles, and vastly different approaches to writing letters. But this is its strength. It is a brilliant book to read a little at a time, I picked it up and read a couple of letters here and there, rather than from start to finish. Some of the letters were very candid, others were hilarious, and out of all the letters there were only two that I didn't like (and one of those was written by Paul Kelly).

I must admit that there are two things about this book which I would usually dislike. First is the 'celebrity factor'. Ever since I read a social science text with an infuriatingly pretentious introduction by Bono I have shied away from any kind of 'non literary' celebrity association. However, in this case I am willing to overlook this, because seeing Megan Washington's name was actually what made me pick up the book, and give it a proper look, rather than just a cursory glance. In addition, the actual idea behind the fundraising is based around famous Australian women, as so it isn't some tacked on celebrity endorsement.

Secondly, as any frequent reader of this blog will probably have noticed, I'm not really a reader of 'current' books. Those books that dominate newspaper columns and 'recommended this Summer' lists before falling into obscurity as mediocre. I had seen this book mentioned in a few Sunday newspaper reviews and there was a huge in store display, but I'm glad I swallowed my prejudices and gave it a try. 'Women of Letters' is something truly unique and well worth a read, it might even prompt you to see your own life in a different light.

Tracy says

I really enjoyed this as a beautiful, funny and poignant look at the lost art of letter writing.

Read the full review at OurBookClub

Sue Hatton says

This was one of those pick up and read between other books for me. Easy to devour short sections without fear of getting lost in complex plots. I love a well written letter and this created imaginary places and scenarios, that it needs a follow up.

Grace Backler says

I quite enjoyed this! Majority of the letters hit home at some point and reminded me how wonderful human beings are and how interesting everyone's lives can be. The only thing I did not like about the letters were that some seemed quite pretentious and forced when they could have been less metaphorical and more laid back.

Calzean says

There are a lot of letters in this volume. Being letters there is also a lot of personnel feelings/events/memories being shared on a large range of topics. There are even a few blokes included. Alice Pung stole the show.

Rach says

Such a treasure trove of delights! There were some good letters, there were some great letters and there were some really amazingly awesome letters! I dipped in and out of it, sometimes reading one or two letters, then other times five or six. There were some I liked much more than others, the content and the circumstances behind those really resonating with me. I hope they do another one with different people, this idea has a lot of life left in it.

~*kath*~ says

Nowhere near as good as I had expected it to be. There was so much potential there, but the letters were mostly silly and shallow and not even funny. A few exceptions, like those from Noni Hazelhurst and Alice Pung, but generally very boring,

Erika says

As a lover of letters I loved this book. The letters were often intensely personal which made for fascinating reading. I would've loved to have seen them 'performed', but equally, being able to read them as opposed to hearing them gave an appropriately letter-y experience.

It wasn't a difficult read and the format made it easy to dip into at a spare moment.

Merryll says

ok not remarkable

Steve lovell says

A mini-publishing industry is the issuing out to the literate reading public of the collected letters from the historic, artistic and literary icons of history. Letters have always given an insight to the soul, thus the popularity of such publications. What of the future though? Do emails, tweets and text-messages give the same depth – ‘The Collected Tweets of Shane Warne’???? According to Marieke Hardy and Michaela McGuire, the art of letter writing is dying out – thus this tome in an attempt to resurrect it, along with its preceding stage presentations.

Letter writing is one of my pleasures, the old throwback that I am! I love doing it, adding photos and newspapers clippings – ‘inclusions’ – to the envelope. These are then sent on to extended family, mates and pen friends. Few write back, mainly responding digitally – but that is not the point – it is my way and I’m addicted. So kudos to these two like-minded editors in assisting me to keep the practice alive.

Not all the letters in this volume work though – some are pretentious, precious, attempting uber-cool or simply drab. And the cursed f-bombs fly throughout! It’s as if so many in this day and age cannot come up with a more vibrant, descriptive adjective, verb or noun than the ubiquitous variations of ‘to fuck’. That being said, mostly these letters engaged the reader with their authors, especially as the latter were required to respond to a range of topics, and in that way many a more than passable yarn was imparted.

Judith Lucy’s attracted so much I immediately purchased her memoir ‘The Lucy Family Alphabet’, and I immensely enjoyed Jenny Valentish’s ode to Adam Ant, especially in light of his recent appearance on ‘Gordon Street’. Terry Psickis’ tribute to her mentor and Jo Walker’s take on the best ever present, her fagnatism, were also highlights for this reader. Fine epistles also came from the stunningly beautiful and gifted Megan Washington, and as well there were Helen Garner’s mini-memorials to her most influential gazombis.

The editors have hinted of a sequel, and with this maybe the premise could be reversed as obviously a few men, despite their many deficiencies, can string a word or two together.

‘Men of Letters’ could have a token contribution from the opposite gender, as this collection contains in reverse. I’d personally love to see contributions from Hannah Gadsby and the courageous Magda S. A minor irritation was constantly having to go to the back of the book to retrieve biographical details of those contributors I was unfamiliar with. Could they be better placed next time?

All in all this is a diverse and, for the most part, thoroughly readable attempt to encourage the joys of a not quite extinct pastime. At least the included notables will pass something tangible, in a small way, on to the future – even if a few commented that they could not remember the last time they wrote a ‘real’ letter!

Jet says

I was excited to find this, during a post-Christmas Melbourne bookshop crawl. I'd wanted to go to one of the live Women of Letters events when they were on, but it was never possible. This is a project of Marieke Hardy (who I've followed since the days of her blog, Reasons You Will Hate Me and through her time as a presenter on Triple J breakfast radio) and Michaela McGuire. Even better, the Women of Letters project supports a charity I'm very fond of: Edgar's Mission.

I enjoyed this read. A collection of letters written on given topics by Australians of note, generally in the arts field, and organised into sections by those topics. Because of its letters format, it's easy to pick up and read a letter or two, then put down and let that process.

As is to be expected when 60+ different contributors are involved, I enjoyed some letters much more than others.

The topics ranged widely, and with varying numbers of responses to each one. The first section, "To the night I'd rather forget", sets up a common thread. Because the letters were originally written to be performed at the stage events, and because many of the contributors have a background in comedy (and Australian comedy does so love the mocking of the self), many of the letters are written as if they might be material for a stand up routine. Many of the contributions in the book hold the writer's failings up for ridicule, which is very well done in some cases, but is not something I enjoy very much of. I preferred the contributions from women with different backgrounds, particularly Noni Hazelhurst ("To my ghosts" and "To my first boss"), Megan Washington ("To the best present I ever received") and Joan Kirner ("To my turning point").

Certainly, some of the topics were more intriguing than others. "A love letter" was the most responded-to prompt, with seven contributors, and together with "To my twelve-year-old self" seemed the most overdone of the topics - which is not to say the letters were of a lower quality, just that the topics have been done so many times before.

I loved the sections for "To my first pin-up", "My first boss" and "The moment it all fell apart".

I thought that the collection could have done without the two sections for men, "To the song I wish I'd written", and "To the woman who changed my life". Two of the six letters in the "Changed my life" section are beautiful, true celebrations of a treasured woman in the writer's life - one a sister and one a wife, from Ben Salter and Eddie Perfect respectively. The other four are male-centred dreck, and the first one is for some reason written to Desdemona as if from Othello, by way of Paul Kelly. Why is a letter from a fictional man to the fictional woman he betrayed and murdered in here? Other highlights are the one to woman-as-monolith (No, really, the whole thing is addressed to "Woman"), the one about my-wife-is-awesome-because-otherwise-I'd-be-dead-of-my-own-stupidity-but-I-wish-we-had-more-kids (hi, Bob Ellis, you misogynist old asshat), the childish offering from John Saffran (parody song about thinking his girlfriend's mother is hot), and the self-indulgent plea to be forgiven by an ex courtesy of Tim Rogers.

I would have loved to have seen women's responses to the "To the woman who changed my life" topic.

Still, I very much liked this taste of so many different women's voices, some whose work I knew of, and others who were new to me. It's an engaging, funny, honest, shocking and beautiful collection of works.

Anne_MB says

An excellent collection of short writing pieces, in the form of letters under various headings such as first boss, nemesis, love, earlier self, important moments or actions, turning points, etc.

The contributors are a varied and interesting group of Australians, and also include a few men.

I found this book to be a delight and enjoyed every fabulous letter, some of which made me laugh, some even made me cry, most made me think, or even recognize myself in places.

A great book, and a great format.

TAT Books says

Reviewed by Kristie Giblin. First published in the September 2014 issue of The Australia Times Books magazine.

For full review visit <http://www.theaustraliatimes.com/maga...>

Women of letters inspired me to be a better person. As cheesy as that sounds, it really did change my outlook after reading the tales of so many truly amazing women.

Writing on a broad range of topics such as 'a love letter', 'to my teenage self', and 'to my first boss', each story brought something new, a different way of thinking, a different perspective.

Stemming from the travelling conference which sees great Australian women writing letters to a range of topics and presenting them live on stage, these perfectly crafted stories in their own right, have been collated into three books; Women of Letters: Reviving the lost art of correspondence being the third one.

Many familiar women appear such as Noni Hazlehurst, Claudia Karvan and Megan Washington, along with a few men including Paul Kelly and Eddie Perfect, who write letters to the women in their lives.

The range of letters, each written from a different personal perspective, some comedic and others quite serious, extend a passion for life and made me reflect on how my past has shaped me.

A recommended read for someone who is in need of a little inspiration, or just a laugh.

Kate Miller says

My voyeuristic side really enjoyed these insights into some of the women (and men) that I admire. It was well thought out and well collated by Hardy and McGuire. I have to disagree with other reviews who thought that the letters from the men could have been skipped over, and I especially enjoyed the letters TO women. I've now been inspired to write my own letters.

Kerryn Roberts says

I must say a huge thank you to my best friend Kelly, for giving me this book as a Christmas gift and continuing our mutual love of the written word. This book has brought me so much enjoyment. It has made me laugh out loud, it's had me close to tears. It's made me proud to be a woman and proud of my country. It gives you a snap shot into the lives of some amazing women, Claudia Karvan, Jennifer Byrne, Judith Lucy, Cal Wilson, Megan Washington, Marieke Hardy... And all the rest. Thank you for sharing your stories, for reviving a lost art and for supporting Edgar's Mission.

Everything about this book is exciting and amazing. I'm so thrilled that there is a second book 'Sincerely', I have it at the ready :)
