

Pen



ADELE STARR

“After a while, we stopped,” Gary says. “Then in 1990, we went on another Marriage Encounter weekend, and we’ve written each other a letter every day since.”

To keep their writing fresh and relevant, the Morrises, who married in 1971 and have two grown children, often identify writing topics of the day.

“We may decide to discuss what’s on our ‘bucket list,’ or how we feel about each other, or even discuss harder topics like money or God,” says Lisa, 58, a retired nurse. “It allows us to talk about things that we would never ordinarily talk about. It’s a safe way to communicate, and the whole purpose of the love letters is that it’s a gift of love.”

The practice has deepened their marriage.

“I don’t know how you can tell someone you love them in a richer way than to say, ‘You’re worth my time, and this is what’s inside of me, and it’s a gift to you,’” Lisa says.

Gary agrees. “I’ve read about how precious I am to my wife in her own handwriting and been told that she loves me every day since 1990,” he says. “It’s hard not to take it seriously after 8,000 days in a row.”

Between friends

Although they haven’t lived in the same town in nearly three decades, Barbara Birkeland and Eleanor Jean Beck know about each other’s daily lives better than next-door neighbors. That’s because every day for the last 28 years, the pen pals have written a letter to each other.

“Eleanor Jean has received letters of joy

and sorrow, frustration and celebration, anger and incredible good fortune from me; and in return, I have anticipated every letter from her, whatever the mood or daily grind,” says Birkeland, 68, of Cloquet, Minn. (pop. 12,124), about her friend Beck, 68, who lives in Maryville, Tenn. (pop. 27,465).



// Barbara Birkeland and Eleanor Jean Beck have remained faithful pen pals since 1984.

The correspondence began in 1984 after a job change forced Birkeland’s family to leave Byron, Minn. (pop. 4,914), where both women lived at the time. The separation initially was difficult for the friends, who first met in 1975 when their children were young. However, their daily letters kept them connected, and over time became therapeutic.

“It feels so wonderful to share things with her,” Beck says. “There’s a feeling of unloading a burden. If you’re having a bad

day, you can get it out in the letter.”

The pen pals keep every correspondence, which can range from a quick postcard to a 10-page letter. One day, they plan to pass on their letters to their children.

“In spite of the fact that our husbands have frequently suggested a shredder as a fitting gift,” Birkeland quips, “we continue to treasure the trove of handwritten letters which, in this day and age, are quickly becoming a thing of the past.”

“Who knows?” Beck adds. “Maybe we’ll even turn our letters into a book and call it ‘Between Friends.’”

Dear diary

Eleanor Erickson’s love of journaling blossomed in 1982 while attending summer camp following her eighth-grade school year.

She opened her Mead marble composition book and began filling the pages with the angst of a 13-year-old girl. “A kid had been kicked out of camp, and I turned to paper and pen to capture what I was feeling,” she recalls.

The entry was to be the first of thousands that she wrote sporadically over the years until 2001, when she began the practice of journaling every day. Now 41 and working as a hotel manager in Southport, N.C. (pop. 2,833), Erickson keeps her old composition books on a shelf in her bedroom and instead chronicles her daily life in a leather-bound journal.

“My journal has become a safe place where I can go and work through stuff,” she says. “I don’t worry about grammar or

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