

Dear Dad

Giving a Thank You Letter as a Christmas Present to an Elderly Parent

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In 2003, when my father was 84 and in good health, I decided to give him the gift of a ‘thank you’ letter for Christmas. Interestingly, I can’t remember if I gave him anything else to supplement it but I know for sure that the letter meant the world to him then and means a huge amount to me now. It was a five page letter, written by hand with a fountain pen, and started like this:

Dear Dad,

This may seem like an odd Christmas present but I want to remind you of all the really ‘fatherly’ things you have done for me since I was born.

It covered happy times growing up and moved on to his involvement in my education:

Another aspect of life was the academic; your willingness to pay for me all those years in Trinity. The PhD was the outcome for me – a lot of money spent the outcome for you! Trinity was my first time away from home. I have vivid memories of you delivering and collecting me from Trinity Hall, driving me to the station, meeting buses. The car was always there and so were you with your warm smile.

There was so much to say and on the last page, I wrote:

In so many ways, it’s been the little things that have been everything – mopping up the cuts, catching the mice, just being at the other end of the phone Nights chatting over cups of tea and sugary hot orange drinks

Father never, ever mentioned the letter to me after I handed it to him in a yellow folder on Christmas Day in 2003 but my mother told me that he was deeply touched by it. After he died almost seven years later, I felt a great sense of happiness that I had taken that opportunity to thank him when he was fit and well.

I was rather surprised when I was clearing out his house that there was no sign of the letter. I doubted very much that he would have thrown it out as he always kept things that mattered to him. Then on the day I was handing over the key, I decided to have one last look and there in a special hidey hole, I found the familiar yellow folder. It was well thumbed and I knew that he must have read the letter on quite a few occasions. It has now become one of my treasures and sources of solace.

So, from my experience: *write that Christmas ‘thank you’ letter now and don’t wait until it’s too late.*

Oh and there was a PS in the letter:

PS: Remember that magic moment when we saw the deer crossing the mountains in the snow