

## A Semi-Posthumous Note from Maggie

My dear, dear readers in the future, who would mean the world to me if I were still alive in your human way:

I'm writing this note in advance, assuming that (like Ghandi and Jesus) I'll have been dead for many years before the world is truly grateful for all that I was in it, wringing every drop from the juice of life.

But eventually, someone will surely plume a book about me (thank you to whomever did it; I have no doubt you were enriched by *la expérience!*)

As the ways I improved the world will no doubt be timeless, you too could be a better person *by the time you finish reading this!* It may not seem possible so fast, but I 100% guarantee that it may be possible.

Of course, it's also possible that I *will* be fully appreciated in my own time in which case I'll obligate this note. But wait – then you couldn't be reading this, could you?

Isn't death funny that way?

- Maggie Jennings,  
December 8, 2039



*“Effluently  
Yours,  
Maggie”*

*The Bizarre  
Holiday Letters of  
Maggie Jennings*

By Milo Shapiro

based on a concept created by  
Jennifer Coburn

Effluently Yours, Maggie: The Bizarre Holiday Letters of Maggie Jennings

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Effluently Yours, Maggie: The Bizarre Holiday Letters of Maggie Jennings

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# *DEDICATION*

*To Jennifer Coburn*

*Whose twisted mind  
planted the seed for  
all things Maggie  
to have ever happened*

*and to*

*the Coburn/O'Neil  
Christmas group*

*who each year tolerate,  
laugh at,  
and groan through  
another chapter  
of Maggie's bizarre life*



## The Background and Bizarre History of Maggie Jennings

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Don't skip this chapter, okay? Seriously.

“Background” sounds kinda boring and I know I *personally* usually skip these parts, but knowing the peculiar and nutty story of Maggie's creation and development will add greatly to your enjoyment of this book. You may get more laughs at how she was created than anything else about her life!

So okay; you know those horrible Christmas letters you get from people where it's just a giant bragfest about how great everything is in their family? The ones that are *way* over the top? They generally make you feel one of two ways.

It's either:

- 1) “What's wrong with *my* life? Everything in *her* life sounds so great, while my kids just put glue in their hair *again*, and I've been dressing out of the laundry basket for three days because I haven't got time to put everything away?”

Or, as you're still reading the letter:

- 2) “God, I hate her.”

I use “her” because it does tend to go that way, though I've certainly gotten some icky holiday

letters from guys as well. But, for the most part, guys wouldn't think of doing a holiday letter. Or mailing cards. Or noticing it's Christmastime at all till someone says, "What are you getting Donna for Christmas?", yielding a reply like, "Shoot — when does *that* fall this year?"

But I digress. The point is we've all gotten those syrupy sweet letters that you know are hiding a world of pain. Come on, you know it. When the letter reads "We're so proud of Donald Jr.'s achievements in lacrosse," you know that what they *aren't* saying is that gym class is the only subject he's *not* failing.

Well, in 1996, my friend, novelist Jennifer Coburn, got yet another letter that had her reaching for Pepto-Bismol. She showed it to her co-worker, Amy, who agreed it had gone past the point of an annual catching-up and turned into an ego trip for the holidays. Jennifer and Amy, bored at work, decided just for fun to create a letter from a fictional woman whose Christmas tomes were so icky-perfect and garishly boastful that you just couldn't *stand* her by about the third paragraph — especially once she starts to get new-agey spiritual and poetic.

But then came the real fun.

"Hey, what if," Jennifer said, "we actually sent these out to people and left them wondering who the heck this person is? Who *is* this Maggie Jennings? And what if we personalized them slightly so that the recipient couldn't assume he or she had received the letter by mistake?"

The idea so tickled them that they sent out over a dozen copies of Maggie's letter and then just waited a bit.

I was one of the first to get that personally-addressed letter from Jennifer. My name is Milo and it has definitely not been changed to protect the innocent. (Oh, I may have been innocent at the *beginning* of this story, but far from it by the end!)

I still remember looking at the envelope and return address (fictional as it was) and thinking, "Who is this?" but, being bad at names, that happens to me now and then. I was sure whatever was *inside* would make it clear who she was...but it didn't. Instead, as you'll see in the 1996 chapter, it told me:

- ⇒ details of their life that were far too personal to be shared (how much her husband's salary increased);
- ⇒ about an event where she had invited 300 of their closest friends (but to which apparently *I* hadn't been invited);
- ⇒ far more about the Jennings children than anyone but a grandparent would care to hear.

It started out "Dear Milo" and this was 1996. Not many housewives were doing mail merges and databases then, so it seemed that this odd woman had very specifically written this to me...even asking me about my family in New York!

I called my parents to ask if they knew who she was. I asked a number of friends, co-workers, and

colleagues, coming up with different theories on where my paths could have crossed hers. No one knew, but they all found her letter pretty repulsive. It was driving me nuts.

Finally, just before Christmas, I had a number of friends over for a holiday gathering. Jennifer took me aside at one point and said to me, “Did you happen to receive a letter from a Maggie Jennings?” I nearly gasped in excitement that someone else must have received the letter as well. “Yes! Did you get it, too? Who is she? Do you know her?”

She pulled me into a corner and whispered, “Shhhh...I'm Maggie Jennings.” I was floored as she told me the story behind it. Before I could even think about whether I was upset with her, I had thought of about nine people upon whom I planned to play the same joke. And it was fun every time! By Christmas night (which I've annually spent with Jennifer for over fifteen years now), I had a bunch of great stories to share with her about the letter's continued use.

I'll save the details of how these escapades played out for the epilogue, except for one. You need to know a little about *that* story to know where this book came from.

Among others that year, I had sent the letter to my friend Laura and her husband, Dave. Laura's great, but we were not in constant contact and I'd totally forgotten to check back with her and let her know that the letter was a phony. When I finally remembered months later, she almost screamed.

“Are you kidding me?!? Dave and I had an outright argument over this one, each of us insisting that the other one must be the one who knew this nut job! He called his mom and we came up with all kinds of theories about how the other person must have met her.”

Just as I'd been with Jennifer, Laura was initially a bit frustrated with *me*, but that quickly passed when she got into the idea of taking the joke further. With Christmas approaching in 1997, we decided that Dave needed to receive another letter from Maggie that made it clearer that *he* was the one Maggie really knew rather than Laura.

Since Jennifer was pretty over the whole thing by now, I wrote that letter myself, allowing Maggie's kids to age a year and talking about the newer developments in her life. I made her a bit battier to add to the fun. That Christmas, I brought the letter to Jennifer's house. Everyone there had been a victim of or heard about Maggie's first letter and I surprised them all with the appearance of a sequel. It was a hit.

Jennifer said to me, “You realize you've started something. We're going to need to hear what happens to her every year now.”

For well over ten years now, Maggie has written her letters. Each Christmas, we read two: The previous year's to remind us where we left off in her life and the new one with her latest inane ramblings, unintended put-downs, and butchering of the English language.

Without question, each year Maggie grows more bizarre, dense, ignorant, illiterate, and occasionally outright offensive. In this age of political correctness, Maggie boldly expresses her poor attempts at acceptance, but proves time and again that she's just clueless.

The earlier years have come to look quite tame before Maggie started completely losing it in her own pursuit of "personal growth" – at the expense of all others. In putting together this book, there was a strong temptation to go back and change earlier parts to make them suit what Maggie has turned into. For instance, there's really no explanation as to why her use of the English language deteriorates so much over time, so I could have changed the earlier years. But it felt right to leave the letters just as they were sent each year, especially now that you know the story.

If you enjoy her icky opening letter and can think of a few people *you'd* love to play this joke on, I'm going to give you that opportunity! The original letter is going to be posted in the books section on the website [www.MiloShapiro.com](http://www.MiloShapiro.com) (which is also called [www.IMPROVentures.com](http://www.IMPROVentures.com)) for you to download. I hereby give you permission to download that letter and send it to others, with the following two restrictions:

- 1) The only things you may change are:
  - a. The return address to something more believable for your recipient
  - b. The name following "Dear" so that it's personalized

- c. The Year in the heading
  - d. The third to last line, right before “With warmth, love, and excitement” such that you mention something about them (like their kids or a hobby) that makes it clear that Maggie actually knows them
- 2) After you break the joke to them (best done by waiting a week and saying, “Say, did you get a Christmas letter from someone named Maggie Jennings?” and watching them react), please tell them about this book and encourage them to share the letter, too!

Finally, those in our circle have occasionally talked about what would become of Maggie, her family, and these letters. This is why the prologue is dated far, far into the future, allowing the book to be a look back from what becomes of the Jennings family.

Enjoy...and know that Maggie loves you more deeply than she can express...but that won't stop her from trying!

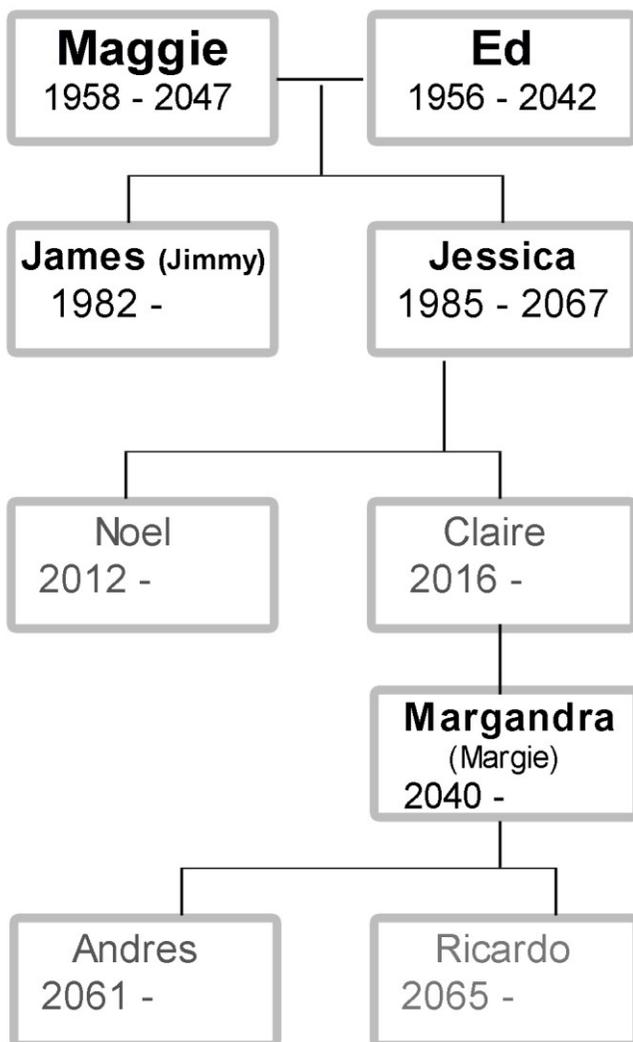


**Prologue Letter:  
From Maggie's Son,  
Jimmy**

**December 9, 2069**

# Jennings Family Tree

(characters featured in this book are bolded)



Prologue:  
A Much, Much Later Letter

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**Dec. 9, 2069**

James Jennings  
237 9<sup>th</sup> Ave.  
New York, NY 10009-88AF7

Margandra Sanchez  
7557 Glorita Pl.  
North San Diego, CA 92223-RT89A

Dear Margie,

Sorry I haven't found time to vid you recently; so much going on with the move. It's stranger than I can describe – getting used to the idea of not living here after calling this place home for so many years.

So I expect you're more than a little surprised to be getting an antique 20<sup>th</sup> century type *letter* from me! Well, it wasn't easy! I had to search in four webmarts to find a vendor who still sells *paper*! And don't tell me you've never seen paper before, smart-girl, because I still have a picture you drew for me when you were in primary back in 2046!

I wanted to put ink on paper for the first time in many, many years because it felt right to include a paper letter from me with the rest of this package. It contains a number of letters written by your

great-grandmother Maggie, whom you may not know you were partially named after.

Your mother liked the name Cassandra but my mother Maggie (short for Margaret) was so anxious for *someone* to name a child after her that Margandra was the compromise. You were too young to remember her trying to calling you Maggie, too, but you would only answer to Margie, which frustrated my mother immensely (and pleased your Grandma Jessica to no end).

I know you've heard countless stories about your great-grandmother and what a character she was. But it's hard to capture someone like Maggie second-hand. Well, finally, with these letters, I can let Maggie speak to you in her own words.

When Kaleb and I were going through boxes, I found a series of Christmas letters that my mom had sent out between 1996 and 2009! Actually I had first found them about ten years ago and wanted to share them with you then, but my sister wasn't sure she was ready for her granddaughter to read between the lines about some of the issues of her youth. With Jessica's passing (can't believe it's been two years now) and you being very much an adult now, I think there's more value in sharing them than risk of embarrassing Grandma Jessica's memory. And after all, this is a LONG time ago.

Read on...and enjoy a little peek into the woman who was the unconquerable Maggie Jennings. It may explain why your whole family is a bit nuts. She's the only mother I've ever had and I loved her madly...but it sure wasn't always easy.

With love,

Your Great-Uncle James

P.S.: Can't *wait* to see you and the boys  
at Christmas!



**1996**



The Jennings Jamboree  
2312 Elmdale Ave.  
Simi Valley, CA 93065

***Happy Holidays  
from the Jennings Family:  
Our 1996 Sharing of Joy***

Dear Beloved Friends,

We hope, as you look back and review the last year, you find memories filled with joy and love! And that 1997 takes you to new levels of cherished joy. As always, I apologize for the formality of the Christmas letter but it enables me to share more fully with *all* the people we care about rather than a sentence or two to each.

And when we reflect upon the year that has passed, we simply must reach out to those who have meant the most to us and thank them for their love and friendship. We cherish the times we have spent together and wish to share with you the highlights of our year so that you may know our joy. We do not wish to brag about how grand our life is, but rather we wish to shine the glorious rays of the skyful of happiness onto you as you have done for us over the past years. Life has been a harmonious dance of bliss for us this year and we simply must ask you all to waltz across the floor with us and share the meadow of glee.

First, Ed got a terrific new job as the director of finance and operations at a biotech firm which

manufactures medical research equipment. The job pays about \$25,000 more than he made at the Syntech division, which makes a huge difference now that, of course, college is just around the corner for Jimmy. We are tempted to add a swimming pool to the yard, but are resisting the temptation until we see how much tuition will cost.

And we mustn't forget about Jessica and her many lessons. Her flute sings magical prayers which need her lips only to seem as though she is a participant! One cannot help but be hypnotized by the exotic calls from her "silver wand". It won't be too long, of course, before we're going to be

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To order your copy of the book and see just how much looper darling Maggie gets with each passing year, order your copy of "Effluently Yours, Maggie – The Bizarre Holiday Letters of Maggie Jennings" at [www.IMPROVentures.com](http://www.IMPROVentures.com) .



## About The Author

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Milo Shapiro grew up in the suburban town of Syosset on Long Island. He graduated from the State University of New York at Albany with a B.S. in computer science. He then spent fifteen years doing fairly forgettable tasks on computers in New York and San Diego.

In his free time and on vacations from his full-time job as a programmer/project manager, he studied the art of *improvisation* across California and in Canada, developing a love for both the art form and for how valuable its lessons are *off* of the stage.

In 2000, he left a career in programming to start his own company, *IMPROVentures*, to pursue his goal: Sharing with the world the many ways we can improve both our business and personal skills through the fun and lessons of improvisation. In his teambuilding events and keynote programs, attendees get to play in his world of games as he brings out the lessons in them. More information at:

[www.IMPROVentures.com](http://www.IMPROVentures.com)

Milo is the author of two other books:

***Public Speaking: Get A's, Not Zzzzzz's!*** is a fun guide to improving your presentation skills and being better prepared for avoiding potential pitfalls.

***The Worst Days Make The BEST Stories*** is a collection of true stories, mostly humorous, from Milo's life and people he's known where there's a life lesson. It was once described as, "...what *Chicken Soup for the Soul*" might have looked like if Jerry Seinfeld had written it."

Milo is also impassioned by editing pictures on Photoshop. His work includes:

- ⇒ improving faces and bodies
- ⇒ restoring damaged photos
- ⇒ making creative alterations like removing people/things from pictures

Check out this clever, fun work at:

**[www.FreshenYourPhoto.com](http://www.FreshenYourPhoto.com)**

At the time of this publishing, he is hosting a podcast interview show called "Full Speech Ahead!" More at [www.FullSpeechAhead.com](http://www.FullSpeechAhead.com) .

Maggie Jennings herself still resides and resounds in Milo's head and, at least for now, both are still permitted to publicly walk the streets of San Diego, California.

## **NOVELS BY JENNIFER COBURN**

The originator of the Maggie Jennings concept

### ***The Wife of Reilly***

Prudence attends her college reunion and reconnects with Matt, the one who got away. After agreeing *this* time to marry him, Prudence has just one little problem: she'll now have to find a new wife for her *current*, perfectly-good husband to leave without guilt. Easy? Or a dizzying train wreck of continual catastrophe?

### ***Tales from the Crib***

Talk about bad timing! Lucy Klein is overjoyed to finally tell husband Jack that they are pregnant. But before she can tell him the big news, Jack has something to announce – he wants a divorce! Rather than split up, Lucy and Jack decide to try living together as friends. Co-parenting is grounds for a bumpy road for the frustrated Lucy.

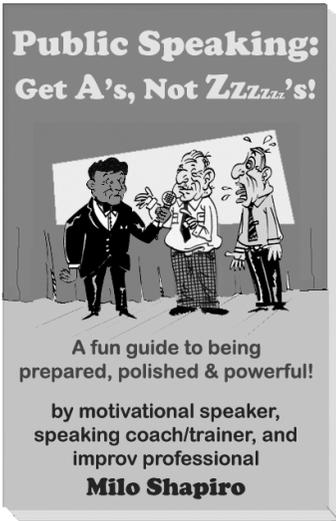
### ***Reinventing Mona***

In an effort to win the heart of her longtime crush, poor Mona turns to Mike, a self-proclaimed chauvinist columnist, to be her coach for the inside scoop on what men really want. Mona stages several public relations stunts designed to showcase herself as the height of fabulousness. Clever...or desperate?

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More info on these books and  
others by Jennifer at  
[www.JenniferCoburn.com](http://www.JenniferCoburn.com)

## ALSO BY MILO SHAPIRO

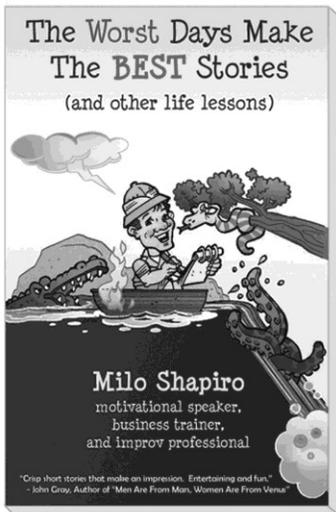


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***Men Are From Mars,  
Women Are From Venus***

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