

# CHANGING THE WAY WE COMMUNICATE

Lead Article



THE ART OF LETTER WRITING



A REVOLUTION IN COMMUNICATION

**Recent alumnae are unlikely to have ever seen a telegram, nor searched through a hard copy encyclopedia to do research, and the days of handwritten letters to friends and family are also becoming a distant memory. In this edition, we talk with graduates across the generations and examine how technology has evolved and changed the way we communicate, as well as opening up new possibilities for alumnae to connect.**

When the Academy's founding mother **Ursula Frayne** first arrived in Melbourne in **1857**, the journey from Ireland to Australia took more than three months and she would frequently wait more than six months for a reply to her requests sent to Dublin via boat. Handwritten letters were not only the mainstay of communicating across distances, but they were considered an 'art' that well-educated women were expected to cultivate. While the building of the Suez Canal in 1869 sped things up a little reducing travel time to about 40 days, it's a far cry from today's instant messaging, email and the myriad of 'Apps' such as Facebook and Twitter. For the avid Smartphone user with Skype and Viber readily accessible, it is difficult to imagine a life without a telephone or thinking twice before dialing overseas and interstate.

**Joanne Moore**, who was a boarder at the Academy in the Sixties recalls that "when setting off from home to boarding school in **1964** important items that were packed were a pen, writing pad, note cards, envelopes and stamps. Every Sunday evening after dinner, we all went to the study room and wrote letters home to our parents. After placing it in an envelope we then gave our letters to Sister to read. I think this was to make sure we didn't say anything to our parents that would "worry" them".

"We also waited eagerly for our weekly letter from home. The telephone was only to be used when it was very important. Phone calls were expensive and were only made on rare occasions".

Joanne, who is now Principal of Travancore School, which supports students undergoing treatment for mental illness, stays in touch

with her daughter daily via SMS and skype: "I follow her travels on Facebook and Instagram. We are in constant communication with each other. Daily I talk on my mobile phone, send emails, text, Skype family and friends but sadly rarely write a letter".

Similarly, **Clarissa Agudo**, who graduated in **1981** recalls that the advancements of telecommunications have changed dramatically over her lifetime: "We did not have a phone at home. My experience was solely with the use of Payphones. We had one directly outside our house and there was a well-worn path to it".

"The next advancement that I was privy to was the 'Brick', the first mobile phone that was introduced in Australia in the early 1980's. These were very popular with the tradesmen and real estate agents, as this was the first time that they could get calls whilst out on their jobs. It revolutionized the whole industry. Tradesmen could be a one-man band; they didn't have to have a receptionist to answer their calls. They were contactable anywhere subject to reception. This was the beginning of communications on the go that current generations take for granted today".

"The speed of change has been dramatic", says Clarissa, who now works in the telecommunications industry with Telstra and in fact received her first job offer with the company via telegram. Clarissa recalls how mobile phones very quickly evolved to small handheld devices but that "we are now heading back to bigger, mega powerful smart phones that do everything except wash the dishes. The current batch of smart phones with their speed, coverage and power have (changed) our ability to communicate digitally 24/7 anywhere and to anyone that has the required reception."

Clarissa's two boys both have had SMART phones since the age of 10 and are able to contact her anytime they want. "Smart phones, tablets and laptops have placed the world at our fingertips," she says, "my kids don't use the library anymore for research – straight onto the Internet and they have their



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While the evolution in technology has placed information at our fingertips and made life easier with online shopping and banking, instant communications and maps, Clarissa believes that there are some disadvantages: “Now we now don’t have a moment to ourselves, we are ruled by technology. We can’t sit and have a meal without a mobile going off or an email message tone or an SMS message tone ringing out for our immediate attention. Work follows you home, wakes you up in the morning. The younger generation doesn’t know how to communicate without technology. The art of conversation in its true defined form is becoming extinct by the day! We are now prisoners to technology and all its mediums”.

One alumnae graduate has found new opportunities amidst this rapid change and unrelenting pace. For **Maria Davis (Cataldo)** from the **Class of 2003**, social media is her daily bread and butter as the co-founder of Get Glossy, a social media marketing agency that manages the online presence of many well known Australian and international brands.

Maria says that “social media has provided us with a communication tool that has simply never existed in quite the same way before. We can show our support, like or dislike of something with a simple click of a button, or ramble at length without expecting a response. It can be an outlet to air happiness, frustration, share opinions... and you can be as passive or interactive as you like. It has allowed old friends to keep in touch without really having to do much, and has opened up true two-way communication between brands and consumers. It's incredibly powerful”.

Even though she only graduated a decade ago, Maria has still seen drastic changes in technology since her Academy days: ‘The Internet was essentially in its formative years while I was in VCE. No Google, no YouTube and definitely no Facebook. Phones weren't very smart, and broadband was only really starting to trickle through into homes. The pace of life has definitely sped up because of it”.

So while some alumnae fondly recall the weekly letter writing sessions with the Sisters without the distractions of internet and TV, nor the possibility of phoning home, recent graduates would be lost without their Smartphones. **Two 2011 graduates** report using technology for ‘absolutely everything’ while on a recent overseas study trip: “From email and data communication with my College and navigating the streets of New York with GPS to Facebook, YouTube, face time, texting and phone calls with family and friends, with the applications that are now available from the Internet talking and texting internationally can be free. All you needed was a local sim card, a venue with free Wi-Fi and time! The only thing (the Smartphone) didn’t do was ‘hugs” and the smell of gum trees when you were feeling homesick...maybe they should work on that!”

Social media can be a great way of staying in touch not just with family and friends but also Academy alumnae, as Maria Davis shares that by doing a couple of quick searches on Facebook, “you’ll be sure to find a huge AMI presence... I've managed to stay in touch with a huge chunk of my year level via Facebook. We may not catch up in person, but I feel more connected knowing that they're there”.

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**Clarissa Agudo** Class of 1981