

Ashley Davis : A Life Through Letters
a review by: Ellen Gurley



On National Letter Writing Day (December 7th 2016), I attended Ashley Davis' book signing for *A Life Through Letters*. After having sat on a stack of letters his father had written for more than twenty years, Davis has recently dedicated an entire book to explaining them. Essentially and ultimately, I think we all wish that we had said something to someone before death comes in. Robert Gray Davis was a father to three boys and a pastor to hundreds of people in his years on this earth. With a shaking hand, he wrote letters to many people, wanting to tell them how they affected him or what he regretted not telling them. It's beautiful and not many of us are afforded this luxury.

Davis was lucky enough to be able to read these words and ultimately share them with us. His father penned letters to past colleagues, to a building, to his sons, to a pill, and even to strangers. He wrote to a man whose name he never knew. When Pastor Davis was a child, he remembered a man that a neighbor would wheel out into the sun daily. The man never moved. He just laid there. His name becomes "Stone Man" in this letter and it is very telling. Pastor Davis regretted never asking his name or how he came to be "Stone". I wonder how random my letters would be. In fact, so does Davis. He not only urges us to purchase and read this book but he wants us all to join the "Writing Revolution". I, for one, would love to see people putting actual pen to actual paper again. Davis is urging us all to write just one letter. If you cannot remember how to do that, that's okay, he is kind enough to have sent us some letter writing tips. He truly believes that "connecting with others through writing has the power to create a huge a lasting impact on others". My City Magazine agrees.

THE Art OF Letter Writing



THE PURPOSE — of a — FRIENDLY LETTER

There is no better way to communicate in an authentic manner than with a friendly letter. It could say I love you, I miss you, I wish you well, or all of the above. It could also relate your thoughts, feelings, or day-to-day events. Friendly letters are generally personal and can be either handwritten or printed.



LETTER-WRITING PROMPTS

To whom could you write today?

- high school teacher • college roommate
- childhood friend • mentor • coworker
- family member • neighbor
- children • partner



THE ELEMENTS — of a — FRIENDLY LETTER



The friendly letter is typically less formal than a business letter.

You generally want to start the first paragraph with an **INTRODUCTION**. This gives the reader an idea of why you're writing to them. If you don't know the person very well, you can reintroduce yourself or remind them of how you met.

Following your introduction, your next few paragraphs consist of the **DETAILS** you want to share — why you're reaching out, what is on your mind, etc.

The last paragraph is **REPEAT AND WRAP UP**. You'll want to sum up the main context of your letter, thank the recipient, wish them well, and let them know how to contact you.

While the above gives you some guidance, this is an informal, friendly letter, so have fun! The most important part of any friendly letter is to come across as . . . well, friendly!



TIPS — on — EFFECTIVE LETTER WRITING

- Keep the recipient in mind, and write in a way that he/she can easily understand the letter.
- Proofread your letter after writing it — check for spelling, context, sentence structure, grammar, etc.
- Do not use abbreviations. This makes you look rushed and not as thoughtful as you want to be.
- If you make any revisions, proofread your letter again.
- Incorporate humor into your letter, when appropriate. Everyone loves a good laugh!
- Use personal anecdotes and stories to connect with your recipient.
- Oh yeah, did I mention to proofread?

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