

Unsent notes

By Marty Coffin Evans

I have the belated guilts. Belated because I can never send them. Guilts because I didn't send them.

The "them" here pertains to thank you notes. More specifically, I'm thinking of my mother and wondering if I sent those thank-yous years ago. I'm remembering a conversation when she asked if she should send me a thank-you note. I responded "No" and yet, now, I'm wondering if that might have been her subtle way of suggesting I send one to her. I don't remember the object of thanks, just the question.

In sending graduation checks and cards along with birthday ones, I realize that this topic has become part of my current reality. Well, let's see. We've had family high school graduates ranging from Colorado to Kansas and Alabama. Wonder if we'll hear from anyone. What a nice surprise to hear first from Alabama, several months later from Kansas, and then Colorado. We hadn't seen the out-of-staters in a number of years. It was special to know our remembering meant something to all of them.

Then, there've been the birthday cards with checks. Almost immediately, after one daughter had received hers, we had a thank-you note in the mail. That's her style, which is also greatly appreciated.

While I'm gathering that a granddaughter appreciated her check and gift card, we've not heard anything. The same is true for the partner of another family member.

Back to sending cards and gifts along with the idea of receiving that thank-you note in return: Does it really matter to receive that thank-you note?

I remember another family member telling me years ago about their Uncle Lester sending him and his brother Bob presents. His brother never sent a thank you; he did. Uncle Lester finally stopped sending presents, believing they didn't matter enough for the nephews (at least one of them) to say thank you.

I know, there's something about being a cheerful giver. Maybe there's a counterpart in being a grateful receiver. Is sending thank-you notes generational? Cultural? A family expectation or tradition?

When it comes to scholarships and other collegiate support, it's really special to receive a thank-you acknowledging the value of the donation. What a delightful surprise when such a letter arrived from a recipient of a memorial graduate fellowship. This was

especially meaningful since those in advancement tell me they can't require students to send thank-you letters. Expressing gratitude will go a long way in their lives.

The same day the graduate student's letter arrived, so did a postcard. It was in acknowledgement and appreciation of our support for the recipient's sabbatical time.

While I can no longer send my thank-you notes to Mother, I can continue that practice of gratitude and appreciation. It does really matter — whether family, friend or stranger.

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