

Tips on writing a Christmas form letter (22, 12, 12)

© by Mike Keenan

Ah yes, that time of year when we realize that our Christmas cards will definitely arrive late, because, in my case that is, I have yet to take pen in hand to write them. I could try to rationalize a tad in that it is the time of year when we should be able to forgive others for their failings, one of which involves Christmas cards. I mean, really, in this modern era of instant communication, can't we simply text each other a merry Christmas, or what about a simple email?

No, I guess not. Well, I suppose it's getting easier in that my long list has greatly diminished over the years. When Miriam and I were first married, the list was quite lengthy, and involved a small fortune in stamps and cards. Now, the list is quite manageable thanks to the diminution of friends and loved ones.

Nonetheless, I always try to get away with a form letter, folded inside each card thereby allowing me minimal writing as in a simple signature along with the ubiquitous "Best Wishes." When our children were growing up, this missive used to go on and on about how clever they were and how many awards they had won and how they were likely to soon be world famous in a variety of endeavours, all of which would reflect well on Miriam and me both for our terrific stewardship and their prized genetic inheritance.

Alas, the children are long gone, and strangely, they have not become world famous. This is not to discredit their achievements. They have remained out of jail, have not joined any separatist political party and for the most part, they have good friends, jobs and relatively happy lives.

I should mention that my form letters had to be passed by Miriam for approval, and so I learned firsthand what censorship was like for those poor writers living in lands ruled by dictators. Not to suggest that Miriam is a dictator, but she would easily reduce my three-page letter to a few short paragraphs.

For those of you who are married to a spouse with lesser standards, I will now proceed to assist you with your form letter, if that is the route you wish to take. Remember, most of these people you rarely see, and the last time that you wrote to them was about the same time of year last December. So, you may as well provide them with a short note that outlines your incredible success in picking stocks, your ability to judge fine wines and your rising popularity in your community as evidenced by the fact that you have been awarded not one but two traffic tickets in the past 12 months.

Any good writer knows that the first step is to attract the reader's attention. Do not start out: "Sex, sex and more sex!" This might be the way that movie clips start along with: "Violence, violence and more violence", but it's not the way to go. Also, do not start off with: "Warm holiday wishes" or "All the best for 2013." This attracts a level of enthusiasm akin to an ad by a funeral parlour. By the way, why do funeral homes call it a parlour? A parlour is a room in a house where you entertain people, not see them off to the great unknown.

Drifting again...let's get back to those warm letters. How to attract attention? Good marketing these days involves factoids so start with, "Did you know that scientists estimate that the average person will gain 7.5 pounds during the Christmas holidays due to uncontrolled eating and drinking to say nothing of those who suddenly perish by choking on cooking?" That will get their attention and cause them to wonder if they should abstain from Aunt Mary's dinner.

Once you have grabbed their attention, you may proceed to some boring items such as the number of teeth grown by grandchild number 15, named Abbott, no doubt after Abbott & Costello. From there, it's all downhill.

One more thing: warm wishes for the holiday season!

