

Letters of Note was born in 2009 with the launch of lettersofnote.com, a website celebrating old-fashioned correspondence that has since been visited over 100 million times. The first Letters of Note volume was published in October 2013, followed later that year by the first Letters Live, an event at which world-class performers delivered remarkable letters to a live audience.

Since then, these two siblings have grown side by side, with Letters of Note becoming an international phenomenon, and Letters Live shows being staged at iconic venues around the world, from London's Royal Albert Hall to the theatre at the Ace Hotel in Los Angeles.

You can find out more at lettersofnote.com and letterslive.com. And now you can also listen to the audio editions of the new series of Letters of Note, read by an extraordinary cast drawn from the wealth of talent that regularly takes part in the acclaimed Letters Live shows.

The Letters

LETTER 01

NOTHING GOOD GETS AWAY

John Steinbeck to Thom Steinbeck

10 November 1958

*Born in California in 1902, John Steinbeck remains a giant in the world of fiction thanks to his classic novels *The Grapes of Wrath*, *East of Eden* and *Of Mice and Men*. Additionally, when he reached sixty, his standing was further cemented when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, an honour bestowed on so few. As was the case with most authors in the 1950s, Steinbeck was a keen letter writer who enjoyed the to and fro: he kept up correspondence with all manner of people, from fellow authors through to US presidents, with effortless style. In 1958, four years before the big award, Steinbeck wrote arguably his best, and certainly most valuable, letter, to his fourteen-year-old son. At the time, Thomas was at boarding school and had fallen for a girl. He needed some fatherly advice.*

THE LETTER

November 10, 1958

Dear Thom,

We had your letter this morning. I will answer it from my point of view and of course Elaine will from hers.

First—if you are in love—that's a good thing—that's about the best thing that can happen to anyone. Don't let anyone make it small or light to you.

Second—There are several kinds of love. One is a selfish, mean, grasping, egotistical thing which uses love for self-importance. This is the ugly and crippling kind. The other is an outpouring of everything good in you—of kindness and consideration and respect—not only the social respect of manners but the greater respect which is recognition of another person as unique and valuable. The first kind can make you sick and small and weak but the second can release in you strength, and courage and goodness and even wisdom you didn't know you had.

You say this is not puppy love. If you feel so deeply—of course it isn't puppy love.

But I don't think you were asking me what you feel. You know better than anyone. What you wanted me to help you with is what to do about it—and that I can tell you.

Glory in it for one thing and be very glad and grateful for it.

The object of love is the best and most beautiful. Try to live up to it.

If you love someone—there is no possible harm in saying so—only you must remember that some people are very shy and sometimes the saying must take that shyness into consideration.

Girls have a way of knowing or feeling what you feel, but they usually like to hear it also.

It sometimes happens that what you feel is not returned for one reason or another—but that does not make your feeling less valuable and good.

Lastly, I know your feeling because I have it and I'm glad you have it.

We will be glad to meet Susan. She will be very welcome. But Elaine will make all such arrangements because that is her province and she will be very glad to. She knows about love too and maybe she can give you more help than I can.

And don't worry about losing. If it is right, it

happens—The main thing is not to hurry. Nothing good gets away.

Love,

Fa

LETTER 02

I CANNOT DO LESS

Simone de Beauvoir to Nelson Algren

10 September 1950

French philosophers Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre spent much of their lives together, in a complex and extraordinary relationship that lasted for fifty-one years, until Sartre's death in 1980. Other partners came and went over the years, but in 1947 Simone met Nelson Algren, a novelist she found impossible to resist, despite the long distance between them, and with whom she would correspond for eighteen years. In 1950, on her return home from a loveless trip to Nelson's city of Chicago that clearly signalled the end of the affair she had so enjoyed, Simone wrote him a letter.

THE LETTER

Hotel Lincoln, New York

30 Septembre 1950

Nelson, my dearest sweetest one,
You had just left when a man came smiling and gave me this beautiful crazy flower, with the two little birds and the love from Nelson. that nearly spoilt my fine behaviour: it was hard to “weep no more.” Yet, I am better at dry sadness than at cold anger, for I remained dry eyed until now, as dry as smoked fish, but my heart is a kind of dirty soft custard inside. I waited for an hour and a half at the airport, because of the weather; the plane from Los Angeles had not been able to land in this fog. It was right that you went away; this last waiting is always too long, but it was good that you had come. Thanks for the flower and for coming, not to speak of the other things. So I waited with the purple flower on my breast, pretending to read the MacDonald mystery, and then we took off. The trip was very easy—no tossing at all. I did not sleep but pretended to read the mystery to the end, and kept fondling you in my dirty, silly heart.

New York was a beauty: hot, sunny, and grey at the same time. What a glamorous city! I did not

want to break my heart by going to the Brittany. I picked the Lincoln where I had landed three years ago, when I knew nobody in this whole continent and did not suspect I should be so strangely trapped in Chicago. I got exactly the same room I had, a little nearer the sky, but identical. How queer to find myself in this faraway past again! As I did three years ago, I went to Lincoln beauty shop: no trouble either, the hotel seems empty, the beauty shop empty. Then I bought the pen for Olga, which was fourteen, so I am glad you gave me so much dollars; I'll just make it. And I walked and walked in the town, along this Third Avenue, which we walked thoroughly down the last night, two years ago, all around the Brittany, too, and once more I found you everywhere and reminded everything. I wandered in Washington park where they have a kind of flea-market and bad painting sale; I went up the Fifth Avenue bus and saw the night come down on New York.

Now it is nine, I just had a little sandwich since the plane, no sleep since Wabansia; I am awfully tired. I came to my room to write to you and drink scotch. But I don't think I can go to bed now. I feel New York around me, behind me our summer. I'll go to bed now. I'll go down and walk and dream around, until I am utterly exhausted.

I am not sad. Rather stunned, very far away from myself, not really believing you are now so far, so far, you so near. I want to tell you only two things before leaving, and then I'll not speak about it any more, I promise. First, I hope so much, I want and need so much to see you again, some day. But, remember, please, I shall never more ask to see you—not from any pride since I have none with you, as you know, but our meeting will mean something only when you wish it. So, I'll wait. When you'll wish it, just tell. I shall not assume that you love me anew, not even that you have to sleep with me, and we have not to stay together such a long time—just as you feel, and when you feel. But know that I'll always long for your asking me. No, I cannot think that I shall not see you again. I have lost your love and it was (it is) painful, but shall not lose you. Anyhow, you gave me so much, Nelson, what you gave me meant so much, that you could never take it back. And then your tenderness and friendship were so precious to me that I can still feel warm and happy and harshly grateful when I look at you inside me. I do hope this tenderness and friendship will never, never desert me. As for me, it is baffling to say so and I feel ashamed, but it is the only true truth: I just love you as much as I did when I landed into your

disappointed arms, that means with my whole self and all my dirty heart; I cannot do less. But that will not bother you, honey, and don't make writing letters any kind of a duty, just write when you feel like it, knowing every time it will make me very happy.

Well, all words seem silly. You seem so near, so near, let me come near to you, too. And let me, as in the past times, let me be in my own heart forever.

Your own Simone