

Hallmark Moments

By Rachel Loveday

I hadn't even shut the front door when I saw it on the dining table—the pink envelope stood out amongst what would most likely be my bills. It was practically screaming at me. I knew what it was; this pink envelope is sent to me every year, with beautiful, elegant, perfect print writing on it. The perfect curve of the J and the perfectly symmetrical double o's which resembled eyes and were staring right back at me, signalling to me who this card was from, has always been from—my mother.

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"Are you going to open it?" Michael asked, spotting it too.

"No, I'm going to unpack."

"She must have gone to a lot of trouble, she couldn't have sent it herself and it got here on time."

"I don't want to open it Michael." I said firmly, knowing I had stood my ground.

"Okay, okay. Do you need help unpacking?"

"No" I answered, having already walked out towards our bedroom, getting as far away from the pink envelope as I could.

Going back to work was easier than I thought, although everyone has been overly sympathetic in their effort to make me feel better; it wouldn't be so bad if it wasn't so fake.

It took a few hours for everyone to get the message that I didn't want to talk, that I was there for one reason only, to work and to stay as far away from the pink envelope as I could, but of course I would never tell them that.

When I came home, the pink envelope was still on the table and a white box was sitting next to it, keeping it company.

“Your dad sent this, I don’t know what it is” Michael said to me, sitting at the table, waiting for me with the mail, like he always does.

I opened the box to find a pile of light pink envelopes with my name on it in the same beautiful, elegant, perfect print writing. Instead each envelope had my first name and the numbers one to 20 in descending order on them. On closer inspection, the envelopes were weathered; they were a bright pink once.

“I think dad sent me my old birthday cards.”

“Birthday cards? You kept them? All of them?”

“Yeah, mum always picked out my birthday cards and wrote little letters in them. I don’t know why dad would have sent them to me.”

“Maybe he thought it would be a nice present for you this year.”

“I don’t know why he thought that.”

“Are you going to read them?”

“I’m going to take a bath.” I avoided the question, although I did take the pile with me.

I let the warm water, the coarse and scents of my bath salts and the weightless bubbles envelope me, I usually love my bubble baths, but I can’t stop staring at the pile, as it’s staring back at me. I guess now is as good a time as any. I gently picked up the top envelope, which was the most weathered out of all of them.

The first birthday card my mother gave me was pink with an even darker pink number one on it. I opened the card to find my mother’s perfect handwriting; it was as perfect twenty years ago as it is now. Mum always wrote letters on the inside of the cards I got when I was a teenager and apparently it didn’t start there, it started at the beginning, when I was one year old.

“To my baby girl,

I can’t believe it’s been a year since you came into this world. You were crying and screaming your little heart out or should I say lungs! But once you settled down, your big wide eyes looked around the room, taking it all in. You looked so wise; you seemed like an old soul.

This year has gone by incredibly fast, that’s what happens when you get that little bit older.

You’ll read this again when you’re older, you’ll understand then.

Love Mummy xxoo”

I don’t know why my mother would write a letter like that to a one year old, even if I’m reading it now as a twenty-one year old. Nevertheless, now that I’ve opened one, I feel the need to keep going.

The letters continued to appear in every single card, my mother was never a pushy woman, well at least not obviously. Each card she told me to enjoy being a kid, how valuable friends are if they are good ones and the importance of learning and being a responsible person. In every one of them without fail, she would always remind me of how much she loved me and how much she loved being my mother. On my sixth birthday card, which had a fairytale land and a princess on the front, she reminded me that I was more of a mother to her than she was to me on my first day of school.

“To my little kindergartener,

I can’t believe you’ve started school! I was so nervous on your first day, your back pack looked like it was full of rocks! I just wanted to make sure you had everything you could possibly need. I calmed down and smiled ear to ear when you said this to me:

‘Mummy, I know the first day is scary, but I’ll be fine, I don’t worry.’

I'll always worry about you honey, but I also know you'll be fine.

Love Mummy xxoo"

As I progressed through my childhood, the letters slowly progressed themselves. From mum telling me to enjoy being a kid and not to rush to adulthood to finally accepting that I was starting to transform into an adult and subtly warning about how hard adulthood really is. She did a particularly good job in the letter in my multi-coloured card with the words 'way cool', 'way fun', 'way nice' and 'way hip' for my thirteenth birthday.

"To my beautiful young lady,

So it's official, you're no longer a baby. Although you are still my baby and even though you're growing up, you still have to do what your father and I tell you. These next few years are going to be the biggest and hardest years of your life, but also some of your best.

Enjoy being a teenager and being in high school.

Love Mum xxoo"

It took me all of two hours to get through all of the cards, the scents of the bath salts have dissolved and the bubbles have completely melted away. I thought I could run away from the pink envelope by hiding in work, the bath salts, the bubbles and the past birthday cards, which are now ruined by said bubbles and salts. I was hoping it would be a way to keep my mother alive, that she was still here, but she's not here anymore and I can no longer hide in my now grey-water filled bathtub, my tears aren't hiding anymore, so why should I?

I got out of the tub, put my pyjamas on, which were eerily similar to the pyjamas I remember my mother wearing when she was younger and walked out into the lounge room, to the table. Michael hadn't moved the card, he knew deep down that I would

eventually have to face it, but being the good fiancé that he is, he didn't push, just like my mother never pushed.

I finally opened the envelope which revealed another pink card with a pink cake on the front with the words 'Happy 21st Birthday' printed on the cake in blue metallic letters, above the words 'Let the celebration begin! Congratulations!' True to form my mother wrote me a loving, heartfelt letter.

"To my wonderful daughter,

Twenty-one! You've made it, you're officially a grown up now, although you have been one for a while. You have the biggest year of your life ahead of you—you'll be graduating from university, getting married and you will become a mother. I was shocked at first when you told me, because you're so young, but I can't wait to be a grandmother. You will be an amazing mother and you'll feel the joy that I have felt with being your mother.

I know you're worried about me, but don't worry, I won't let this beat me.

I love you always.

Mum xxoo."

Mum didn't tell me that she had no chance of beating the cancer, but being the loving mother who would always go to so much effort to pick the most beautiful birthday cards for me every year to make me feel special, it didn't surprise me. I'll always have photos and memories of my mum, but I think the things I'll treasure most are these birthday cards with my mum's beautiful, elegant, perfect print handwriting.