

LOVE LETTERS FROM THE CORONAVIRUS QUARANTINE: How to make your down-time meaningful and fulfilling.

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WHAT if an old fashioned thoughtful LOVE LETTER changed your life for the better, healed one of your relationships, or even helped the world during these chaotic and frightening times?

The typical contemporary and busy lifestyles we lead tend to interfere with our ability to express love fully, with tenderness and vulnerability. If you have experienced trauma, addiction or mental illness, then healthy self-expression is critical for your long-term well-being.

I have offered creative arts therapy workshops for over 35 years and during that time, I have come to realize that people have as much or even more grief over unexpressed love than they do about profound trauma.

As a result of unexpressed love, people suffer with a remarkable amount of unconscious suppressed grief. This suppressed grief is able to exacerbate a sense of alienation or a deep abiding loneliness. During this time of world-wide quarantine, when we all need the comfort of a hug, love letters might help us connect more deeply in ways we never imagined.

In the past, it has been completely understandable that we reached for store-bought greeting cards while standing in the grocery store check out line. These cards offered a variety of pseudo-prose and poems to help us express our affection to a cherished person, or, to celebrate a special occasion. It's an easy solution, but the message provided in the card is typically - well - typical. By this I mean, that the commercial card sentiments have been designed for many people. The words are not specifically tailored for your loved one.

The simple-to-follow structured process and creative techniques below will help you write a meaningful love letter, one that touches the heart of your recipient. This letter will include details that leave no doubt that the letter was written JUST for her, him or they.

Below there are easy steps to follow for list making, journal writing, Haiku poetry, and then the love letter.

You might be surprised by the emotions that emerge while writing a love letter. You might be even more surprised by the emotions that your letter will evoke in your recipient. One writer said, "My husband began to weep before I finished reading the first paragraph, in 25 years of marriage I had never written him a love letter".

Right now, while Sheltered in Place or Quarantined, why not send love letters via email or FaceTime?

None of us wants to believe that we will die, or that more than a few people we know and/or care about will die. Yet - if this is a reality - even if it is only a low possibility, wouldn't you want to send and receive love letters before that time?

Today, and for the next few weeks or months, we all have more down time than usual. We have family members, friends and colleagues sequestered with us or far away. Why not write them now? Isn't this better than watching TV, surfing the Internet, or worrying at home.

Does this interest you?

Would you want to read letters written by others?

Are you willing to share excerpts of the letters you have written?

Usually I suggest that people buy nice writing paper, but during the time of the Coronavirus, emails and FaceTime are best. If you do want to handwrite and mail a letter, then please ask your recipient to leave the letter untouched for at least 72 hours. If your recipient is elderly or at grave risk for a fatal response to the virus, then please read the letter via FaceTime and then send an email. For a personal touch, you may scan or photograph your handwritten letter and email that. A physical letter can wait until after this crisis is over.

Authentic love is the root of inner peace and a greater capacity for joy. Authentic love, as opposed to egotistical or narcissistic cathexis, is not defensive, demanding, or entitled. Authentic love is able to be expressed freely, even though you may feel vulnerable. An authentic love letter can heal and deepen our connections even while we are practicing social distancing.

E. Hitchcock Scott, PhD, LPCC917

This series of exercises help participants write a love letter, whether it is to the self or another. These letters are very intentional, specific and personal. Even if you think you cannot write, the result will be much more than a store-bought card.

QUOTES FROM PREVIOUS WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS: "I never knew I could write like this", "I have told my wife how much I loved her over and over, but this letter reached deep and touched her heart", "My son said, 'Dad I didn't know you were that deep'", "My best friend was dying, she knew I was not religious but she asked me to pray for her, I didn't know what to say and I wanted to honor her request, I opened my mouth and God's words came out", "I was only seven and I felt lonely in the desert, I missed my mother, the sun was rising over the pyramids, but I wasn't alone, I felt the beauty of the land"; "The LOVE LETTER WORKSHOP changed my life! I wrote this 3 1/2 years ago in Malibu with you Ericha..... I was in the darkest place I have ever been. Mourning a loss. You gave me the courage to have a voice (to express my love). Thank you.....!"

OUTLINE: There will be step by step directions for each section of the writing exercise. The first step will be to select your letter recipient (generally this is the first person who comes to mind). Your final letter may include all or only a few of these steps, 1) select your recipient. 2) scribble drawing, 3) list making, 4) select a shared event that is vivid for you, 5) a modified version of Freud's process of free association via journal writing techniques, 6) followed by writing a Haiku poem, 7) and then the love letter.

These directives sound much more difficult than they are in real life. You do not have to write well for this to work.

LETTER WRITING GOAL: To deepen your connection to yourself and those you love via contemplative writing.

Your love does not have to be uncomplicated for this to work - but - no criticisms are allowed.

NOTE: These exercises (and the goals and directives) are deceptively simple and yet profound. YET, it is very important that you do not skip even one step.

I designed this process for people who think they cannot write.

Again, this step by step process might seem a bit complicated but if you take it one step at a time, please do not skip a step, you might be very surprised at the beauty of your letter.

1) SELECT A RECIPIENT - I invite you to select a person to be a love letter recipient. If you have doubts please ask a mentor, teacher or friend if a love letter would be appropriate. For example, it might NOT be appropriate to write a love letter to a colleague at your place of employment, or to your spouse during divorce proceedings.

While these letters are able to help bring people closer together, it is best not to select someone when there is a current and ongoing deep relational conflict. For example if someone is very angry with you, they may not receive the letter well. They might perceive a love letter as a form of manipulation.

ALTHOUGH - I have asked you to carefully select a recipient - if you are stuck - sometimes the best recipient is the first person who came to mind.

You may decide to write a love letter to yourself - as you are today - or to yourself at a younger age. You may write one to your children, life partner, parents, or other family members - even those who have already passed away.

I hope you will write more than one love letter. While quarantined, how about making it a daily, weekly or monthly practice?

Once you have selected your letter recipient, please find a quiet and safe place to scribble and write.

2) SCRIBBLE ART: I invite you to practice a scribble drawing (which is exactly what it sounds like), you may use any form of crayons, ink pens, pencils or paint. If you have no paints, consider making a magazine collage, a sculpture with found objects, or a blind contour self-portrait (please see my web page for the directions for self-portraits). All you have to do is think about the person and your love for them while you scribble, draw or sculpt. There is no need to make anything look like anything, abstracts are great. The playfulness of a scribble drawing is able to help you relax. You may include the drawing or not, as the cover for your letter or handmade card.

3) LIST OF POSITIVE TRAITS - I invite you to write a list of positive traits for your letter recipient. These positive traits may be about their talents, emotional presence, spirituality, intellect, creativity, competence, skills, ability to have fun, humor, physical appearance, and/or kind ways of being. You may think of another category to add to this list. Please do not be shy - write as many as possible and write them down as fast as possible. It is very important to be very specific. Rather than writing down, "Your eyes", please add descriptive details such as, "Your sky blue eyes that sparkle when you are happy". These details make your letter very intimate and personal. Some traits might be obvious and others more subtle. It does not matter, these are your perceptions.

4) SELECT A SHARED EVENT - I invite you to select an actual shared event that best represents the love you have felt and want to express. Select a past shared experience that is vivid with imagery, and/or sound, and/or sensory memories. Again, it is likely that this is the first event that comes to your mind. What is important is that the event is meaningful, vivid and detailed.

This will be a time when you felt affection or love for this person and maybe also, a time when you felt loved back by this same person. After 25 years of marriage one person selected a seemingly small moment on a park bench and she described the soft breezes that she felt as they talked about their future together. This brief moment brought the letter recipient to tears as she read the letter to him. The details of her memories made the letter and her love feel more real.

5) FREE ASSOCIATION JOURNAL WRITING - I invite you to write this event down in with all of the tiny details you can remember seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting or touching. Please write as quickly as possible. This is a modified version of Freud's free association process of remembering. It is also referred to as stream of consciousness journal writing.

Do not worry about spelling, punctuation or handwriting quality. Writing quickly on unlined paper will help you bypass your frontal lobe filters. It will help quiet the critical voice. Again, please describe what was said or heard,

what was seen, what was thought, felt or sensed about the event. In other words try to write down any and all of the tiny details and the five senses.

Please WRITE: about the emotional, intellectual, physical, energetic and/or spiritual dimensions. To deepen your experience you may write all of this in the present tense, then adjust later for the actual love letter.

6) HAIKU POEM - I invite you to write a Haiku poem about that event you just described. Haiku poetry is not about rhyming - but instead - cadence - and so the words and syllables are counted. Haiku poetry is about an actual event and there is always a reference to nature. The nature referenced might have been true to your experience and therefore literal or it might be a symbol - such as spring time as a symbol of new love. BUT be specific - instead of the word "springtime" - write - for example, "new buds on the pear tree".

Haiku Poems are three short lines. The first line is only five syllables, the second line is seven syllables, and the third line is only five syllables again.

THE FIRST HAIKU POET - BASHO:

1662-1672 1662-1672

The old lady cherry The first snow
Is blossoming, a remembrance Daffodil leaves bend
Of years ago. Under the weight.

7) LOVE LETTER - I invite you to write the love letter. The love letter is much easier to write now because the scribble drawing, list making, journal and poetry writing are your building blocks. You may use each building block inside of your letter or pick and select various portions - such as - the whole Haiku poem or just various lines or sentiments from the poem.

8) INTRODUCTORY LINES: Many people start with introductory lines such as, 1) I have wanted to write you a love letter for a long time now but I did not know how,

2) DEAR _____ - you are beloved to me and since our lives are so busy, I wanted to take the time and tell you how much I love you in writing.

If you are stuck - keep writing even if it does not sound good yet.... A crude love letter is often much better than NO love letter.

Please read your letter to one objective friend or mentor before reading it on FaceTime to your recipient. Seriously consider their advice. Once a letter sounded as if it was too much about the author and less about the recipient - all that letter needed was a bit of editing regarding pronouns.

To date, I have never heard of a person having a negative response to these love letters. In fact, usually it is the opposite, one man kept his letter in his glove box to read while stopped at a traffic light.

Please do not expect anything in return from your letter because that is a set up for disappointment. There are times when people do not know how to respond to this type of expression, and they feel overwhelmed or frozen. If there is a negative response it might be more about hidden rules in their dysfunctional family or origin.

Please allow a person time to process and make sense of the love letter. If your recipient has a history of childhood trauma, they may struggle for a while before accepting the letter as authentic. This is their process. Please let them have it.

Due to the Coronavirus, I recommend reading the letter to your recipient face to face on the Internet. It is best to read the letter out loud in person before emailing it. Reading the letter deepens the experience of love and connection. It is meaningful for people to be able to watch your facial expressions, observe your body language,

listen to the tone of your voice and inflection, and observe your emotions as you read the letter. This helps make it more real.

Reading the letter face to face via the internet is also helpful in case there is anything in your letter that has been misunderstood, then you can correct the misunderstanding quickly in person.

This is not the letter to use as a vehicle to slip in a criticism, confrontation, or suggested behavioral changes - that is another letter for another time.

If you cannot refrain from criticism, then this might not be the right time for this love letter.

This process of letter writing might seem cumbersome, but if you follow these directions and do not skip any steps, I will NOT be very surprised if you are pleased with the results.

It is my wish that these letters will help bring more love into the world during this time of global heart ache.

PLEASE WATCH AND SHARE THE VIDEO!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M4ncPSSpZNY>

The video is only 12 minutes long and it helps clarify the steps.

MOST IMPORTANTLY - please help me start a global love letter writing campaign.

I know this sounds a bit grandiose, but why not now? If that sounds like a good idea to you, please post this video all of your social media accounts.

This video is free for all peoples of all nations!

MOBILE: 310-880-9761 - for a free ten minute consult, once you have written your letter.