

**LETTERS FROM THE
INSIDE**
JOHN MARSDEN

February 11

Dear Tracey,

I don't know why I'm answering your ad, to be honest. It's not like I'm into pen pals, but it's a boring Sunday here, wet, everyone's out, and I thought it'd be something different.

Um, what do I say now? I know what I won't do, and that's tell you my star sign, favourite group, favourite food, all about my sister and brother and the usual junk. If that's what you want, don't bother answering this letter, OK? That's not me.

So, I'll just tell you whatever comes to mind, for example . . . um . . .

(1) The last time I cried was when I saw an old movie called *How Green Was My Valley*, in black and white at 2.30 in the morning last Monday, on Channel 7. I was a mess.

(2) Right now I've got \$78.31 in the bank, \$12.60 on me, my sister owes me \$5.00, and a friend at school, Rebecca Slater, owes me \$6.00. Total: \$101.91.

(3) I'd love to get a tat, where no-one can see it, and it'd be of a cane toad, 'cos they're so cute, but I don't have the guts to do it.

(4) I've got a dog, or at least there's a dog who lives here with us. I don't think you can own an animal. He hasn't got a name, which drives everyone crazy. It's not that I'm against names, although I don't like them much. It's more that I can't think of a name for him. So everyone keeps suggesting names, like Toby (my sister), Onion???

(my friend Cheryl), Mick (my father) and Idiot (my brother).

He's only about a year old. He was dumped near the RSPCA shelter and we got him from there. He's nearly all white, with a bit of black round the head. I think he's a mix of Border Collie and twenty other things.

I was going to call him Gilligan, 'cos he's my little buddy, but it doesn't sound right.

Do any dogs or animals live with you?

Well, I've told you four things about myself, four amazing facts. And a lot more besides. And I've written a long letter. Hope you answer, after all this work! Bye!

Mandy

PS: How come you have a post-office box? I thought they were for big companies.

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Feb 18

Dear Mandy,

Thanks for writing. You write so well, much better than me. I put the ad in for a joke, like a dare, and yours was the only good answer. There were three from guys, real perverts, pretty funny but disgusting. And a couple from little kids. It was exciting though, getting them all.

You asked if I have any pets, sorry, if any pets live with us. I have a horse, two dogs and a cat.

The horse is called Kizzy, the dogs are Dillon and Matt and the cat is Katie. So you see, they all have names. Why don't you like names?

You also asked why I gave a post-office box as the address. Well, that's my father's company. He owns a transport company, with lots of semi-trailers. They do mainly interstate work.

As for me, I'm in Year 10 but I hate school. The only good subject is Art. I play a lot of sport though, and I'm quite good at basketball and high jump. (I'm pretty tall, as you can guess.)

I don't know what else to tell you. I hope you keep writing though. It'd be fun writing letters to someone without ever meeting them. Prescott's a long way from Acacia Park. I've never been to Acacia Park or anywhere down that line. Does anyone read your letters or can I write anything I want?

Please write,

Tracey

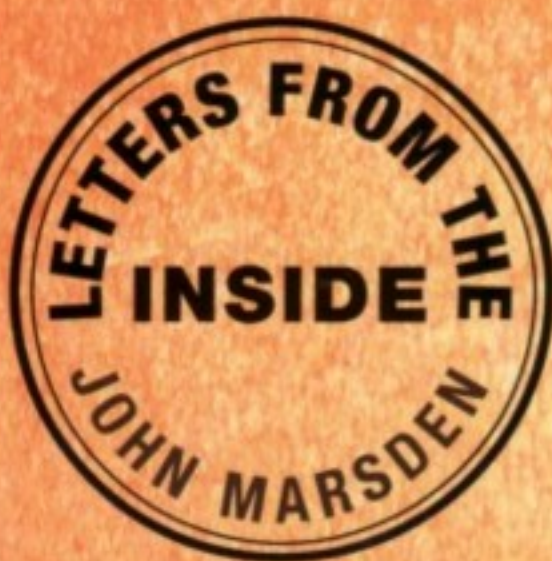


February 26

Dear Tracey,

What do you mean, does anybody read my letters? You must be joking. I'd nail them to the roll-a-door if they tried.

Well, I suppose my brother would if he could, or if he thought of it. It's OK though, he can hardly read as it is, so no problem.



Mandy and Tracey have never met, but they know everything about each other. Connected through a pen-pal ad, they exchange frequent letters, writing about boyfriends and siblings, music and friends. They trade stories about school and home. They confide their worries and hopes. It almost makes it easier, and more special, that they've never met—they can say whatever they want in the safety of their private world of letters.

But that private world may not be as safe as it seems. Can Mandy trust Tracey to be who she says she is? What secrets hide between the lines of their letters?

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