

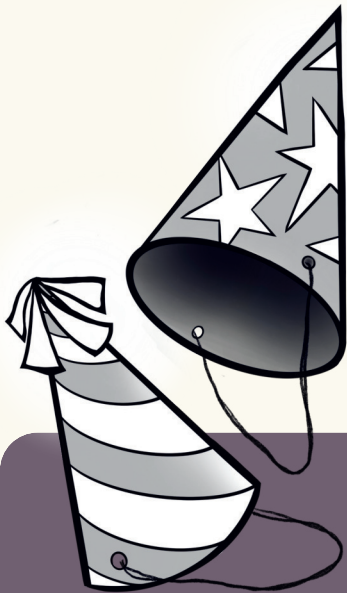
# BIRTHDAY LETTER



# RITUAL GUIDEBOOK

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# BIRTHDAY LETTER RITUAL GUIDEBOOK



Why Hello There

Don't Tell Me What To Do

Get Excited: The Basics

Inspiration For Meaningful Making

Find Your Ritual Rhythm

Courage And Tenderness

Your Life In Letters

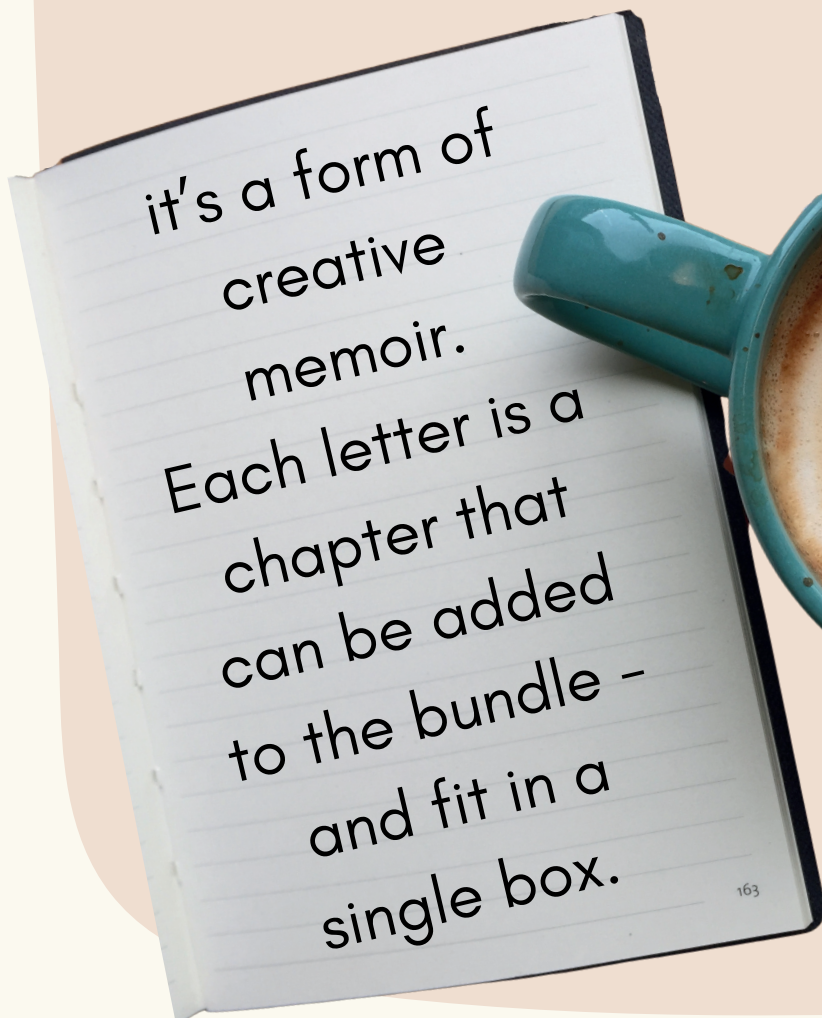
# why hello there



I'm Danette Relic. Author, artist, self-marriage muse and mentor. I've been doing the Birthday Letter Ritual since the year 2000, and have inspired many others to begin theirs. Care to join us?

fun  
fact:

A birthday letter ritual  
is a beautifully  
minimalist way  
of keeping  
a journal.



HEY



# Don't Tell Me What To Do

When I tell people about my ritual of opening letters from myself every year on my birthday, they often say this is such a great idea - *for their kids*.

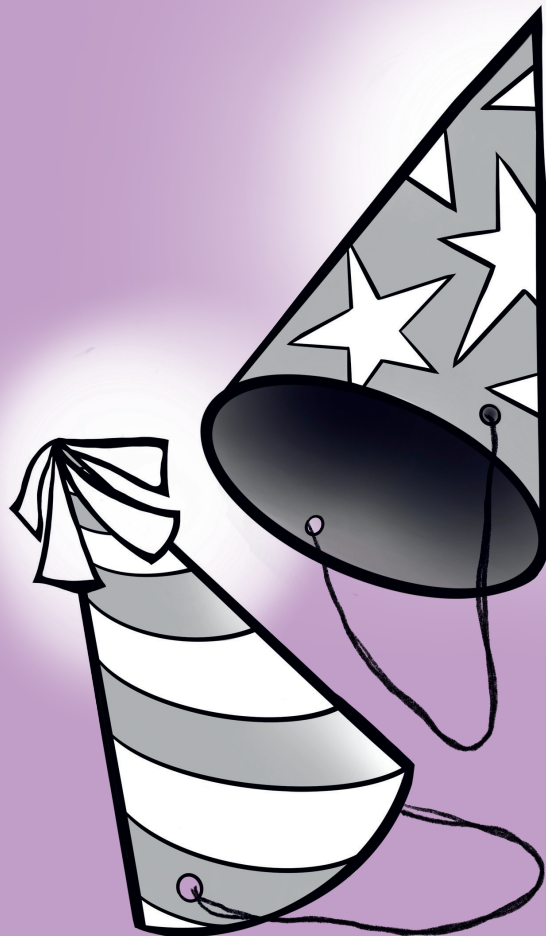
I can only imagine how I might have responded if a grown-up had told me to do a writing assignment EVERY YEAR on my birthday. As a kid, all I wanted was to go bowling and wear weird shoes and laugh in the basement and eat cake with my friends.



The birthday  
letter ritual is  
for YOU.

No matter how many  
birthdays you've  
already had.

# Get Excited: The Basics



# What counts as a birthday letter?

Anything that you write to your future self, to be opened on your next birthday. It can take many forms. Basically if you write something that fits in a sealed envelope, it's a letter.



# How does this ritual work?

You begin with writing a letter to be opened on your next birthday. On your birthday, open the letter. Repeat.

Some of you might be thinking “cool I’ll remember to start this *ON my NEXT birthday!*”.

Trust me. Many people think this.

**START YOUR RITUAL NOW -**  
even if your next birthday is tomorrow.  
**Write your first letter today.**



# What to write on?

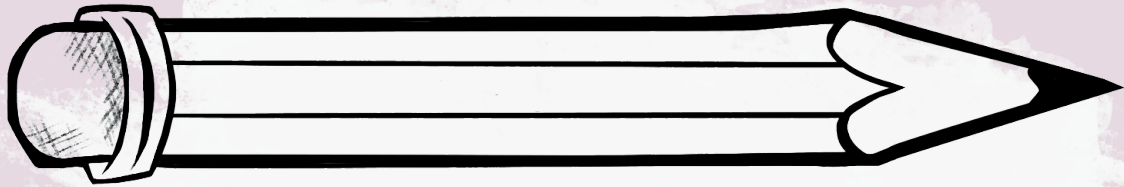


A piece of paper. A card. A postcard. A piece of cardboard from the recycling. Anything you can fit in a sealed envelope. Have an envelope.

It can be a single-page letter, or a 10-page outpour. It can be a simple postcard, or a series of postcards. More is not better, and also, go wild if you're inspired.

**Don't forget: the letter itself IS enough.**

The act of writing + the gift of attention is where the love is.



# What to *write*?

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.

Write from your heart, as though you are an old friend. Write like you are writing a message to someone who is worth celebrating. Imagine what they might like to hear on their next birthday. This is just for you.

If you're still stumped, choose from the big list of prompts in the next section.

**Tip:** Get started with a friend. make a date to write your first birthday letters together!

Bring this guide with you!



# Inspiration For Meaningful Making



# Making It Special



There's a white envelope, and there's an envelope in your favourite colour. Or, a repurposed envelope that someone special sent to you - I have many birthday letters with my Mom's handwriting on them.

There's a letter on plain paper, and there's a letter on stationary you saved from the hotel you stayed at last summer on a road trip with friends, then doodled around the edges.

## Meaning is in the details.

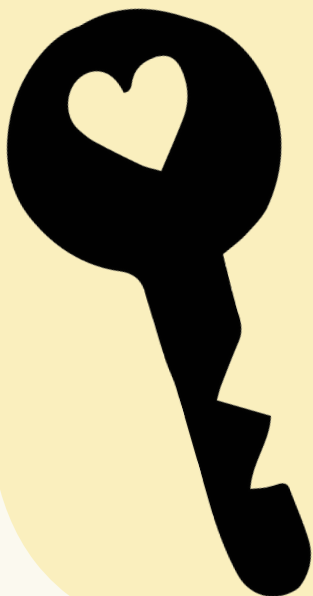
Any beauty you add, any display of preference, *the more specific you get with any of it* - will add meaning to your letter.

# Personal Is Key

Just as you can have fun with personalizing the envelope, see how specific you can get with your *words*.

Don't leave it at "Happy Birthday to You!"  
Focus on the YOU. Who is the person you are wishing happiness to? What do you really wish for them, specifically?

THIS MAKES YOUR LETTER SO MUCH MORE FUN  
TO READ.



With any of the prompts on the next page, get specific. Name what you mean. Describe it with your senses. Imagine you are writing something that will be filmed for a movie - give more detail than you think is necessary. Paint a picture.

# Big List of Prompts

- Describe the past year in 3 words.
- What were the highlights?
- What changed?
- What are you proud of?
- What are you grateful for?
- What have you let go of?
- What gifts did you receive?
- What were the simple pleasures of this past year?
- What have you been making time for?
- Who has been showing up in your life?
- Who have you said goodbye to?
- What did you learn?
- How are you growing?
- What was the soundtrack of this year?
- How does it feel to be you, right now?
- What are you appreciating?
- What are you looking forward to?
- What do you want most?
- What Birthday Wishes would you like to send to yourself for next year?
- Is there anything else your future self might need to hear?



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

## Slip in a little treat.



My faves?

**New Stickers.** Flat and fabulous additions to any birthday letter.

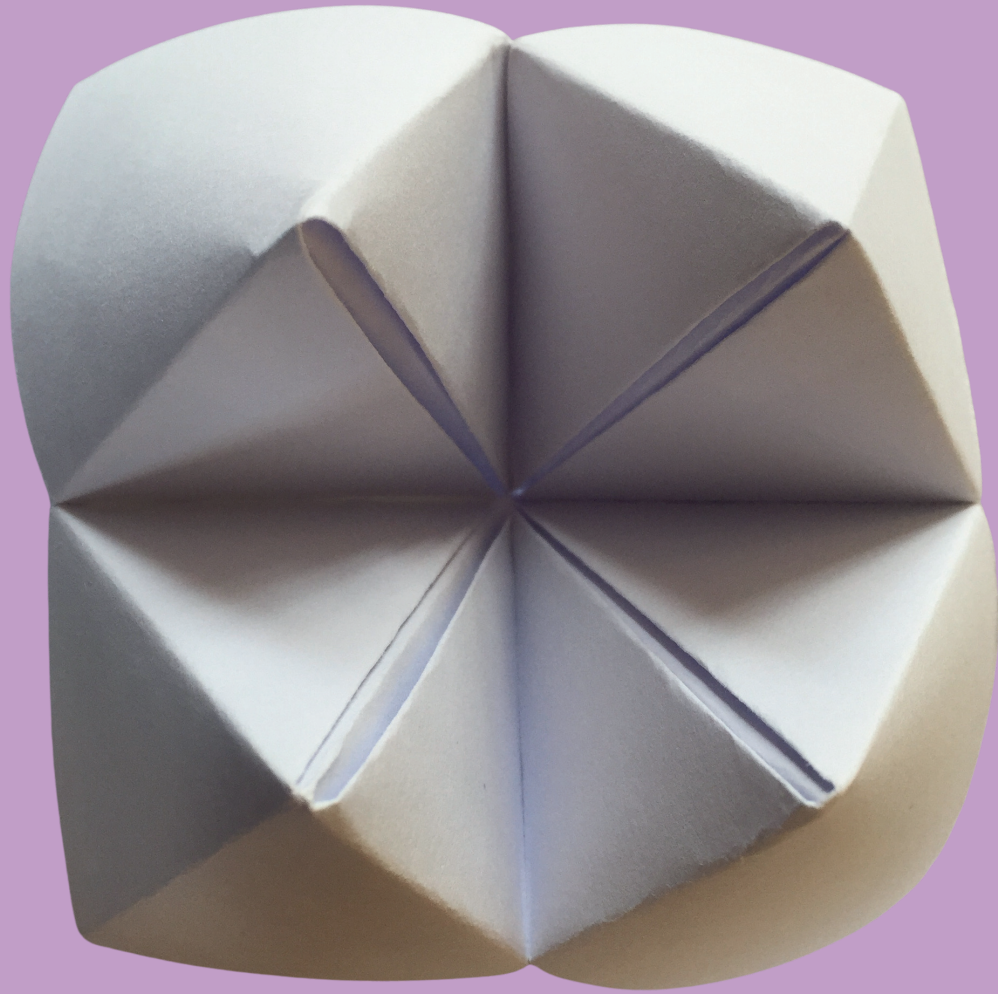
**And Money!** Even a small amount will be a fun surprise, like finding five dollars in last year's winter coat. Spend it on something frivolous and delightful.

# Time Capsule Treasures

It might seem silly now, but little scraps of your everyday life 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.





# Find Your Ritual Rhythm

# Permission for Perfectionists

Perhaps, 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.





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.

Well, SURPRISE! Halfway through 2013, I couldn't for the life of me find my new letter.

I waited. I hoped it would show up. Should I just write a new one mid-year? The worst case scenario would be finding the old letter, and then getting to open two, right?

(exactly what happened)

**Tip:** Say NO to putting your letter in a “safe place”



They'll never  
find me now!  
Muah-ha-ha!

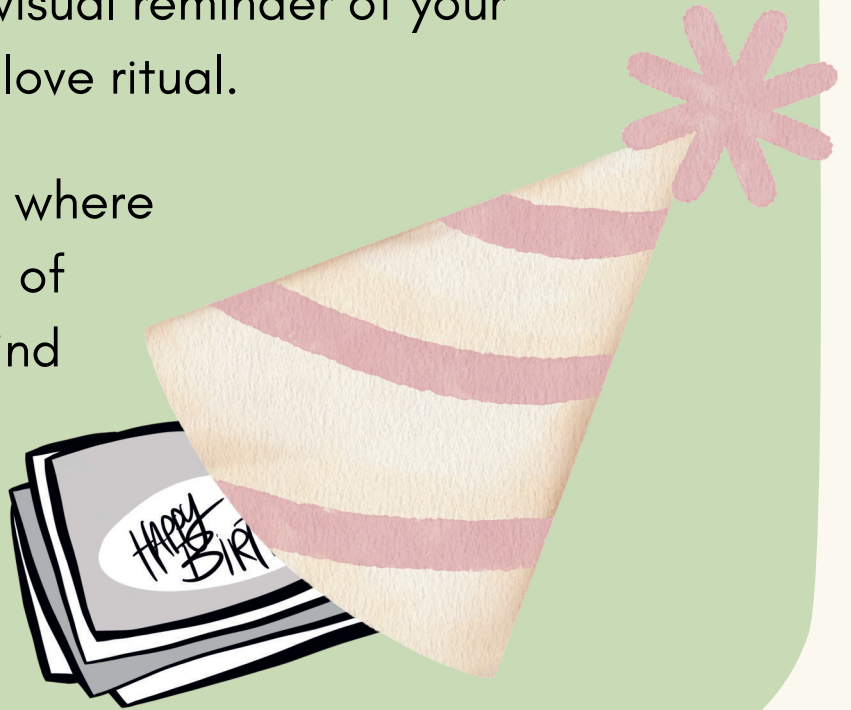
# Seeing is Safekeeping

Too clever for your own good? Display your letters out in the open. You can tease yourself by clipping your first letter to the door of your fridge, lean it against a frame on a shelf or even pin it to the wall like a work of art.

As they collect, keep your letters bundled together 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.



# Opening Your Letters



Part of your ritual might include a special place, or time of day when you plan to open your letter. Where do you imagine yourself opening yours?

My favourite is to take myself out and open my letter over a solo coffee.

Be the first voice you hear on your birthdays, by opening your letters in the morning. Or before bed, as your special day comes to a close. Your ritual doesn't have to be elaborate - but let it be *intentional*.

# Writing Your *Next* Letter

Typically, writing takes longer than reading. Very few people want the pressure of a writing assignment on their birthday. It's easy to make yourself "wrong" for not getting it done "on time" (see Permission for Perfectionists).

I generally aim for writing my next birthday letter the week after my birthday, once I've had a few days to reflect but not too many days so that I get "busy" and "forget" to write it.

If you DO forget....write as soon as you remember and be kind to yourself. Your future self would love to hear from you.



# Courage and Tenderness



# 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 I was nervous to read my Birthday Letter, because in the 12 months since I had written it, life had taken a sharp turn. The grief of unexpected loss was heavy on my heart - but "past me" didn't know what was coming.

It took courage to read a letter written before I found out that some dreams of mine would be so short lived. 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. 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.

# Your Life in Letters



Birthday letters connect you with  
yourself over time.

One letter. Once a year.



It's both an on-going time capsule  
and a conversation.

Can you imagine finding a bundle of birthday  
letters someone had written to themselves  
every year until they died?

This is a precious archive.

# It's never too late to begin something beautiful



No matter how old you are now. No matter how  
“uneventful” you think your life might be. Your life  
is a life worth documenting.

Witnessing. Celebrating. Cherishing.

Perhaps you wish you had started sooner.  
Don't let that stop you. Let that inspire you.

Handfuls of years from now, there lives a Future You who is wishing for you to start *right now* - with the wisdom and insight (and longing and regret) you've cultivated so far. All of it.  
All of YOU.

You too, like all of us, are a miracle here on earth. There is no other you. Never has been. Your life, and your experiences, have never been experienced through the lens of all that you are.





# share & tell

I'd love to hear about you starting your ritual!

Feel free to share a pic or drop a line to  
Danette @ [RadicalCreativeSanctuary.com](https://www.RadicalCreativeSanctuary.com)



happy birthday  
To you