



PRACTICAL WAYS TO CREATE MEANING

## The Gratitude Letter as a Gift

*Not the same as a “thank you note,” Gratitude Letters give you an opportunity to examine the pleasure and meaning you get from a relationship, and share that with a significant person in your life. Consider writing one or two gratitude letters each month. It’s not only a gift to the recipient...it’s a gift to yourself to mull over the good things in the relationship.*

### Who to write:

Lovers ▪ Family members ▪ Dear friends

### Things to think about as you write your Gratitude Letter

- Thoughtfully examine the meaning and pleasure you get from this relationship.
- Think about one or more experiences you’ve shared with this person, and describe how they made the events fun, funny, tolerable, memorable, etc.
- Describe shared dreams.
- Focus on happy aspects of your relationship.
- Share your recollection of how this person impacted your life.

### Mail or Hand-Deliver

Consider hand-delivering your letter. It could be one of the most meaningful events of your year, and/or could help you deepen a relationship.

**Below is a sample letter.** This was written by a 51-year-old to a 91-year-old.

Dear Roy—

It feels I’ve known you all of my life. You were an “institution” at the church I grew up in, and I have great memories of our families getting together in the summer for watermelon or homemade ice cream. We always combined that with softball or kickball games...and I remember you always talked to me and had this great smile.

When my father died, you became the closest thing to a father to me. I felt like you watched out for me, sharing that great smile when I saw you, and always talking with me for a few minutes at church and community events. You seemed to always make time to give me a little attention. I suspect you knew I needed that, growing up with six siblings and a mom who was plenty busy just trying to make ends meet and get food on the table for us.

As an adult, I recall asking if you and Mary might share a room with me, since we all planned to attend the church conference. I also asked if we could carpool to the conference together. I wasn’t sure how that would go, but I had a wonderful time rooming with the two of you, and helping you celebrate your 85<sup>th</sup> birthday while we were there. All that car time gave us plenty of opportunities to talk to each other as

adults. And, after all of the conference activities were over each night, you both kept me up quite a long while, and I was always smiling at your stories.

You continue to support me and my family. What I appreciate most is how utterly comfortable my family and I feel in your home. I've left there many a night with warmth in my heart because my family and I just spent time with two people whom I love and feel are part of my own family. I find great comfort in knowing that you both love me.

I respect you and Mary a great deal. As I've said many times to you, you both are mentally sharp as tacks... sharper than me at my young age! That can make me mad (not too mad, though). I seek your opinions about church-related matters and your wisdom (well, at least Mary's) about life in general.

What I treasure most is the warmth in your heart when we are together. I feel a connection with you and Mary that's rare and rich. Your smile and presence are a large part of that.

Thank you for inviting and encouraging me into your life, Roy.

With much love,

Nancy

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This exercise was written by Susan Salterberg, University of Northern Iowa Center for Energy & Environmental Education. This project is made possible thanks to funding support from the REAP Conservation Education Program and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Solid Waste Alternatives Program. Find more at [ReclaimYourHolidays.org](http://ReclaimYourHolidays.org).