

## Spare ordinary folks your bragging letters



**ANN  
LANDERS**

**Dear Ann Landers:** At this time of year, thousands (maybe millions) of people are busy preparing those ghastly Christmas letters. Nothing will deter them. They will send those messages come hell or high water, so will you kindly print a timely message for them?

**Dear Friends and Family Members:** Please show a little consideration for those who are having a tough time making ends meet. Many of us are tapped out and cannot afford to take fabulous trips. Your glowing travelogue of the glories of Venice and the grandeur of Rome are a bit too much.

Please do not tell us about your new \$700,000 home or the Lexus your husband had parked in the driveway as a "surprise." We just had our 1992 Chevy fixed up and hope it makes it through the winter.

Spare us the details of the Ivy League schools your children are attending and the honors and awards they have received during the year. Our kids are just average, and we hope they will graduate from the local community college. Just let us know in a handwritten note that your family is well and doing something useful. — Your Cousins in Illinois

**Dear Cousins:** Thank you for expressing sentiments that are sure to be shared (and appreciated) by millions of readers. Including me.





Ann Landers  
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November 29, 1998

Dear Ann Landers:

I was shocked and disappointed by your response to Your Cousins in Illinois (Sunday, November 29, 1998). How can you, in good conscience, encourage people to not share their happy news in holiday letters? After all the holiday season is a time for not only receiving, but sharing and giving. I founded the Secret Society of Happy People, this past August with the mission to ask everyone, "Are You Happier Than You Admit You Are?" and encourage people to share their happy moments. We live in a popular culture that all too often makes people feel rotten for being happy and even worse for sharing it. Instead we reward complaining, celebrate bad news and wounds, and air dirty laundry with pride. However, with the exception of Jerry Springer and your recent column this message is delivered a lot less blantly.

"Your Cousin In Illinois," who wrote that letter is just one example of why people focus less and less on the things that they are happy about. I have personally received many holiday letters from friends and family. The letters include not only the good things that have happened to the family, but also some of the challenges the family faced – illnesses, job changes and moves to name a few. However, using the example of the letter you received and published in your column, if I knew someone who'd just bought a \$700,000 house, took a trip to Venice, who's husband surprised them with a new Lexus, or who's children were in Ivy League schools then I'd be happy for them. Not angry or jealous that it didn't happen to me.

Happiness is about recognizing the happy moments in your life, not about competing with others. The concept of not sharing happy news in lieu of bonding only on the wounds of life must end. Happy moments are good things that need to be shared more – not less. In light of this you owe an apology to the millions of people you made feel bad for wanting to share their happy news.

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