



Reach Out

BEFORE CELEBRITIES WERE DONNING THE movie star staple of large sunglasses, my Aunt Grace was rocking them on a regular basis and looking fabulous. She wore her sunglasses with such style, either on her face, or up on her head, pushing back her shiny blonde locks. My sisters and cousins and I used to call big glasses “Aunt Grace glasses.” Who knew she was ahead of the fashion trend, perhaps even setting it?

Aunt Grace sips extra spicy Bloody Marys at brunch, with ease. While I feel like flames are shooting out of my forehead and cheeks after only two sips, she calmly finishes hers. Being from the Midwest, Aunt Grace always insists we call her “Aunt Grace,” pronounced as “ont,” not “ant” because, as she says, “I’m not an ant that crawls on the ground.”

Sunglass wearing, Bloody Mary sipping, Aunt Grace is beloved for many reasons, but perhaps none so much as because of her cards. The woman has never missed a birthday, a holiday or a special occasion. Death and taxes are the two things you can count on, but I would like to add, Aunt Grace’s cards. They show up without fail. They show up early. They show up. And that means so much.

She remembers not just the immediate family members, but every family member and generation, as far as the branches of the family tree stretch. “Love, Aunt Grace – and Uncle Gary too!” is always the signature, whatever the season. Christmas? Easter? Thanksgiving? Check, check and check. I have never known a birthday or celebration to pass without a card from Aunt Grace arriving in the mail.

Getting those cards in the mail may seem like only a passing moment of recognition, but they carry a much greater meaning.

They show that you are valued, loved, appreciated and remembered. Nothing can make you feel as discounted and unvalued as when someone doesn’t have time for you, or doesn’t recognize you. And yet, how powerful and impactful a simple recognition can be for one’s soul. While it may look like nothing more than a card with a dog and a birthday cake, or a field of flowers on the front, or a plain piece of paper, in reality, a card or a note is so much more. It says: You are valued. You count. You are remembered because you are important to me.

On a recent trip to Sioux Falls, this March, I learned the method to Aunt Grace’s system. While at her house for dinner, there was a question about when someone’s birthday was. Standing from the table, she went to the kitchen and returned with a thick, spiral bound notebook calendar. The mothership!

Each month had tabs with names and dates sticking off the edge, and inside there was a folder with notes written to the people who would be receiving a card that month. She has the cards planned out for the year, which in my mind makes them even more meaningful. It is not that I randomly pass through her mind in March and she decides to grab me a birthday card while at the store. She is intentional about making sure someone feels loved and important. She plans for people to feel successful.

I want to be more like Aunt Grace. Willing to take the time and effort, to make others feel so loved. Willing to plan ahead, to make sure people – friends, family and those who have played an important role in my life – know how valued they are, that they count.

It has been a grim week in the news: plane crashes, senseless acts of violence, unrest and upheaval. It is easy to feel like the world is full of only the dark and dreary; that hope and light and love have been permanently extinguished. Yet, even in the times of darkness, where there is but the smallest pinpoint of light, it can grow and overtake the darkness. Is it possible we are called to be that pinpoint of light that shines bright in someone’s life?

What is on your calendar? Who is on your calendar? Who have you taken the time to talk to today - or perhaps, who have you not talked to today, or in a while, who could use a bit of light? Is there room on that calendar to add someone else in; to shine light into their life?

Sometimes we’ve let so much time pass since we last talked to someone that it feels uncomfortable or awkward to restart communication. I beg of you to be brave and make that call, send that text or mail that card. The difference you make may be life changing. Did you know that there is power in a pen? You have the ability to take someone from feeling low, to feeling incredible. You have the potential to fix what is broken.

I remember hearing a comment Oprah Winfrey made once, that has stuck with me as such a powerful truth: “‘I’ve talked to nearly 30,000 people on this show, and all 30,000 had one thing in common,’ she said. ‘They all wanted validation... they want to know: ‘Do you see me? Do you hear me? Does what I say mean anything to you?’”

We all yearn to know we are valued and we are important. Taking the time to remember someone makes them feel validated. It doesn’t cost anything – well maybe just the cost of a card and a stamp – it doesn’t require anything, but the difference it makes in someone’s life is truly life changing – sometimes life saving.

Not sure where to start? Pick up a pen and write a note. Reach out. Be like Aunt Grace!

Blythe