

## Dear Dana: That Time I Went Crazy and Wrote All 580 of My Facebook Friends a Handwritten Letter

**Amy Weinland Daughters**

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*Dear Dana is an inspirational memoir about caring for friends near and far by reviving a lost art.*

Tongue-in-cheek affection for social media informs *Dear Dana*, Amy Weinland Daughters's memoir about reconnecting with former summer camp friends through Facebook.

Daughters, who attended Camp Olympia in Texas, sent a friend request to Dana, a past acquaintance, only to learn that Dana's son struggled with cancer. Compelled from afar, Daughters prayed for Dana's family without being asked to, then mailed letters of encouragement. From this compassionate impulse—which Daughters admits might have seemed “stalker-ish”—an old friendship was rekindled and came to thrive in the women's midlife.

Laced with bemusing candor, Facebook messages and letters, people's responses, journal entries, and Daughters's reactions, the book recounts how Daughters surmised that God was using her to love others, and how she expanded her pen pal campaign to include hundreds of her Facebook friends. Musings about God's promptings to intercede, and her own feelings during the process, are glimpses at what it's like to be a determined intercessor, though these strands are underdeveloped. Throughout, Daughters is practical about her expectations, yet enthusiastic because of positive results. When these are attributed to providence, the down-to-earth tone remains true to the book: “This crap was for real.”

Daughters's zeal is entertaining, while her ground rules for the letters, record-keeping, and strategy for coming up with words for people that she didn't know beyond her memories and their Facebook posts are explained in clear terms. Noteworthy exceptions include her letters to her family, which evade the initial awkwardness of other exchanges and show the value of risking vulnerability, even among loved ones.

However, Daughters's many recipients are developed only in abbreviated, sketched ways. Though the book is written with a keen sense of the need to preserve the recipients' privacy, the result is that the exchanges cannot be pushed beyond their bustling overviews of events. Instances of repetition (portions of Daughters's letters and ideas are recycled to explain her project's aims to people) also impede the book.

Still, Daughters and her friends' observations about relationships reveal the delights to be found in online connections. They're also honest about the limitations of online communication, naming a sense of loss that is somewhat recovered through writing by hand. Such thoughts conclude the chapters, urging the audience to better appreciate the need for saying what's important while there's time to do so. And other lessons are shared, too: about accepting that a lack of responses does not mean that letters had no impact; about what genuine investment in a friendship looks like. The book's emphasis on fostering individual relationships so that people become more than “blips” on a newsfeed is refreshing.

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KAREN RIGBY (March 3, 2022)

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