

# Going postal

Part of letter writing forgotten in modern era of electronic communications

... The days go by at their accustomed pace, leaving little time for the more pleasurable pursuits of life such as indulging in correspondence with friends. Even now I can do little more than to tell you again how much I enjoy your letters, and to urge you to write whenever you feel an impulse to do so."



**MEREDITH HIGHT**  
columnist

Portion of a letter from President Dwight Eisenhower to an old friend

In the 1950s, Eisenhower may have been president, but he found the time to write a letter to an old friend.

In the 1990s, e-mailing and phone calls have made communication much easier and much faster, replacing the most classic and meaningful form of communication—the handwritten letter. The convenience that satisfies the needs of today leaves tomorrow without a personalized record of the past.

Nothing so unveils a person's true character than a letter. This is most easily seen through the numerous historical figures who have revealed more about themselves through their personal letters than could ever be revealed through a biography.

Napoleon Bonaparte, a tyrannical general infamous for his attempted conquest of all of Europe, wrote over 100 letters in his life time. Many were to his beloved Josephine.

This excerpt comes from a letter written to her shortly before their wedding.

"Until then, mio dolce amor, a thousand kisses; but none in return, for they set my blood on fire." (As a few of this kind of lovesick gushing from a man whose viceroy was to be the greatest leader of all time humanity: "Yummy" him in a way that no book or movie could.)

Love letters, of course, are one of the most common kinds of letters written. If ever curious about the relationship one's parents had in their youth, or how one's grandparents felt about each other, the best way to find out is through their love letters.

Up in attics now are stacks of letters, yellowed with

time and tied with fraying ribbons, waiting to be read by future generations.

Unfortunately for this generation, correspondence often is carried out via electronic mail. This generation may have to save e-mails on a disk to hand over to the grandkids, a cold and impersonal keepsake. A printout of an e-mail just does not have the same effect as the arrival of a letter in the mail, and therefore, is not quite as cherished.

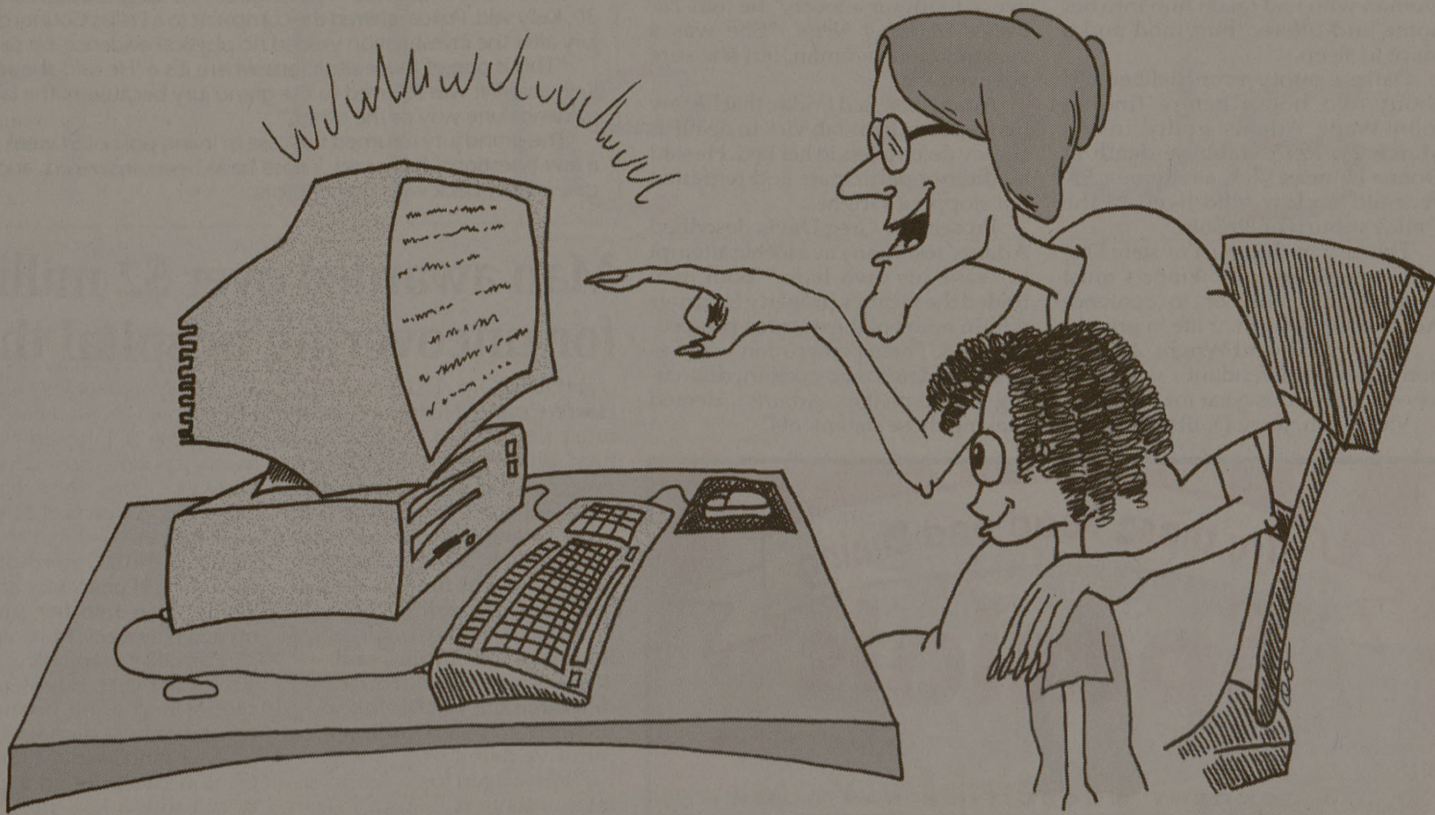
Also common are letters to soldiers, from soldiers or concerning soldiers during wartime. In a letter sure to be brought back to the forefront of American consciousness, due to its relevance in the recently released *Saving Private Ryan*, Abraham Lincoln extends his condolences to a woman who has lost all five of her sons in the Civil War.

"... I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.

Yours very sincerely and respectfully,  
Abraham Lincoln"

Whether the letter is from a president, or to a lover, it carries with it an insight to the writer's inner thoughts that can be adequately expressed only through the handwritten word.

One company, Lifelines, has recognized this unique form of expression, and turned it into a commercial enterprise. For \$10, Lifelines, intended for "the moments of your life" will create a letter to be sent to the meaningful people in one's life. The company as-

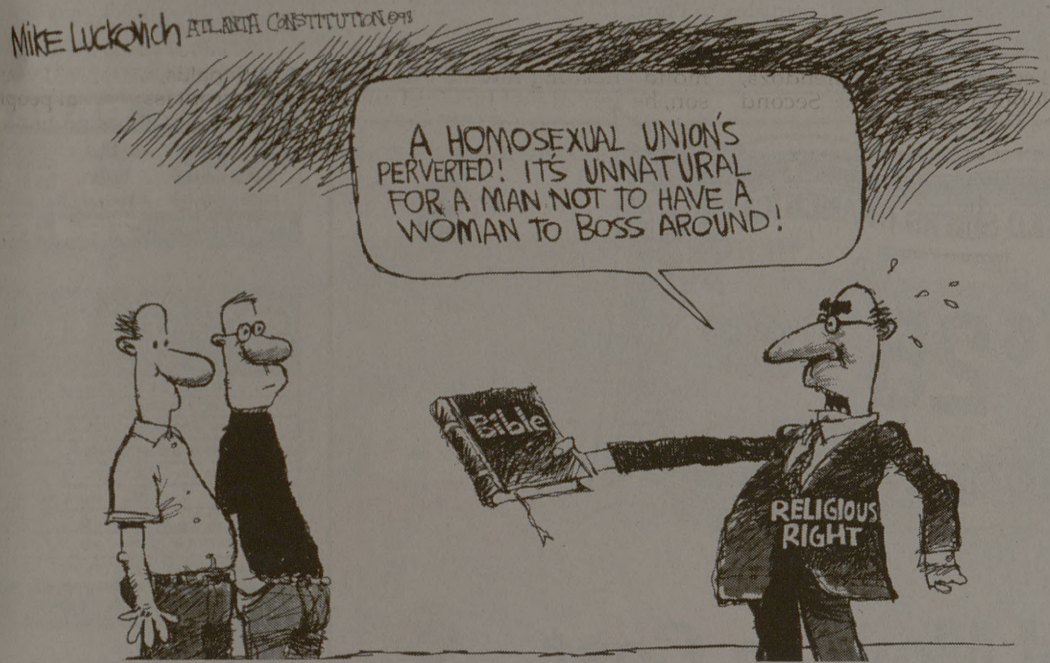


sures that its creations will be original, with just a little bit of personal information necessary in order to help in its composition.

That, of course, destroys the whole purpose of the letter. The handwritten letter is meant to show that the writer has taken the time to share his or her feelings, creating a personal keepsake to be treasured.

The handwritten letter is important because it conveys things e-mails and phone calls cannot. It would not hurt to follow the example of Eisenhower more than 40 years ago, and take the time to write a letter.

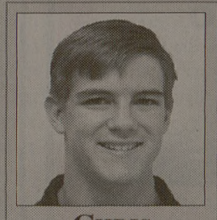
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## Dropping the bombs

### Houstonians protest incoming Navy shipments of Vietnam-era napalm

Some days, it seems Americans are just not happy unless they are protesting something. Protesting is a great thing — it keeps the government on its toes. But some protests are a little out of hand. The latest example of this concerns the napalm shipments coming into Houston.



**CHRIS HUFFINES**  
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The issue with these shipments is not so much that there are protests, but that the protests are being put on for inadequate reasons. These protests, which stem from lack of information more than anything else, should be stopped.

Napalm is jellied gasoline, the Devil's marmalade. Once ignited, napalm is just about impossible to put out. It's pretty nasty stuff.

For years, the U.S. Navy has had Vietnam-era napalm sitting in storage containers in California, just north of San Diego. Recently, the containers have begun to leak.

The Navy decided this posed an environmental hazard and put out a contract to recycle the napalm. GNI Group, Inc., in Deer Park, just outside of Houston, won the contract.

The Navy has begun shipping napalm in rail cars to GNI, and people have begun protesting.

There are two groups of protesters: those who have concerns with how the napalm is being shipped, and those who have concerns with how the napalm is being recycled.

The first group, those who are protesting shipping napalm to Houston via rail, have what appears to be a good position.

After all, Vietnam horror stories center around this chemical compound. And the U.S. Government is shipping it past schools, hospitals and neighborhoods. There is a case there.

However, according to Dr. Jerry Bradshaw, senior lecturer in chemical engineering at Texas A&M, napalm is much less dangerous to ship than gasoline.

Napalm, since it is jellied gasoline, is very difficult to ignite. Regular gasoline and many other chemical compounds that are shipped every day by rail are far more dangerous.

Also, the napalm is being shipped in double-

hulled tanker cars made of boiler-plate steel. These cars are so tough that at least one chemical company lines the perimeters of their plants to stop bullets. It would take a severe amount of force to rupture one of these containers.

Shipping the napalm via rail is not 100-percent safe, but nothing is. However, even if there were an accident, the worst that could happen is a very large fire that burned itself out once all the napalm torched itself. Little damage outside of the railroad's right-of-way would occur.

As to how the napalm is being recycled, the Navy is putting the napalm through a process to turn it into fuel for making concrete.

Those in the second group, the environmentalists, are concerned that there may be releases of dangerous chemicals into the environment, specifically the air. This is a valid concern.

Houston already is the second-most polluted area in the nation. Houston does not need to turn into East Los Angeles.

According to Bradshaw, the recycling process is no more likely to release dangerous chemicals than any other chemical plant on the gulf coast.

The Navy, which began this entire procedure with the intention of protecting the environment, is not going to go around polluting it. Pollution to prevent pollution does not make sense.

Also, Lt. Commander Pricilla Baird, a navy spokesperson, said the entire recycling process is in a closed environment, preventing releases.

The environmentalists' claims are valid, but they already have been anticipated and corrected.

The protesters are not protesting intelligently. What they are doing is the equivalent of students protesting lower fees.

Napalm is a high-profile substance. Many Americans have vivid images of what it is capable of when used as a weapon of war. Their concern is genuine and justified.

But protesting these shipments, where all the protesters' objections have already been corrected, is a fool's errand and should stop.

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## Social Security future bankrupt

Many college students and young adults, when pondering their future, are



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concerned with Social Security. Specific issues of Americans' national retirement system seem to be distant questions and concerns that young adults set aside in middle-age.

However, this summer and with the next year, legislators will focus on debating and improving the retirement system.

A result of the focus will most likely be abundant media attention toward young adults and their knowledge of Social Security. Hopefully, the attention will convince young Americans to have more concern for retirement and Social Security funds.

As a result of recent debate and discussion in Albuquerque on Social Security reform, young adults should actively participate, get involved in and become a part of present planning that will tremendously affect their futures.

On the morning of July 27, President Clinton along with Democratic and Republican congressmen, met in Albuquerque to discuss the current system and possible ideas for reform.

The forum, sponsored by the American Association of Retired Per-

sons and other groups hosted several proposals for reform.

With the explanation of these proposals, many lawmakers from different parties have conflicting ideas about doctoring the system.

Associated Press reports stated some lawmakers, most prominently Republicans, propose investing part of the Social Security trust fund in the stock market to increase its value.

Others favor giving individuals control over some or all of their Social Security payments, allowing them to invest in the private sector.

The debate is whether Americans should privately and individually invest their Social Security dollars or allow a group of legislators taking American's funds and bulk invest them.

Despite this disagreement in reform, Clinton urges Democrats to take the reins in fixing and improving the system.

"Our party, which created Social Security and created Medicare, has the responsibility to take the lead in a constructive reform of them," Clinton said at a Democratic Party retreat.

Which political party initiates reform is significant to the outcome, obviously, because different parties have different opinions for reform. However, the issue stands that there are several concerns for the future of young adults and Social Security that must be discussed.

A USA Today Gallup Poll reports that among those under 30, nearly four in 10 do not think that Social Security income will be there for them when they retire.

This survey result illustrates the

hopelessness in the clogged system.

Repair is essential to the welfare of the present generation of young adults and their children. When it becomes time for young adults to partake of their due benefits, they will have vanished.

"Under current law, young people will receive a negative rate of return from Social Security," Sen. Judd Gregg said.

The Associated Press also reports that America's current retirement program will not be able to fully benefit the 77 million baby boomers retiring in the near future.

If this is the situation of today's adults with the present system intact, the future presence of Social Security cash flow and benefits is a joke.

This is a well-known fact. Americans know that it is foolish, misty-eyed and overly idealistic to believe that the funds will reach and improve the state of retirement for young adults.

The July 27 USA Today special report states that while retired people remain a potent political force, many of them say it is not so much about their own checks, but those of their children and grandchildren.

This is why young adults should get involved to understand what will occur and how to contribute.

Individual understanding today will affect young adults tomorrow. Knowledge of Social Security is a significant part of an individual's positively planning for his or her future.

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