

The elusive thank you note

Grace a friend or impress the boss: tips on written words of gratitude

By WENDY BEST

As a species, thank you notes are vanishing off our planet. That is too bad. When I was young, we used to call these short notes our “bread and butter letters” — the idea being that if you have enjoyed a nice dinner or an extended visit at someone’s country estate, you must write your hostess a letter of appreciation to secure the possibility of being invited back.

Youngsters might call these courtesy letters “Legoset letters,” or “Barbie Doll letters.” Grownups usually call them “thank you notes” if they write them at all. Fewer and fewer adult and supposedly mature people do. In any case, the function of these short and classy epistles could be made crystal clear by calling them “Impress the boss letters,” or “Secure future business and/or social contacts letters,” or simply “Make an old lady happy let-

ters” (their most common use).

Certain situations absolutely require thank you notes. Gifts are the most obvious. I had an aunt who kept sending nice presents to her nieces and nephews. One family of kids never sent thank you notes. She finally stopped sending them gifts. I don’t really blame her.

Thank you notes for gifts can be very short, and need take no longer than five minutes to write, put into an envelope, address, stamp, and mail. Here is an example of a perfect thank you note for a gift:

Dear (gift giver),

Thank you for the (beautiful, stunning, useful, unusual) thing (name the thing specifically).

I will (use, enjoy, cherish, appreciate) it, and I will think of you every time I do so.

I hope you are well, and looking forward to (the upcoming year, Easter, the coming months, summer, winter, etc.).

Thanks again for the thing (name it again).

(Love, affectionately, respectfully, fondly, Cheers!)

(Your name)

Incidentally, you should write a note even if you received the gift in the pres-

ence of the gift-giver. This is especially true of birthday, holiday, graduation, and wedding presents. A verbal thank you, no matter how gushing, does not do the job adequately.

Be sure to say something pleasant about the gift, even if you hated it and found it in the worst possible taste. Do not do as I did when I was a child and wrote, “Dear Auntie, Thank you for the dancing princess. Granny sent me one just like it, so it didn’t matter when Harry (my brother) broke the one you sent.” Needless to say, I was not allowed by my mother to send that particular note.

An overnight stay at someone’s home absolutely needs to be followed by a thank you note. As soon as you get home, sit down and write:

Dear Hostess and, if appropriate, you should include your host,

I (we) had such a wonderful time this past weekend at your lovely (home, cottage, apartment, beach house ski lodge, etc.). The countryside is beautiful there, or (alternatively) Seattle, (Boston, Timbuktu) is a terrific city to spend time in and especially in the company of (thoughtful people, dear friends, valued family members, old

friends) like you (yourself).

If you are ever out our (my) way be sure to look us (me) up. If you actually hated the hosts and had a miserable time, you can leave out that sentence. Instead, say something like “We rarely travel or entertain, which made our visit with you all the more memorable.”

Thank you again for sharing your home with us.

(Sincerely, Love, Affectionately, etc.)

(your name)

Before you even ask, an e-mail or a phone call do not count. You need to send these little notes on proper note paper either through the mail or hand-delivered.

And now we get to the “it would be nice” notes. Obviously, it would be silly for people to start banging notes back and forth when they stop by casually for coffee or a sandwich. A thank you note is never wrong, but we have to be realistic here.

However, if you go to someone’s house for a delicious home-cooked dinner, where the hostess or host have obviously gone to a lot of trouble and/or expense, a note is in order if you feel grateful. This is particularly true if the hostess is an el-

derly person. For some reason, elderly people like thank you notes and often treasure them. I should know, because I am fast approaching old age myself.

Dear Hostess (or host, or both),

Thanks so much for the wonderful evening and dinner I (we) enjoyed last Tuesday. It’s always a pleasure to get together with friends, and we do appreciate your thoughtfulness in inviting us. Hope to see you again soon.

(Sincerely, love, affectionately, etc.)

(Your name)

If you actually had a rotten, boring time, don’t send a note at all. Just let it pass and, with luck, you may never be invited again. If you do get invited again, you can always fall back on the flu, back pain, or prior commitments. But never be overtly rude.

Another occasion which might rate a note would be one in which another person did you a really important favor. Recently, our car broke down on a broiling summer day in a nearby city. The owner of the local liquor store, of all places, took us home along with our two very large dogs and some

nursery stock. She let us use her phone to call AAA, and she was entirely gracious throughout. The very next day I dashed off a three-line note to her, and we stop to say hello every time we pass by her store. What booze we buy, we buy there. It’s only fair.

The other day an elderly neighbor’s sink overflowed and she called me in a panic to help her clean up the mess. There was water everywhere and she had heart trouble. Naturally, I went over right away and a couple of days later she slipped a little thank you card into our mailbox. It meant a lot to me.

So there. Please, please, for the sake of future civilization, write thank you notes. Otherwise, our entire society might crumble down into a shapeless mass of barbarism. You wouldn’t want that to happen, now, would you? Just because you couldn’t take five minutes to make an old lady happy?

Wendy Best is a writer living in Parkdale. Hood River News will be sending her a thank you note.

CUBA

Continued from Page B1

U.S. credit and debit cards will also be allowed in Cuba.

But back in 1997, Van Valkenburgh and his buddies knew that the Cubans had a special affinity for American \$2 bills, so they got \$600 worth of the bills and spent them all.

Cuba has the same latitude as Hawaii, Van Valkenburgh said, and the island was memorable for its music, friendly residents and delicious food, though it was a bit heavy on two island staples: black beans and rice.

“There’s a lot of Chinese, Canadians, Europeans there, and because of our embargo, there aren’t many Americans, which is a stupid decision,” he said. The distance to the island from Florida is not much farther than “the distance between here and Portland.”

While American commercial tourist travel to Cuba has long been banned — and still is, even under Obama’s looser regulations — it appears that travel there by private boat has been another thing entirely.

“We reported to the Coast Guard before we left and did it by telephone,” Van Valken-

burgh said of their departure from Key West. “And they said, ‘Well, you’re not taking anything illegal?’ And we said, ‘No,’ and they said, ‘Report back when you come in.’”

They did, but it was late on a Friday night and nobody answered the phone, so they just left a message.

After an eight-hour boat ride, Van Valkenburgh’s boat sailed into Havana and the Hemingway Marina, “which is a beautiful marina with condos around it, swimming pools, and is very attractive,” he said.

“When we got close we radioed for permission to come in and they gave us direction where to come in and berth the boat and we were met by a small group of musicians and a boy who offered to wash the saltwater off the sides of the boat.”

Two government officials came on board and checked their papers — all they needed to enter the country was their driver’s license — “and they sent a diver underneath the boat to make sure we weren’t sneaking something in.”

A man arrived and offered to take them on a tour.

They went by the area where Fidel Castro lived, and spent a full day at the Hemingway Museum, which is the former home of the great

American writer, Ernest Hemingway.

They learned that Hemingway put on an annual fishing contest, and Castro won it a couple times. Also, during World War II, at the behest of the British secret service, Hemingway went to the Caribbean to look for submarines.

Prior to the revolution, Cuba was a hotspot for the rich and famous — and the mafia, Van Valkenburgh said.

They saw former casinos and brothels that were shut down by Castro. The story in Cuba was that those decadent, sinful places were run by President Kennedy and his father, Van Valkenburgh said.

While America embargoed Cuba two years after Castro took over and it became communist, prior to that the U.S. had backed the dictator Fulgencio Batista, “a crooked snake,” Van Valkenburgh said, who brutally controlled the country with death squads.

Batista was overthrown in early 1959 and Fidel Castro took over. Castro’s brother, Raul, is in power today.

Van Valkenburgh and his buddies spent a week and a half on the island and had a great time. “People were very friendly. They all seemed to have relatives in



Contributed photo

A GROUP OF MUSICIANS greeted The Dalles attorney M.D. Van Valkenburgh and friends upon their arrival at the Hemingway Marina in Cuba.

Miami,” he said. A few asked them to forward letters to relatives, and they did.

Nobody had cell phones, since they were banned, and long distance calls could

only be made with permission, he said.

While Cuba is famous for its cigars — visitors can now bring home \$400 of items from Cuba, but no more than \$100 worth of tobacco

products — Van Valkenburgh didn’t buy any. He didn’t buy any rum either, another favorite.

Rather, he said, he just went “for the experience.”



Photo by Rick Swart/ODFW

CHARLES BAKER, a hatchery technician at ODFW’s Sandy hatchery, puts a Coho salmon into an ice-filled tote destined for the Oregon Food Bank.

Banner runs of Pacific salmon helped feed thousands of Oregonians in 2014

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife hatcheries donated more than 350,000 pounds of Chinook and Coho salmon to food banks in communities across the state.

The huge donation of high quality protein was made possible by one of the largest returns of Pacific salmon in years. A record 1.2 million Chinook and 1 million Coho returned to the Columbia River in 2014. Similar returns are expected again in 2015.

“The unprecedented returns salmon to our region the past two years have benefited fishermen, the economy, and helped feed thousands of people who might

otherwise have gone hungry,” said Chris Kern, deputy administrator of ODFW’s fish division.

The vast majority of salmon donated to Oregon’s food banks are collected after ODFW hatcheries gather enough eggs to produce the following year’s crop of juvenile salmon. Once the young salmon are reared at the hatcheries and then released, a small percentage of them will return to the hatcheries as adults after spending three or four years maturing in the ocean.

“We’re proud that our hatcheries have such positive impact on the lives of Oregonians,” said Manny

Farinas, ODFW West Region hatchery coordinator. “Thanks to all of our great volunteers that helped collect, process, and deliver the fish to the various food banks.”

If forecasts materialize as hoped, 2015 could be another outstanding year for salmon returns. Preliminary data compiled in December by fishery managers from Oregon and Washington suggests Chinook returns will be even larger than 2014 while Coho returns could be mixed.

“All the indicators are pointing to another good year of salmon returns,” Kern said.

Pass The Word!
Shop Locally
And Keep
The Gorge
Working!

**BUY LOCALLY.
PRINT LOCALLY.**

Commercial printing
at an affordable price.

CALL TODAY FOR
A FREE ESTIMATE!

sales@columbiagorgepress.com [541.386.1234]

**HOOD RIVER VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL
SPRING SPORTS 2014**

FOOTBALL	BASKETBALL	BASEBALL	SOFTBALL
<p>1. Hood River Valley High School</p> <p>2. ...</p>	<p>1. Hood River Valley High School</p> <p>2. ...</p>	<p>1. Hood River Valley High School</p> <p>2. ...</p>	<p>1. Hood River Valley High School</p> <p>2. ...</p>

COLUMBIA RIVERKEEPER

ELEMENTS

SCIENCE

Columbia Gorge Press