

The Letters

LETTER 01

YOU ARE AN INSPIRATION

Melissa Rivers to Joan Rivers

2013

On Sunday, 7 September 2014, crowds gathered outside Temple Emanu-El on New York's Fifth Avenue in order to pay their respects to the recently departed Joan Rivers. Born in Brooklyn in 1933 to Russian immigrant parents, Rivers was an outspoken comedian who had been a household name since the 1960s thanks to her numerous television projects. Many speeches were made in memory of Rivers that day, including one by her daughter, Melissa, whose spare room Rivers had stayed in sporadically over the years while filming in Los Angeles. To the delight of all gathered, after saying a few words, Melissa read out this letter, written to her late mother the year before.

THE LETTER

Mom:

I received the note that you slipped under my bedroom door last night. I was very excited to read it, thinking that it would contain amazing, loving advice that you wanted to share with me. Imagine my surprise when I opened it and saw that it began with the salutation, “Dear Landlord.” I have reviewed your complaints and address them below:

1. While I appreciate your desire to “upgrade” your accommodations to a larger space, I cannot, in good conscience, move [thirteen-year-old son] Cooper into the laundry room. I do agree that it will teach him a life lesson about fluffing and folding, but since I don’t foresee him having a future in dry cleaning, I must say no.

Also, I know you are a true creative genius (and I am in awe of the depth of your instincts), but breaking down a wall without my permission is not an appropriate way to express that creativity. It is not only a boundary violation but a building-code violation as well. Additionally, the repairman can’t get here until next week, so your expansion plan will have to be put on hold.

2. Re: Your fellow “tenant” (your word), Cooper. While I trust you with him, it is not OK for you to

undermine my rules. It is not OK that you let him have chips and ice cream for dinner. It is not OK that you let him skip school to go to the movies. And it is really not OK that the movie was *Last Tango in Paris*.

As for your taking his friends to a “gentlemen’s club,” I accepted your rationale that it was an educational experience for the boys – and you are right, he is the most popular kid in school right now – but I’d prefer he not learn biology from those “gentlemen” and their ladies, Bambi, Trixie and Kitten. And just because I yelled at you, I do not appreciate your claim that I have created a hostile living environment.

3. While I’m glad to see you’re socializing, you must refill the hot tub after your parties. In fact, you need to tone down the parties altogether. Imagine my surprise when I saw the photos you posted on Facebook of your friends frolicking topless in the hot tub.

I think it’s great that you’re entertaining more often, but I can’t keep fielding complaints from the neighbors about your noisy party games like Ring Around the Walker or naked Duck, Duck Caregiver.

I’m more than happy to have you use the house for social gatherings, but you cannot rent it out, advertise as “party central” or hand out T-shirts that say “F— Jimmy Buffett.”

In closing, I hope I have satisfactorily answered your complaints and queries. I love having you live with me, and I am grateful for every minute Cooper and I have with you. You are an inspiration. You are also 30 days late with the rent.

Much love,
Melissa

LETTER 02

I KNOW, MOTHER, I KNOW

Anne Sexton to Linda Sexton

April 1969

*Born in Newton, Massachusetts, in 1928, Anne Sexton battled mental illness for much of her adult life, the births of her two girls in her twenties only serving to deepen and complicate her mental anguish. It was on the advice of her therapist during a stay at hospital in 1955, two years after the birth of her first daughter, Linda, that she began to write the poetry that would keep her suicidal thoughts at bay and give her family and friends hope. While travelling in 1969, two years before she won the Pulitzer Prize for her book, *Live or Die*, Sexton wrote to Linda, then fifteen, with a message for the future. Five years after this emotional letter was penned, Sexton finally took her own life. She was forty-five years old.*

THE LETTER

Wed – 2:45 P.M.

Dear Linda,

I am in the middle of a flight to St. Louis to give a reading. I was reading a *New Yorker* story that made me think of my mother and all alone in the seat I whispered to her “I know, Mother, I know.” (Found a pen!) And I thought of you – someday flying somewhere all alone and me dead perhaps and you wishing to speak to me.

And I want to speak back. (Linda, maybe it won't be flying, maybe it will be at your own kitchen table drinking tea some afternoon when you are 40. Anytime.) – I want to say back.

- 1st, I love you.
2. You *never* let me down
3. I know. I was there once. I too, was 40 and with a dead mother who I needed still.

This is my message to the 40-year-old Linda. No matter what happens you were always my bobolink, my special Linda Gray. Life is not easy. It is awfully lonely. I know that. Now you too know it – wherever you are, Linda, talking to me. But I've had a good life – I wrote unhappy – but I lived to the hilt. You too, Linda – Live to the HILT! To the top. I

love you, 40-year old Linda, and I love what you do, what you find, what you are! – Be your own woman. Belong to those you love. Talk to my poems, and talk to your heart – I'm in both: if you need me. I lied, Linda. I did love my mother and she loved me. She never held me but I miss her, so that I have to deny I ever loved her – or she me! Silly Anne! So there!

XOXOXO

Mom

‘LIVE TO THE HILT!’

— *Anne Sexton*