



MY WRITING PAD AND PEN.

MAIL BY SNAIL

skim the first few lines. There is just too much information.

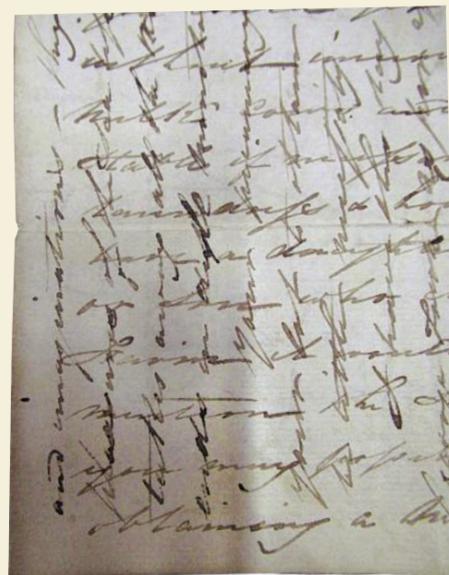
What prompted my little experiment was in fact an email. I'd completely misread it, ignored it until the sender prodded me with another one, and it had been an invitation. I also received an email from Merrie and Greg, and lost it in my in-box for two weeks before I found it and sat on it, not reading it in its entirety. Just too much information.

I figured that if I got a handwritten letter I would read it. I would cherish it, or at the very least I would cherish its stamp. The idea that there is something creative, something personal, waiting for me in my letter box is pretty enticing.

I think that I can actually tell you where I work now: I'm reference librarian for Pictures and Manuscripts at the National Library. What do I do most days? I look through boxes of correspondence, handwritten or typed letters, journals and ledgers.

These are accounts written by people who came to Australia to live in sometimes the harshest of conditions. Pioneers, soldiers, writers, all corresponding with family and friends about the bush, the battlefield or inspiration. These papers from the past describe a social history that for many of us is long forgotten.

If I manage to send letters backwards and forwards, even if only for a little while, then my experiment will have worked. Maybe in a few decades that correspondence will also be part of the annals of social history, and in turn amuse or amaze a researcher.



IN THE DAYS WHEN PAPER WAS PRECIOUS, IT WAS USED WITH MAXIMUM EFFICIENCY.

Did you know that according to a census figure I read somewhere online, Ainslie (where we used to live) has just about the same demographic as Braidwood. Hard to believe, and I can tell you that as a village, Ainslie is nothing compared to the community spirit so often displayed in our town. For example, Bruce at the post office was quite surprised when I told him that the mail in Ainslie was only delivered every other day. At least we have good postal service here. What do I care about the postal service? I only ever got junk mail from stores and politicians, and of course the ubiquitous wad of bills lurking at the back of the letterbox. I haven't received snail mail in about two years, and that was from a Braidwood friend. So I started an experiment on Facebook: let's see who would give me their mailing address, and I would answer with a handwritten missive and a real postage stamp. The response has been surprising.

Firstly because it was lower than I expected — perhaps people don't think I'll do it. Secondly because the respondents were not people I knew very well. So much more the challenge. I did receive a letter even before I took up my pen, and it came from, you guessed it, Braidwood. When I was a child I belonged to an organisation that arranged pen-pals world-wide. You might even be of the generation who, like me, joined it at school. I'm slack these days — I send neither birthday nor Christmas cards. I just don't get around to it. I don't get mail; I wonder why. In fact I don't even get real emails. I remember when the Internet first started and we excitedly joined up to Braidwood.net. When we listened to the funny noise the modem made when connecting, and waited for our mail to come down from the sky. In those days I used to get real email letters; now it's just junk newsletters, junk mail, spam and, if I'm lucky, the announcement that I've won the Lottery. I also get bills. So I barely



NICOLA FAIRFAX, PAUL DANN AND SANDRA VON SNEIDERN GET ALL COSY ON THE COUCH. WHIP IS NOT SO SURE ABOUT WHERE THIS IS ALL LEADING.

Death after life

Sandra von Sneidern and Paul Dann are getting on a bit. They spoke to BWD about life's exit strategies

BWD: The subject of this afternoon's discussion is mortality.

Sandra von Sneidern: Well Paul, you're not going to cark it, are you?

Paul Dann: Oh, not this afternoon.

BWD: That would be a scoop.

Sandra: Yeah.

BWD: Sandra, tell us your attitude towards people becoming terminally ill and not being able to choose the moment of their departure.

Sandra: I think it [the current law] is appalling. Some people might want to live as long as they can ... even if they're a vegetable. But for people like me for instance, once I've passed my use-by date, then as far as I'm concerned, what's the point? I intend to take my own life, or whatever is left by then.

BWD: Do you think the government's opposition to euthanasia is based mainly around morality or just simply based round the pragmatic

idea that it's actually very difficult to figure out a regime by which people could do that without misuse?

Sandra: Oh, for God's sake. No. I mean, [laughs] here I am, talking about God's sake, but it's just because Christians have got their hands around the government's throat and saying, "Don't you dare do anything about it, because we want to keep people alive as long as possible, regardless of whether they're mentally there or not because it's God's will that you die in your due time."

And now, of course, we've got many ways of keeping ourselves alive well past our due date and, as far as I'm concerned, I'm not going to do that. I'm going to make sure that I'm out of it, so I don't have to lie there and have people tending me. That would be just absolutely dreadful. We all have to clean it up. Other people would then have to clean it up — no, thank you very much.

Paul: I don't agree with you all the

way. Having just elected to go in to Narbethong for two weeks respite care makes me realise that if the end of life is like this, it's not so bad. It's nice being a recipient of a bit of care — having your meals cooked, your toenails clipped, your eyebrows brushed and having your dog looked after.

What worries me about terminating life for the convenience of others is that it might be motivated by those others; by your family wanting you out of the way, so they can get your money and your estate.

BWD: That's an interesting point that some of the people who are opposed to euthanasia raise. How do you protect the rights of a person who's indicated that they might be willing to go? If they then become unsound of mind, then that's it, because their relatives can say, "It says here on this bit of paper that she wanted to go, so we're sending her off."

Sandra: I think that's a bloody good idea. What's the point of her being there, or him being there, and being just a bloody vegetable? What's the point of it?