

September 27, 2016
(May Letter)

Dear Samantha,

I am way behind in my letter writing – and so much has happened since my last one that there is no problem for topics. It's your birthday today so a perfect time to be thinking about you and writing a letter. Happy Birthday!!

I'm now enjoying a train trip between fields of corn as I head on my way to Toronto. I have a conference there – with two presentations – so I felt obliged to go, in spite of the fact that JP, Lies, and their four little ones arrive from the Netherlands today. In fact, as my train passed the airport I received a text from Fran that she was in the international arrivals area and enjoying the crowds of people waiting to greet their loved ones.

I have always felt that the arrivals area of an airport, bus, or train station is one of the most wonderful places to be. It is full of happy people greeting other happy people. That was why I found it so delightful that the beginning and end of *Love Actually* was located in the arrivals area and both Fran and I were delighted when we discovered the CBC show entitled "Hello, Goodbye". It is set in the Toronto Airport where the main character speaks to people waiting to greet others. He is most impressive to us because he is such an expert interviewer.

Most interviewers on the public media are very poor interviewers. They are usually focused on entertainment value – not learning something about the person and their perceptions. This is often the case on talk shows where people are interviewed with the objective of finding something humorous, startling, or nasty about them.

In this show, the interviewer is very good. He asks questions about who they are coming to meet, some about their relationships with the person, and how they feel about their lives. I am particularly impressed how he asks very personal questions but in a respectful and supportive manner – never to embarrass or challenge them. It is a great skill – since most of us are not used to asking for details on emotionally-loaded issues. If you have a chance to see some episodes, check it out. Make sure you have some tissue nearby, though, since it is very often a tear-jerker!

As you can remember from our cross-Canada trip I have a big soft spot for train travel. I love the comfort of it – where I can be busy with reading, writing, or just sitting and watching as we speed across the country. It's also nice to meet other people along the way.

I remember some lovely times where Fran and I crossed the country on our own or with our kids. In those days, train travel was the "cheap" way to do it so it was the transport of choice for poor students. We would pack a box of food, snacks, and drinks that would sit nicely under our seat. If we were feeling particularly rich we would splurge for a meal or two in the dining car. On the trans-Canada train there was usually a dome car – with seats under glass – where one could hang out enjoying a 360 degree look at the countryside as the train sped through it. I think that one can only find those cars on the trains that go through the mountains, these days – and they are very expensive.

I also loved the nights. We would usually pay for a “section” on the train. This was a couple of facing seats where four people could comfortably sit with the option of a table between them. In the evening, the Porter would come by and transform the seats into two bunks – with curtains that covered them from the common aisle. I can remember lying in the bottom bunk with the stars in the sky, the prairie fields rushing by, and the click, click, click of the rail providing a soothing lullaby to the swaying of the train car. Once, I recall being extremely lucky to see the Northern Lights in the sky. The dome car was very full that night!

I found an old image of what the section berth looked like – during the day and at night.



Love,