

HOWDY,

Maybe you can guess why I'm writing to you. It seems like our country has a fever. People are running around insulting each other, and we can't even seem to agree what is real anymore. Folks are anxious about their health, wealth, or lack of both. Everybody feels disrespected.

I'm writing to you so we can take a little breath. I'm writing to you to let you know that I care about your wellbeing. I'm writing to tell you what I think will help us keep moving toward peace and abundance for everyone (I might be wrong). If I'm lucky, I'm writing to make you smile.

First of all, I don't care who you are. You could tell me your name, age, gender, creed, religion, ethnicity, where you live, who you love, how much money you make, who you voted for last November, what you think about when you are stuck in traffic, whether you fold or crumple your toilet paper to wipe your bum (I fold mine), and none of that information would deter my heart from wishing you well.

By well I mean that I hope that you eat nourishing, delicious food that includes lots of vegetables. I want you to wake up fresh every morning, rested from a full night's sleep. How is your back feeling? I hope that it's straight, limber, and free from pain. I pray that your smile is reflected by the smiles of your family, friends, and colleagues. I hope that your bowel movements are firm and regular. It would make me so happy to know that you feel the sun on your skin, the wind in your hair, and the songs of birds in your ears. I encourage you to enjoy consensual, mind-blowing sex

(whatever, and with whomever, that means to you). I want you to find meaning in your work. If that is impossible, I hope for you to make enough money from your meaningless job to fund a meaningful hobby. I wish for you to know contentment. This is what I mean by well. [Disclaimer: If my wishes do not reflect how you want to live, feel free to disregard them. I won't be offended. It's your life. We are all born and die the same; it's what we do with the sweet, spicy, salty bit in the middle that makes us special and different. But if my wishes do reflect how you want to live, yet you feel that kind of wellness is unattainable, start small. Just sit down and breathe for a while.]

Now you are wondering, "why does a crazy stranger care so much about me?" I want wellness for you, regardless of who you are, because all humans are interconnected in a web of invention, creation, and care. I believe that each person who contributes to this network, even in small ways, has a right to humane living conditions, education, and respect. Look at your clothes. Who sewed them? Who invented the cloth? Taste your food. Who grew it? Who bred the variety of vegetable? Who drove the truck to bring clothes and food to you? Who worked late at the all-night restaurant to feed the trucker? I think that we thrive together, and suffer together.

Two things are worrying me about our country. The first is wealth inequality. The second is the breakdown of how we talk to each other.

Did you know that eight to thirty men (depends on how debts are calculated) own more wealth than the poorest half of the people on the planet, all 3.5

billion, combined? Six of those eight richest men are Americans. Our economic and political structures benefit the wealthy. Income inequality is greater than ever before in history. Meanwhile, clashes between races, genders, and other divisions distract us from the pressing question: how the funky chicken did those guys get so rich?

Now let's think about how we talk to each other. In debates about taxes, education, and more, I've heard people call each other morons, the Devil Incarnate, and worse. Enough. I don't care if he started it. I don't care what she said. I expect nothing but the best from you. It's OK if you need to go out for a walk to let off steam before you are ready to answer.

Our country was born in the same nebulous cloud as the Scientific Revolution, with the idea that even if Truth is hard to pin down, we can move toward it through rational discourse. We should make sure that we keep the mental buckets that contain facts, opinions, and beliefs well organized. We should hold debates using demonstrable evidence, not personal attacks. There is a reality that we can observe, discuss, and perhaps agree upon. Most importantly, we should always be ready to admit, "I might be wrong."

One time, a young missionary asked me, "Do you believe in evolution?" I told him that I do not believe in evolution. I said that I accept the theory of evolution because of the large amount of evidence I have seen that supports it, like fossils and genetics. Unlike a belief in God, which is through faith, scientists all over the world accept the theory of evolution because no believable evidence has yet disproved it—like "we

might be wrong...but haven't been in nearly two centuries". Whole museums and archives are full of examples that support it. [As a side note, the word "theory" is often used informally to mean an unsupported hunch, as in "it's just a theory." However in science, the word "theory" almost means "law" because there is so much evidence supporting it, as in the theory of evolution.] The missionary seemed to like my answer. I think it helped him allow his faith in God to coexist peacefully with his curiosity about science. I was happy to share my worldview at the same time as respecting his religious beliefs.

In the same way that science and religion don't have to exclude each other, morals can help guide markets. Since the Industrial Revolution, and maybe before, the main imperative of markets has been to extract as much profit as possible out of natural resources and cheap labor. I'm not an economist, but I think that a lot of the economic fallout today is caused by the fact that corporations view workers as liabilities to be minimized instead of assets to invest in. Moreover, natural systems that once seemed infinite, like fish in the sea, trees in the forest, and the sky itself, are actually limited. Once they have been decimated, they require tight management to recover. Whether you are a dyed in the wool capitalist, a card-carrying socialist, or just want to buy stuff on Amazon in peace, we need to have a discussion about how we can manage wealth and natural resources more responsibly for the seven billion people alive on the planet. On our end, we can start voting with our dollars.

It can be tempting to think, “Well screw other people. I’ve worked hard, and I’m not giving up what is mine!” However, remember that what you have is merely the pocket change stuck in the lavish sofas of the super wealthy. Also keep in mind how humans are interconnected. The very material that we are made of is shared. Fill your lungs with air. Do you consider that air to be “yours” or “you”? Try holding on to it as your personal possession...but don’t try too hard because you’ll faint. Your life depends on your ability to borrow air, and then freely pass it on again. The same goes for the water that makes up most of your weight. You drink it in, then pee, poop, sweat, and exhale it back out. The water gets evaporated into a cloud, rains down, and then someone else drinks it (The label of “recycled water” in a landscape is funny because all water is recycled). Air and water are just two, fundamental examples of things that bind you, me, and everyone else on the planet together. We should be working to keep them clean for ourselves, or neighbors, and our children.

I believe that you are just as worthy as any other critter to sing the song of the universe. I believe that about the trucker. I believe that about myself. I hope each of us has the opportunity to develop our unique gifts, and that we use them to bring joy to our communities and ourselves.

RESPECTFULLY YOURS,
MERIEL



WHO INVENTED THE CLOTH?