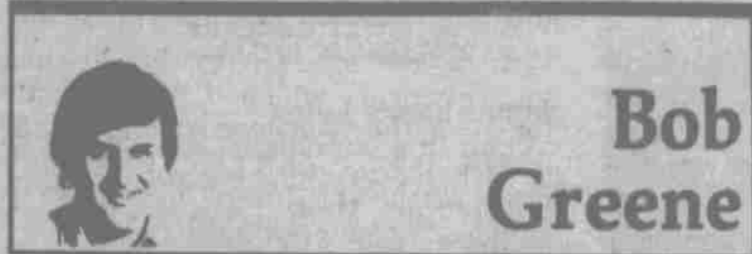


# Art of letter writing not dead...yet

Let's say, just for the sake of discussion, that you've recently moved. You're a little lonely in your new environment. The mail carrier arrives with a hand-written letter addressed to you. You open it. This is what it says:

*Dear Karen:  
All of us are miserable since you've moved. The kids keep complaining, "There's no one to play with," Fred misses carpooling with Cliff each day, and I fight back tears each time I see your empty house next door.*



**Bob Greene**

*After your letter, Fred and I came up with an idea — how 'bout both our families spending a week's vacation together this summer? There must be some lake or lodge halfway between South Dakota and Georgia where we could meet. July would be the best month for us, but we're pretty flexible all summer. Talk it over with Cliff and see what he thinks.*

*The winter weather is going to be a drag. The kids never tire of the snow, and Fred and I have gotten a lot of use out of our cross-country skis, but I'm longing for spring at this point.*

*Write soon!*

Now, chances are that you'd be very touched by that letter. You would imagine that your old neighbor had sat down, had reached deep into his or her soul and had searched for exactly the right words to tell you how much everyone missed you.

That's what you'd think, but you'd be wrong. If you got that letter, your old friend would have copied it from a book. The volume is called *The Complete Book of Effective Personal Letters*. It is published by Prentice-Hall, and it was written by a husband-wife freelance writing team named Robert and Elaine Tietz.

Mr. and Mrs. Tietz had a very clever idea. They realize, with some sadness, that we are well on our way to becoming a post-literate society. People don't read as much as they used to; they watch television. People don't write as much as they used to; they pick up the telephone.

But the personal letter is not quite dead, at least not yet. So Mr. and Mrs. Tietz asked themselves: What do most people do when they want to write a letter? Certainly they have the impulse to sit down and put something on paper. But they can no longer do it; writing a personal letter is a skill that disappeared from their lives many years ago.

Thus, the book. It contains more than 400 personal letters designed to fit virtually all occasions. Readers of the book are openly invited to plagiarize from it.

"That's the whole point," Robert Tietz said cheerily. "We want to make it as simple as possible for any person to write a letter. A person is free to copy our

letters word for word, changing only names and places so that they apply to his own situation. Or he is free to make as many changes as he wants, if he feels like being creative."

There is a comprehensive table of contents that guides the reader to the various letters. There are far, far too many to list here, but they include a letter to write when a neighbor's unwanted dog is on your lawn; when someone has been helpful during your hospitalization; when you stood someone up by missing a prearranged appointment; when you would like to arrange a conference with your child's principal; when a friend is getting a divorce; when you would like a job recommendation from a former employer; when you want to resign from your church board; when your favorite disc jockey gets fired and you want to complain; when you want the president of your child's Little League to remove an incompetent coach; when a magazine has billed you incorrectly.

"Let's face it," Tietz said. "Letter-writing is a dying art. For many, many people it's not such a simple thing to do. They'd like to do it, but when they lean over a piece of paper, nothing happens. So they pick up the telephone instead."

"I don't think that using the letters in our book is such a terrible thing to do. I don't consider it the same thing as a kid cheating on an exam, for example. My feeling is that if we can help get more people started writing letters again, then we've provided a service."

He said that a letter copied from his book is better than a greeting card. "The store-bought greeting card is better than nothing, but it's just not the same as a note someone has sat down and written in his or her own hand."

"I'll admit, this book wouldn't have been necessary 30 or 40 years ago. People back then took the time to

sit down and write personal letters. But these days, television has taught us that everything can be completed in an hour. When you see Quincy on television solve a complicated case in an hour, you don't think it's worth spending a whole hour just to sit down and write a letter expressing your feelings. With our book, you don't have to spend an hour thinking up what to say in your letter."

Tietz said that he hopes people all over America start copying letters from the book. And how will he feel if he receives a "personal" letter in the mail one of these days, opens it up and discovers that it's a letter that he wrote himself and included in the book?

"I'd be pleased as punch."

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