

RADICAL CREATIVE SANCTUARY

The Birthday Letter Ritual a simple way to love your life in letters

by Danette Relic

Imagine knowing every year on your birthday,
you get to open a very special card.
From yourself.
Written the year before.

I know many of us dream of making more time to write and journal. We have intentions of documenting our personal stories, to capture and savour the preciousness of our lives. But like the thousands of photos we never actually print or share, sometimes our good intentions just get tucked away in a folder of good intentions.

Writing Birthday Letters to yourself is a gift on many levels:

- **It is a beautifully efficient and minimalist way of keeping a journal.** One letter to capture every year, the bundle of envelopes would fit in one box. You can even tie them up with a ribbon, like love letters.
- **it is an easy and loving way to connect with yourself that will grow over time.** If you are feeling disconnected from what you imagine self love to be, you can start here. You can start today.
- **if you think about it, it is a pretty amazing thing to leave behind.** Imagine finding a bundle of birthday letters someone had written to themselves every year until they died? This is a precious archive, even for a stranger to discover long after you've flown.
- **Plus, it can be a lot of fun.**



How to Begin Your Own Birthday Letter Ritual

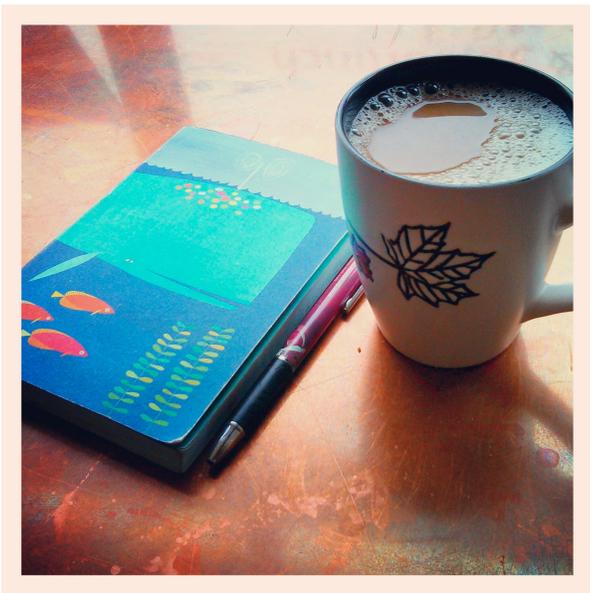
When can I start?

Right now. Even if your birthday was a month ago, even if your birthday is tomorrow. Sit down and write a letter now, ready for you to open when the day comes.

You have to start somewhere. Start here.

I understand that you might be thinking, *cool! I'll remember to start this on my next birthday.* Makes perfect sense. However, over the years I have heard many people confess they love this birthday letter ritual idea - but when their birthday comes they get swept up in the flurry of the day and forget to start. Again.

So start right now. It doesn't have to be long, or fancy or perfect. Just a note, to you, from you. Just a start. Just say *Hello, Happy Birthday!*



How much time to I spend writing my letter?

This might change from year to year, depending on how you feel and what you want to create.

Keep in mind that your Birthday Letter can be as simple as a card that you sign last minute. Some years, that might be all you can do. And that is enough.

When you look back on those last minute cards, they will speak to how you might not have had the space and time to reflect that year, but that *you were still thinking about yourself and honouring the ritual you created.*

You showed up.

When it comes to birthdays, just "showing up" goes a long way to express love.

And, your Birthday Letter *can* be as epic as you desire. Make a pop-up circus themed card if that's what delights you. Buy one of those gorgeous letter press cards

that you only splurge on for your dearest friends. What kind of letter would you most enjoy making?

Flexibility Time Tip: Birthdays can sometimes be busy days where you don't have much alone time to read, never mind craft a letter. To make this ritual sustainable, you may want some flexibility.

I actually give myself a full week to write my letter (I'm not always on time, but I generally aim for that guideline). This gives me time to sit with the letter from the year before, and enjoy my actual birthday without any pressure to have my ritual "homework" done.

Waiting a week also allows me to recall in my next letter how my birthday was celebrated that year.

When do I open it?

Now that I've been doing this for so long, I enjoy planning a little solo date on my birthday in a coffee shop just to read my birthday letter.

You can open it before bed, on the eve of your birthday.

You can open it in bed, at the end of your actual birthday.

You can not over think it, and just open it whenever you open it.

It's your birthday!



What do I write to myself?

What do you write in the birthday cards you send to others? Do you wish them a wonderful day? Do you tell them that they are great and you hope this is the best year so far?

That is a good place to start. Write like you are writing to someone you love who is worth celebrating - you are!

Here are some more ideas to take your letter deeper:

- what were the highlights of your year?
- what do you want to remember?
- how did you grow this year?
- what are you proud of?
- what did you taste this year?
- what have you let go of?
- what gifts did you receive this year?
- what did you begin?
- who are the new lovely people that have shown up in your life?
- who have you said goodbye to?
- what was the soundtrack of this year? (summer hits? your own personal anthems?)
- how do you feel, right now, at this moment in your life?
- what are your dreams for next year?
- what are your wishes for next year?
- what are you grateful for?
- what are you excited about?
- is there anything else?

Write from your heart, as though you are an old friend. This is just for you. It might feel funny at first, if you have never written to yourself before. That's okay! Let it feel funny. Write about how silly you feel. Break the ice. You're in good company.

Permission for Perfectionists: Rituals are made of purposeful actions that mark the significance of a moment. Guidelines are useful because they keep things consistent as we build new traditions - but sometimes, guidelines can get in the way.

If you are a little like me, you *might* get caught up in making sure you do your ritual the way you are "supposed to" - which can stop you from doing the ritual at all.

I do not perform this ritual perfectly, as you'll read up ahead!
You have permission, to let this process be imperfect.



Simple Ways to Make it Special

I'm a sucker for treats and surprises.

This is one of the rare times you might actually be able to surprise yourself. It is amazing how quickly you will forget what you put into an envelope 12 months ago.

Who doesn't love treats?

You'll know you'll like them, because you picked them out.

Of course, the letter itself is enough. The act of writing, the gift of time to record and celebrate your life -- that is the best treat of all.

And, there are more ways to have fun with your Birthday Letter:

- **Choose Colour.** Even your envelope choice can be a treat.
- **Stickers Make it Special.** Decorate your envelope with them. Better yet, if you love fancy stickers and don't often buy them for yourself, slip a whole sheet of them into your envelope.
- **Souvenir Postcards.** Write birthday wishes on a whole bunch of postcards you collected over the year, and bundle them into an envelope instead of a letter or card. They don't have to be from far away places -- local ones can be just as fun.
- **Money!** Even a small amount will be a sweet surprise when you open your letter next year. It's like finding five dollars in the pocket of last year's winter coat. Spend it on something frivolous and delightful.
- **Time Capsule Treasures.** It might seem silly now, but little scraps of your every day might be a wonderful treat to discover many years from now. Ticket stubs, candy wrappers, a grocery list on a sticky note, a photo of something that meant something to you that year. Whatever you choose will belong, because it belonged to you.

You will change over the years! Your letters will too.

You make it special simply by showing up for yourself, year after year.

Whoops! Where Did I Put My Letter?

Have you ever put something important in a "safe place"? And the place you chose was so safe that *even you* couldn't find it?

When I first began writing Birthday Letters, I wanted to hide my letter so it would really feel like a surprise. You can see where this is going.

I don't know what happened but halfway through 2013, I couldn't for the life of me find my new letter. I began to wonder, *had I forgotten to write one?* I waited for a little while, hoping it would show up when I did some cleaning. Then I decided to write a new one (6 months before my next birthday) just in case I didn't find it. I thought, worse case scenario is I find the old letter and then I get to open two! (I did)

Birthday Letter Safekeeping Tip: If you are too clever for your own good, how about displaying your letter right out in the open? You can tease yourself by clipping it to the door of your fridge, lean it against a frame on a shelf or even pin it to the wall like a little work of art.

As they collect, you can keep your letters bundled together; the old ones and the new one, in a place you will often see them. This serves as a visual reminder of your self love ritual. You will know exactly where to go the morning of your birthday to find your letter.

And finally...

Make Room for Courage and Tenderness

A lot can happen in a year. You probably don't need me to tell you that.

There were times where I was nervous to read my Birthday Letter, because in the 12 months since I had written it, I had lost everything that meant something to me. I couldn't bear the thought that those dreams had been so short lived. The idea of reading a letter written before the loss took courage. It was a painful reminder that life doesn't always unfold the way we hope -- and often we won't see it coming.

It takes courage to commit to this ritual. To show up and witness your life, through the hard times and the good. Through all the colours of your life.

It is worth witnessing.
You, your life, is worth witnessing.
Celebrating birthdays is a privilege.
It means *you are still here*.

There will be years, where this ritual is tender with loss. And, years where life has the most beautiful surprises in store.

Let this ritual mark your own personal new year. Your own personal revolution, your own spin around the sun. Let this ritual be a way to honour who you are through the cycles and celebrations of your life. A new beginning, every time.

Yours too, is a life worthy of letters.

There you have it! Are you ready to begin your very own Birthday Letter Writing Ritual? If you do, I would love to hear about it. Post a photo of your envelope on **Instagram** and tag me (**@radical_creative_sanctuary**) so I can see and send you a virtual high five. You did it!

If you are not an Instagram enjoyer, email me the photo of your envelope (**danette@RadicalCreativeSanctuary.com**) and say hello. It's always nice to hear from you.



With  Danette

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