

**P.O. Box 549**  
***A Memoir – Benevolent Quantum Physics & Mailboxes***  
**by M.L. Crider**

©WGA West ©M.L. Crider - CriderInk.com

There seems an inherent poetic kind of intimacy that feels private, sacred somehow, in etching dark fluid ink to a fresh blank white page... to write. Writing a letter to a loved one has always been a joy, right down to the closing where I sign off with my love or sincerity, scribble out my first name, lick the envelope's long bitter-sweet glue strip, seal, stamp, and send. In this day of unromantic bright-screened e-mailing hastily replacing letter writing more and more, I feel a sense of duty in picking up my pen and some parchment once in awhile. I resign the day to a fluffy chair, steeping myself like a tea bag in the quiet to express my thoughts by hand and by a kinder softer candlelight.

Mailed letters hold paramount importance in the way of preserving a family's more private history. They ensure a soft trail of footprints for curiosities of future generations to be able to carefully retrace after opening up dusty, shelved keepsake boxes, only to discover the precious, date-stamped contents hidden within them. They involve all of our senses and so, produce maximal experience. These treasured documents commit history to fact as they bookmark and fill in the blank spots of mysterious family dynamics of ago. Surely, echoed family legends via e-mail forwarding run bleak risk of remaining pure. Sipping hot tea while putting rhythmic viscous ink to paper is a far cry from chugging a shot of espresso while clicking "send" after unnaturally pecking out one hundred words a minute. Give me a white candle, a comfy chair, and a good ink pen anytime.

It was a picturesque fall in late October 2001. After having been exhausted from my hectic city life and travels abroad, I found my taxed mind and *gypsied* body hushed by the inherent quiet that fall offers when I am home. A deep nostalgia had settled in more than ever before. I couldn't seem to dust it off. I was dearly missing my grandmother.

Granny's name was *Ella*. As I write this, merely seeing the four letters that make up her name brings up in me an unequivocal fullness, reminding me of the high esteem I continue to hold of her. Granny passed over in the late autumn of 1985. The afternoon of her funeral, a humid Louisiana sky was crying down... *hard*. I was grateful for nature's decided downpour. It was as if the happy sun was taking a respectful nap, paying homage to our solemnity, while the rain that soaked all of our heavy shoulders might have been her quiet attempt at calming us down here below. This communicated to my young mind and heart that the ceremony needn't be a final good-bye.

Sixteen years had passed since that emotionally drenched day. This particular late autumn, my emotional body had taken lead over my other faculties. I surrendered to it by riding its trying roller coaster in and out of unexpected loops that ranged from sadness to joy and back. The life was draining from the fluffy snowstorm of blood red, amber gold and papery brown leaves as they fell all around me enhancing this, my internal scene. The leaves seemed wistful themselves, as they spun soft surrendered circles en masse dancing down in their quiet population to blanket the ground one after another, in foreseen preparation of the cruel and cold winter that quickly ensued.

The yearning I felt to reconnect with Granny had been so poignant at times that it felt as if a stuck clenched fist was squeezing my heart straight up into my chest while mercilessly offering no hint of reprieve. The visceral manifestation of my emotional body's laboriousness

was instantly fused. It melted and meshed what any healthier functioning filter may have otherwise protected from such fast marriage. I felt sick.

A notion entered my mind. The notion was quieter than a thought. I felt like writing a letter to her... and mailing it to her... to somewhere... to anywhere, for all I cared, so long as I felt that I did my best to reach out to her somehow, since her grave was geographically too distant to visit, to be able to offer her a small vase stuffed with honeysuckle, or a bundle of tea-rose perfumed sticks to scent the air, as this was her favorite scent that I wore as a little girl. I decided that I would ask my mom what her address used to be in Elton, Louisiana. It was strangely okay with me that I wanted to behave with a rare innocence, unfit for my age about this, and mail a letter to my granny as if she were still alive—like some kind of doe-eyed child's Santa Claus wish-list note—appropriately stamped for immediate delivery to the North Pole.

I called Mama. I began reminiscing about Granny with her, asking her certain things about her, so that when I was to blurt out the strange question about her mailing address, it would then hopefully be camouflaged into the conversation neatly, without ringing odd bells. After our initial hellos and other introductory pleasantries that usually take time and precede *the meat* of any of our phone conversations, I began to ask her about her childhood, Granny's jobs, home, her garden of fig and magnolia trees, her sewing machine that stitched many a careful dress, and inquired as to what happened after her true love, Harry, unexpectedly widowed her when Mama was just two years of age.

Then, without further ado, out popped my planned question.

"Mama?" I posed nonchalantly, "Uhm, what was Granny's mailing address in Elton?" In her melodic Cajun-French lilt, she said,

"Well, she kept a P.O. box for her mail for many years after Daddy died."

Then suddenly, with some sort of anticipatory recognition, she blurted,

"Missy, what is your new P.O. box number that you just rented in Arkansas?"

"It's P.O. Box 549, Mama," as I had mentioned to her in passing when I purchased my first home, the October before. A pause fell like a brick and then stretched out for a moment too long for my hidden curiosity. Mama inhaled an audibly shocked, short, deep breath and then with an even more emphasized stretched-out southern lilt this time,

*"What did you just say? Five-Four-Nine? Are you serious? That was Granny's number in Elton! Her mailing address for many years after Daddy died was P.O. Box 549."*

We gasped on about the rareness of this seeming one-in-a-million-coincidence for a while longer before coming back down to earth and saying good night. I kept wondering, *What are the odds of this inexplicable numerically identical mailbox-coincidence-thing?* My granny and I, two women, who lived in two different generations, cities, and states, were arbitrarily assigned identical mail box numbers? The "good chills"—the kind that last longer than a fleeting *deja vu*—began their warm buzz upward and all over me. My arm hairs stood in allegiant unison about this seemingly supernatural fluke. That did it.

Suddenly I felt compelled to follow the inkling that had been tugging at me to somehow reach her. I would now go ahead and mail a letter... to a dead person... even at my age... via U.S. mail, to her ex-postal address—not to the forgiving North Pole.

I wrote to Granny. I mailed it to *her* just before the Christmas holiday. I presumed that the United States Postal Service must abide by certain protocol when receiving such kinds of correspondence if addressed to former box residents—especially deceased ones. I justified to myself that my mailed letter would certainly live to remain to be Granny and my secret. So, that was that.

January flew. February came. Valentine's Day:

I strolled into the post office to collect my mail; half wishing I might open some pink heart-filled card from whoever the man-of-the-time was then. I shuffled through some bills, tossed the always-annoying, incessant bright ads and then... I came upon a letter. I scanned the return address section. It was hand written in a sweet and most delicate cursive:

*B. Fuselier  
P.O. Box 549  
Elton, Louisiana 70532*

Dumbfounded, my mind searched its database as I thought, *Who on earth is B. Fuselier?* I flipped it over and attempted to open the envelope without ripping it irreverently, as I do with my bills to counter how they make me feel. I pulled the card out slowly. It was a watercolor painting of a soft South-of-France late summer setting, rich in calm greens and purple-pink flowers that climbed all over an age-old white picket fence. A worn-out dirt walkway curved my eyes up to a thatched faded-lavender roof that sat proudly atop a roomy country home.

I lifted the card open. Carefully. Any noise around me hushed when a glossy black and white photograph just slipped out into my hands.

*Oh. My. Sweet... God.*

My heartbeat was all that I could hear when I saw Granny beaming her humble smile at me now while standing in someone's front yard with two other *someones* whom I did not recognize. I was in a state of *shock-pause*. All of my senses then honed in on the delicate cursive writing from a kind *someone else* whom I did not know. While trying to flout my demanding heartbeat, I breathed in and out in a pre-rehearsed trust, and dove in:

*February 8, 2002*

*Dear Missy,*

*At Christmas time I received a Christmas card in my post office box. I looked at the return address and was surprised to see your name. I opened it without seeing it was addressed to your Grandma, Ella. It was a very sweet card and I am guessing it may have been a "closure" or perhaps just a granddaughter missing her dear grandma. Since my husband's mom and your grandma were first cousins, it was a coincidence that your card wound up in our box! I am sending you a picture we have of your grandma and my husband Ronnie's mom, Mildred. Your grandma's very beautiful and was beautiful inside, also. I hope you enjoy the picture and may God bless you!*

*Love,*

*Ronnie & Brenda Fuselier*

My bleary eyes brimmed over with bulbous tears that streamed down fast and were dripping from my chin. They were my heart's tributaries that flooded down with gravity far too fast to catch. I didn't want to catch them; they needed to fall and be. Who could have predicted the indelible fate of my innocently mailed hand-written letter? I do remember that my tender message to my granny poured effortlessly out of my hands like some kind of fluid air, but I suppose I was so in the moment when writing it, that to recall what I wrote now would be like trying to recall a cluttered distant dream that nonetheless, remains as a deep impression.

I mailed a heart-felt letter to my dead grandmother only to receive a happy photograph of her and a beautiful letter back to me? I tried to calm my shaking shoulders but a grateful sob just came gushing out. My surprise about this cryptic reciprocity kept me floating over myself like a balloon for many minutes before I was back in my body and in this ticking thing we call time.

Granny's magical card now lives in a special place in my kitchen. The ripe and beautiful French late summer setting invites me in as it encourages me to continue to hope for things that may seem out of reach at any given moment, and sometimes, to go ahead with a "small idea" that I almost certainly would otherwise have yawned about and skeptically dismissed, deeming it too childish a concoction to pursue.

Her smile beams at me these days from the silver picture frame that has housed her photograph ever since. She is here now, no matter the weather. I keep plenty of handy ink and paper standing by these days. I still look up with a hopeful hello in wonderment when rain drenches my shoulders. Still, these many years later, with a spirit of curiosity that has since replaced duty by rote...

I check my mailbox often.