

SPOON FED

Australian woman swallows spoon during funny dinner conversation

A 26-year-old woman in Sydney, Australia, got more than she bargained for during a dinner conversation on the weekend when she laughed so hard while eating spaghetti that she accidentally swallowed a teaspoon. She is understood to have gagged reflexively, but by then it was too late. An X-ray at Canterbury Hospital revealed the 15-centimetre implement stuck in her throat at the top of her stom-

ach, the *Sunday Telegraph* reported. Dr. Bernard Beldholm, an advanced trainee in general surgery, and Dr. Alice Lee, a gastroenterologist, eventually managed to remove the spoon manually, albeit "with great difficulty." While the woman was under general anaesthetic, they used snares to lasso either end of the spoon and pull it upright so it lined up with her esophagus. *Agence France-Presse*



The decline of the thank-you letter

NEW YEAR'S TRADITION

Digital generation needs prodding to give thanks

By IAIN HOLLINGSHEAD

New Year's Day might represent a bright new dawn of well-intentioned gym subscriptions, carrot juice teetotalism and shredded credit cards, but for many it's also a reminder of another unsolved hangover from last year: the dreaded Christmas thank-you letter.

"You should really send them in the first week of January," says Dylan Jones, editor of *GQ's* U.K. edition and author of *Mr. Jones's Rules for the Modern Man*. "The later you leave it, the more obsequious you have to be. After six months you should probably dedicate your next book to them. Or feign death."

According to the staff at De-brett's, a British publisher on etiquette, a thank-you letter should be "warm, witty and to the point." Not liking a present is "irrelevant." Recipients of money should "never mention the quantity."

Families, of course, set their own rules. Some use Twelfth Night as a convenient deadline. For others, it's the start of the school term. Amnesties can be invoked for those who have already been thanked in person. "We don't have precise figures," says a U.K. Post Office spokesman. "But I can tell you that a lot of thank-you letters are still sent at this time of year." Yet every festive season, irate newspaper correspondents bemoan the death of the thank-you letter.

Some resort to extreme tactics to provoke a response from ungrateful relatives. One offered his godchildren a cash prize for the best letter. Another always sends unsigned cheques so the recipient is forced to write back.

"It can be like getting blood out of a stone," says Annabelle Abbott, a mother of two from Newbury, England. "Edward [aged three] dictates his to me. I've just written, 'The transporter is cool and I really like it as well.'" Such training provides a lifelong lesson in the art of expressing gratitude for an unwanted pair of socks.

It is a lesson that Geoffrey Willans's 1950s comic creation, Nigel Molesworth, clearly hadn't assimilated when he penned his refreshingly honest Self-Adjusting Thank You Letter: "Dear aunt/uncle/penpal/stinker/clot, Thank you for your present. I have played with it constantly/ broken it already/ got three more like it."

Formal letter writing no longer has the same place on the school curriculum as in Molesworth's day. "It is still taught," says Syd Hill, headmaster of Elstree, a preparatory school in Berkshire. "I get some very nice letters from the boys. But e-mails and mobile phones mean there are now sadly fewer opportunities."

This electronic revolution appears to have affected young adults most. Children are coerced into writing by parents. Older people write as a matter of course. The rest of us inhabit a bizarre, virtual world in which we have to text or e-mail people to ask for their real address.

Online templates now exist for the true, lazy child of the 21st century. Many of us barely own a pen, let alone writing paper, stamps and address books.

It's a poor excuse, of course. Writing and receiving handwritten letters is an increasingly rare pleasure in a digital world. It might be a dying art, but it's not dead yet, particularly in some sections of society.

"Why don't Sloanes have group sex?" runs a recent joke. "Because of all the thank-you letters afterwards."

The Daily Telegraph



COURTESY 1867 CONFEDERATION LOG HOMES

Authentic log houses designed and built by a Bobcaygeon, Ont., company are part of an effort to spruce up the previously low-end tourist area of Newquay, England.

A gated community is set to transform a stretch of England's southwest coast into a Canadian-style resort

THE RUSTIC U.K.

By IAIN MARLOW

A seaside town in England, known for its rugged coastline and rough surf, is getting a Canadian-style makeover — a complete community of Canadian log homes with a Canadian-themed bar serving Canadian beer.

The plan to transport a little bit of Canada to England's southwest coast may seem a strange fit to those whose image of English seaside towns is more likely to feature fish-and-chips cuisine and "bucket-and-spade resorts," but the Canadian-themed Red Leaves project has attracted considerable support from tourist authorities on the Cornish coast.

The log houses, designed by a company in Bobcaygeon, Ont., are to be built just outside the resort town of Newquay, which has tried to rebrand itself as Britain's surf capital and is undergoing a bit of a gentrification. Jamie Oliver, the celebrity chef, recently opened a branch of his signature restaurant Fifteen in Newquay's east end of Watergate Bay.

Debbie Evans, of the Cornwall Association of Tourist Attractions, says the upscale Canadian-style log homes — which are expected to cost more than \$700,000 each — would fit in nicely with the area's upgrading, and would complement Cornwall's environment.

"That coast around Newquay is quite rugged and can be quite wild, so I think they would fit in very well," Ms. Evans said of the community planned by 1867 Confederation Log Homes. "They would be more attractive than caravans."

Cornwall's tourist associations are now refusing to promote low-end tourist accommodations — such as the stationary caravans, which are quite common around Newquay — that do not meet certain standards, and instead are pushing for more high-end accommodation.

The Canadian log-home development, which is to feature 91 single-family log homes, is to be built on top of an existing low-budget holiday resort.

Most of the Northern Ontario company's custom-built log homes in North America are either for primary use or retirement, but when the con-



COURTESY 1867 CONFEDERATION LOG HOMES

Unlike those constructed in Canada, the custom-built log cabins planned for Newquay will be almost exclusively second homes for the affluent.

struction contracts are international, such as at Red Leaves, they are usually built as second homes for that particular country's affluent elite.

"It's sort of rustic, but not real rustic," said Mike Murphy, president of 1867 Confederation Log Homes, which is providing designs and materials for the project.

Lee Gamble, marketing manager for the project's developer, said they will be marketing these log homes for their luxury, rather than as spartan and rustic country homes. The isolated community will be gated.

"We wanted a home that would fit into the Cornish landscape, very much a back-to-nature feel," Mr. Gamble said. "We're not marketing it as a small town Canadian village — it's the quality of Canadian homes."

Red Leaves will be the largest international project 1867 Confederation Log Homes has ever built, worth an estimated \$10-million to \$20-million to the company. Since all of the log homes in Cornwall are being built out of Canadian lumber, the company is sending all of the building materials over to England in giant shipping containers.

Louise Rousseau, a trade councillor for Canada's High Commission in London, England, assisted the Canadian company and the British developer in staging a signature ceremony there in early December. She said the High Commission is promoting Canada's expertise in energy-efficient, wood-frame housing in Britain.

The Canadian company has built its custom log homes all over the world. In Japan, they have built a ski resort called Cupid Valley in Niigata, a hot spa in the northern city of Hokkaido, and several single-family homes. They have also built custom log houses all over the United States and Germany.

Since these log homes are usually built by a country's elite, Mr. Murphy said, the company often builds in countries undergoing economic booms.

The homes themselves can be quite extravagant — multiple-storey log buildings with enormous decks and elaborate kitchens, essentially wood mansions, that put even higher-end dwellings to shame.

The Red Leaves project's log homes are set to go on sale this summer.

National Post