

**DELIVERANCE:
WRITINGS ON POSTAL RELATIONS**

DELIVER

FRANCE

**WRITINGS ON POSTAL RELATIONS
BY MARC FISCHER**

Soberscove Press | Chicago

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RETURN OF THE SENDER

For as long as I can remember, I have depended on the US Postal Service to bring new information and ideas into my world, and to help me share things with others. As a child, growing up in a suburb of Philadelphia, I read comic books and sent away for catalogs and offers in the advertisements. I bought back issues of *Famous Monsters* magazine through the mail. I wrote letters to baseball players to get their autographs. I collected stamps.

By the time I was a teenager, I became one of those people who writes letters to the editor. I was the consumer who sent a letter of complaint if I bought a record that was missing a lyric sheet or insert.

I started publishing an underground music fanzine when I was in high school and the

postal flood-gates opened wide. I averaged thirty or more pieces of mail a week, which included orders for copies of my zine, zines by other self-publishers sent in trade, records and demo tapes to review, and correspondence with friends from all over the world. Sometimes I received mail from people in prison, so I made my fanzine free to prisoners. I wound up on a “free resources for prisoners” list and started getting several hundred letters from prisoners for each issue that I published.

In the mid-to-late 1980s, I became fascinated with television evangelists and would write to ask them for free literature. Then I used their postage-paid return envelopes to send back pieces of trash. In the late 1990s, I started writing to religious tract publishers to request free publications. I loved getting cassettes from the evangelist Tony Alamo in the mail, featuring the sermons that his followers recorded over the phone while he was in prison for tax evasion.

Surprisingly, for many years I didn't have all that much interaction with post offices. I'd

throw a stamp on an envelope and my mom would make sure that our mailman collected it while I was at school. My dad snuck my zines into the mail pile at the company he worked for, or ran the envelopes through the postage machine on weekends when no one was around. I rarely had to walk into a post office or wait in line.

Between 1989 and 1995, I went to college for art in Pittsburgh and then to grad school for art in Chicago. Along with Brett Bloom, I have been a member of the artists' group Temporary Services since 1998; fellow longtime member Salem Collo-Julin left the group in July 2014. Since 2002, the group has rented a PO Box in Chicago on Western Avenue, chosen for its proximity to where all of us lived at the time. As a central part of our work, Temporary Services has made a lot of publications, and in 2008, we decided to formalize this practice and start Half Letter Press, a publishing imprint and web store. I handled most of the mail orders, particularly once the other members moved out of Chicago. Also during these years, I was

avidly buying and sometimes selling books and records online, so I was visiting the post office a lot.

For most of the 2000s, I was doing nearly all of my mailing from the Nancy B. Jefferson Post Office on Chicago's Near West Side. I liked all of the employees there and the women behind the counter were friendly and kind. I felt cared for and valued. We joked with each other and took interest in each other's lives. Once, on an off-day when Salem visited the post office to pick up Temporary Services' mail, one of the female workers gushed, "Where is Marc?! How is Marc doin'?! Say hi to Marc!" When I was dating my wife, Jen, I brought her along once and she was met with great interest and enthusiasm: "Is this the Missus?!" Employees came out from the back of the office to check out my then-girlfriend.

In 2009, I moved out of my apartment in East Humboldt Park. Jen and I moved to Logan Square, and our place was just three blocks from the Logan Square Post Office—named after Roberto Clemente—on California

Avenue. Half Letter Press had just started up, and though we kept our PO Box (now two separate PO Boxes) at the Jefferson office for receiving mail, I was absolutely thrilled to be living three blocks from the Logan Square Post Office. I was shipping a lot of packages and I welcomed the convenience.

The Logan Square Post Office was different than my beloved Nancy B. Jefferson branch. Both the employees and the customers were often visibly unhappy, the service was frequently poor, and the place felt tense. Rather than forfeit the ability to mail things close to home, I did what any normal person with a computer and access to social media would do: I kept going back there and then complained about it on the internet.

At times it felt like all I did on Facebook was use it to articulate what was wrong at the Logan Square Post Office. The various employees I encountered became regular characters in an ongoing drama that friends followed like a soap opera or old-timey radio play. This went on for three years until my wife and I moved

again, about two miles northwest, to Chicago's Avondale neighborhood, which has its own post office.

I like stories about everyday bureaucratic tedium. I love the compendium of interviews *Working*, by Studs Turkel, in which he talked to people about their jobs. I like reading online comments and letters to the editor as much as the articles that the writers are responding to. I read Yelp reviews of post offices and awful Chicago restaurants like Buffet Castle and Village Pizza, or the Milshire Hotel (now closed) on Milwaukee Avenue.

The US Postal Service is important. The cost of mailing letters and parcels remains a great value and the service is actually very reliable. Having had my own shitty customer service and retail jobs, I mostly sympathize with the workers and I do not want to see the US Postal Service privatized. I know that there are ways I could mail things that would not require me to wait in line, but usually if you know the best times to visit the post office, the lines really aren't that bad. I like seeing the diversity of

people who mail things and I often like interacting with the clerks. I don't want to see even the worst employees replaced with a machine.

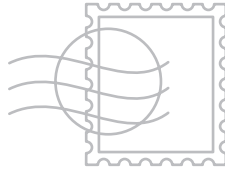
At the invitation of Julia Klein of Soberscove Press, I have mined the archives of my Facebook account and pulled my posts about post offices. In some cases other parts of the conversation, which followed my initial posts, were woven into each dated entry. In general, I tried to just leave things as they were written.

Looking back over these writings, I feel that they gradually become less angry. This may be a sign of submission, or at least resignation. There are bigger world problems to rage against than mediocre customer service. Maybe it's a sign of mellowing with age or of doing more personal, internal work to become a less angry person? I don't hate Margaret anymore.

Marc Fischer

June 2014





JANUARY 5, 2011

Just stormed out of the Logan Square Post Office in disgust for probably the seventh time since I moved to this neighborhood. Just when it appeared that maybe things might be improving...

Waited in line for 25 minutes to mail a flat-rate International Priority envelope. Was told that I needed a different customs form because I put a piece of clear tape across the seal to make sure the shitty envelope stayed closed. Filled out the other customs form, took it back to the counter and suddenly the price jumped from \$13.95 to \$33.90. Was told that because I had “modified” the envelope to close it, it had to be rung up at this other rate. I’ve never heard such nonsense before. I’ll be

mailing the package tomorrow from a different post office.

It also goes without saying the worker I took the package to was all ready to mail it until her coworker, who is never able to focus on her own work, pointed out the violating piece of clear tape.

I've taped a thousand of these envelopes closed in order to actually try to approach their supposed 4 lb. weight limit. Never heard this crap before.

Now that I'm 40, that's old enough to do the angry old man shaking his fist in disgust at the injustice of poor customer service, right?

Also, my wife Jen went in there the other day and they tried to sell her some extra service she probably didn't need. She decided to add the service, and then the worker chastised her for not having the form already filled out! You can't win with these fucking people.

The only people I like in that shithole are the lady with the extremely artistic eyebrows, who is smart enough to know that she works at the epicenter of complete incompetence, and the

more gentle woman who talks to herself constantly and is pretty much certainly mentally ill, but in a harmless and lovely sort of way.

Also, I've noticed that whenever someone comes in that has never mailed a package before in their life—particularly if they speak little English and are mailing something overseas—the workers always start by offering the most expensive service first. Sometimes it is only when people are able to ask if there is a cheaper way that they will offer something else. Really unethical.

JANUARY 5, 2011

When I'm at my beloved PO down by Monroe, on Western, other people are losing their shit in line, and I'm consoling them by saying, in a very soothing voice: "You don't know how good this is, my son. You've never been to Logan Square."

FEBRUARY 15, 2011

Discovered under a pile of melting snow on our porch—Oh look! A package for Jen that was supposedly delivered/buried in snow over two

weeks ago! Encrusted with ice and thoroughly soaked (thankfully the item inside was packed in a Ziplock bag). Does a package really count as “delivered” when you fail to check to see if it might be buried under a snow mound? Oh, and how about that “Please Don’t Leave Packages” note on our door? Thanks for nothing again Logan Square Post Office!

I kept the box in the freezer (minus the contents) all day for Jen while she was at work. That way if she wanted to bring it to the post office to show them how stupid some of their carriers are, which she did, she’d have it just as we found it—frosted topping intact.

MARCH 2, 2011

I actually made the most unpleasant and sometimes downright hateful clerk at the Logan Square Post Office smile, and even laugh, while gently pointing out that she made a mistake that would have saved me money but fucked up my shipment. You have no idea what an accomplishment it was to charm this person in any way.

She was going to charge me the medium box rate for a large box being sent Global Priority. I told her, “As much as I would love to pay about \$13.00 less, I’m more concerned about the shipment going through.”

See, if the grocery store sells you a large pizza for the price of a medium, they don’t come to your house when they figure out their mistake and take your pizza out of the oven until you pay the difference. As the clerk confirmed, the post office would not have shipped the box at the lower rate. They would have delayed it until someone paid—either me, or the recipient. As with all USPS-related problems, their mistake becomes YOUR problem, never theirs.

JUNE 8, 2011

It’s pretty much a given that if I go on vacation for 10 days and have my mail held, the upstairs neighbors will get to have their mail held as well, whether they want it held or not. Because that’s just how the Logan Square Post Office rolls!

JUNE 15, 2011

Today's mail is so wet that I'm contemplating starting paper maché projects.

AUGUST 15, 2011

The UPS Store on California at Armitage has policies and practices that are so unconscionable that they make me adore the Logan Square Post Office by comparison.

SEPTEMBER 7, 2011

Gradually memorizing every detail of the Logan Square Post Office. The tattoo on Anton's forearm; the blonde wig of one employee and the details of her glasses; the sound that the self-service box for packages makes when it swings closed; the sign above the slot for stamped letters; the design of the wheelchair of the homeless man outside who asks for change. . . .

I should mention that this project is simply a supplement to my 10+ year project of memorizing every detail of the Nancy B. Jefferson Post Office on Western Ave:

The slamming down sound that the vertically sliding bullet-proof glass window makes when a customer shuts it too fast after placing their package in the space between the interior and exterior window; the plant on the window sill that always looks like it's on the verge of dying; the way that Anthony slumps in his chair; the friendly way that I'm greeted by India and Angie; the various quirks of the parking lot; the additional parking lot with hundreds of rubber bands on the ground—left by various mail carriers; the beautifully sculpted form of John's afro; the light that shines through from the other side of a PO Box when you pull open the little door; the smell of the severely mentally ill homeless woman that the kind staff allows to loiter in the building on cold, rainy, or stifling hot days.

Eventually we'll have to interrogate the backhanded compliment of having a post office named in your honor. At least one person brings this up in the Yelp discussion of the Nancy B. Jefferson Post Office on Western Ave.

Is there a single Chicago post office that perfectly corresponds to the life and

accomplishments of the person it is named for? Perhaps there should be a John Burge Post Office for the facility that most violently mishandles parcels?

SEPTEMBER 13, 2011

I'm tempted to start a blog solely devoted to my negative experiences at the Logan Square Post Office. I mean, in addition to my posts on Facebook.

I must say, they continue to surprise me with their nonsense. Today I was told that I need to fill out who my parcel is going to on a delivery confirmation form. Now keep in mind, this section of the form is separated from the part that is stuck to your package, and handed back to you. It is solely for you to keep track of whose package you got delivery confirmation for.

I would also like to issue a strong warning to anyone who sends out books or records or other media using Media Mail from the Logan Square PO.

Pam (the woman with the striking blonde wig and stylin' glasses) will always ask you,

“Does this package contain a note or letter?” I am 99.9 percent certain that saying “Yes” will disqualify you from being able to use Media Mail. She is most definitely trying to trick you into having to pay for a more expensive service because I’m guessing Media Mail can’t include personal correspondence. Simply say: “No, just books.”

DON’T say, “Well, I always include a nice little note thanking people for their order.” NO YOU DON’T. IT’S JUST A BOOK AND A BORING INVOICE AND NOTHING FRIENDLY EVER.

SEPTEMBER 13, 2011

From Yelp: “. . . in between each customer they disappear for five minutes (usually to return chewing on food), then they walk around chatting to the other counter staff and then after another five minutes they graciously deem to serve you.”

Mailed another three orders this morning without incident.

I feel that Yolanda and I have reached a certain level of understanding. I recognize that

she is one of the more efficient and intelligent employees. She understands that I mail too many things to be treated like an enemy of the USPS and she has forgiven me for at least one incident where I have completely lost my shit, used “fucking” as an adjective, and left the building in a huff.

One piece of constructive criticism I would offer to Yolanda is to try to avoid interjecting to correct or challenge a procedure when another clerk is taking care of a customer. Of course, it’s not all that common that there is more than one clerk working at any given time, however.

SEPTEMBER 17, 2011

The spiritual and emotional difference between the Logan Square Post Office and the Nancy B. Jefferson Post Office on Western Ave. was established this morning in the parking lot of the Jefferson PO when I sneezed loudly and a big exuberant male postal worker bellowed, “God Bless You! And GOD BLESS AMERICA! Look at that flag wavin’ (points to the flag-pole) . . . that’s the way it SHOULD be wavin’!”

SEPTEMBER 27, 2011

Feeling slightly conflicted about an upcoming Rally to Save the US Postal Service. Of course I believe strongly that we should NOT privatize this service, but my sign in support of USPS might have to include a few caveats about certain employees at the Logan Square Post Office.

I want better working conditions and greater overall support for all postal workers. Then my criticisms will have more overall weight because there will be no excuse for their rudeness and incompetence.

USPS just announced that they will try to drum up excitement by doing away with their long held mandate that stamps can only commemorate dead people. They will start issuing stamps that feature important living people and they are taking suggestions. Does this mean that I'll finally be able to purchase a Frederick Wiseman stamp?

OCTOBER 11, 2011

This morning I had the satisfaction of watching another customer at the Logan Square

Post Office calmly but strongly challenging Margaret on her incessant, and always unnecessary, rudeness and castigating tone. I almost offered the guy a high five on his way out of the building. We are all in this together. Occupy the Logan Square Post Office!

Of course of the three people that could have helped me, I got to be “helped” by Margaret. As always, I wished Margaret a “Good morning.” I try so hard. I really do.

OCTOBER 28, 2011

There is a storefront church just several blocks from where I live that is advertising a Hell House this Halloween. So tempting! Will I learn about the horrors of the endless war in Afghanistan? Or the evils of the CPD’s history of torture? Also, the sign promises “Hell’s Reality” which I keep misreading as “Hell’s Realty.”

Everyone knows, from my countless posts, that the real Hell House in this neighborhood is the Logan Square Post Office.

Margaret from the Logan Square Post Office is surely the greeter at Hell’s Reality. And

while people line up around the corner waiting impatiently to get in and see Teenage Jesus being crucified alongside a doll hanging from a string, Yolanda is standing over her shoulder, helping her figure out how to ring up each \$2.00 entry transaction, while simultaneously criticizing people for not filling out the proper form to verify that they are over the age of 13.

NOVEMBER 17, 2011

The DMV experience today made the Logan Square Post Office look like one of those idyllic rainbow utopias that you can only find in a Jehovah's Witness magazine. And my new license photo is atrocious. Anything else I could have done today would have been more meaningful.

JANUARY 16, 2012

After merely 45 days, a Global Priority envelope that I sent from the Logan Square Post Office has just arrived in Berlin. Unfuckingbelievable. (To be fair, it spent most of that time languishing in Jamaica, NY.)

No package, no cry.

JANUARY 29, 2012

I haven't seen Margaret working at the Logan Square Post Office since the beginning of the New Year. While I do not wish unemployment on anyone, it seems that my prayers just may have been answered by a higher postal power.

It took a lot of restraint for me not to ask if Margaret was still working the last time I went to that PO.

There is still one other consistently rude person, but she doesn't seem to be on the register as much as Margaret was. I remain delighted with our new mailman, though I sort of miss William shouting profanity into his cell phone as he walked past the building, for this was the indication that we were about fifteen seconds away from getting our mail.

I do not know the new woman's name but she is younger and has more of a propensity for playing with her phone and handling things in an aggressive manner. Recognizable for the way that she shouts "NEXT!" as though she cannot wait to be finished serving you and hopes you never come back.

If only you could see the way I am greeted when I visit the Nancy Jefferson USPS branch where Temporary Services and Half Letter Press have our PO Boxes. You would not believe the contrast. Everyone warmly says, “Hello,” and asks how I’m doing, even if they aren’t assisting me. They ask how my wife Jen is doing, too. The men who work at the Logan Square Post Office are all really nice. Anton, with his “Spread Love” button, is perfectly charming. Larry is an absolute delight.

FEBRUARY 9, 2012

Logan Square Post Office News Alert: Margaret has returned. A huge setback for people who mail things in 60647. However, there was a magical ray of light that shone across the line to the door this evening: my dear friend Angie from the Nancy Jefferson PO was behind the counter for a special guest appearance! When I asked if she was being punished, she quietly replied: “I’m beginning to think so.” Stay strong, Angie!

I was tempted to hold to my pledge for 2012 that if Margaret was working, I would simply



UNITED STATES POST OFFICE



BRANCH OFFICE OF THE POST OFFICE
CINCINNATI, OHIO

WATERHILL

MEDJILL





leave, no matter how short the line was. I decided to roll the dice and hope I'd get Angie, or Yolanda, if necessary. I got lucky.

A new revelation from Yelp: "One woman who 'works' there keeps a Bluetooth headset hidden under her hair and takes personal calls in the middle of dealing with customers."

FEBRUARY 14, 2012

If you have to mail something in Logan Square you might get lucky. I confirmed yesterday that Angie, a formidable talent and exceedingly friendly postal clerk from the Nancy B. Jefferson Post Office has been temporarily transferred to help show 'em how it's done at the Logan Square Post Office. One neighborhood's loss is another 'hood's gain. You will recognize Angie by her polite demeanor and lack of desire to interrogate you about why you are using Media Mail.

APRIL 4, 2012

My new least favorite person at the Logan Square Post Office is not an employee, but a

fellow customer. This little shit, who is a regular, will just gab and gab to Yolanda, oblivious of the line—WHICH HE HAS JUST WAITED IN—that stretches to the door. He will talk endlessly about things like cell phone service plans, while she rings up his many packages at an absolute crawl. Man, I hate this fucker.

My experience today was not entirely negative. Manny, my beloved old mailman from Humboldt Park, was also waiting in line. Strange that a mailman would need to wait in line to buy stamps, but maybe he wanted to chat with Yolanda, too?

JUNE 5, 2012

For friends who have been following my regular dispatches regarding the Logan Square Post Office, I have good news and bad news. The good (or bad) news is that in a couple months, my days of regularly mailing things from that direct portal to hell will come to an end because I'll be moving. The potentially bad (or good) news is that I'll be closer to the Irving Park Post Office, which has Yelp reviews

that are every bit as negative as Logan Square's. Fingers crossed for a smooth postal transition. Temporary Services and Half Letter Press will retain our boxes at the Nancy B. Jefferson station where I have always been treated with complete love and respect.

JUNE 8, 2012

For today's tale from the Logan Square Post Office, a guy that came in slinging a Hefty bag of packages over his shoulder was met with a clerk aggressively shaking her head "No." How dare the customer want to give the PO a lot of business! She reluctantly helped him, but was obviously displeased. On the bright side, I had a delightful conversation with Pam, who told me about a customer that paid over \$300.00 to send shit like bags of pretzels to Russia. He used Express Mail after Pam suggested he just use the cheaper Priority rate, only to have the package held up in New York customs for two months.

Pretzels to Russia is the album Kraftwerk intended to release after *Tour de France* but the

masters must have been lost after they were shipped from the Logan Square Post Office.

JULY 2, 2012

Goodbye Logan Square Post Office. You've been better lately but today you were back to your old tricks. A line to the door and a broken postage machine. I grabbed a Priority address sticker, wrote "Out of Order as usual," slapped it on the glass, and proceeded over to the Daniel J. Doffyn Post Office on Kedzie. Oh Daniel, you had almost no shipping supplies, but you also had no lines, three people working the counter, a courteous gentleman that served me, a working postage machine, and stellar air conditioning. Our first date was a success!

The Avondale post office also has an art deco sculpture of Hermes, or is it Mercury? The Messenger God. It's a shame that the Logan Square Post Office doesn't have a statue of Margaret—the Goddess of Senseless Cruelty and Incompetence.

Three years of going to Logan Square is a pretty long relationship. Still, there are so

many unanswered questions: What did they do with Angie? Was Margaret fired or is she being hidden away in some kind of Postal Protection Program? Did they really think that the one day they tried to do a customer appreciation event with free coffee, donuts, and cookies was going to change people's minds about how fucked up that place usually is?

Maybe my complaints about the Logan Square Post Office can be issued as a series of small print commemorative stamps?

Oh, and one observation from the Nancy Jefferson Post Office the other week. I saw a man, possibly twenty-years-old, mail a letter for what must have been the first time in his life. He asked where to place the stamp—then wound up being unable to buy a stamp because he only had a \$20 bill and they had just opened and couldn't make change. But it was a beautiful thing. It's never too late to mail something via USPS!

AUGUST 25, 2012

I decided to try the Ravenswood Post Office yesterday, where I encountered one of the

strangest postal workers. Not bad, not incompetent, just fucking weird! I asked how she was doing and in this high-pitch, cackling voice she said, “My heart is beating, so I might be okay right? Because I can feel my heart beat. What about you? How are you doing?” I said “Not too bad.” She asks, “Your heart is beating?” “Yes.” “That’s good, because if your heart wasn’t beating, YOU WOULD DIE!! Hahahaha.”

I would go back to this post office. I greatly prefer competent and weird service to incompetent service with a shitty attitude (What’s up, Margaret?). At one of the other counters, the clerk was having a very drawn out conversation about her attempts to catch a foul ball at a baseball game she recently attended, and the decision of whether to try for a ball hit by “someone who wasn’t anybody important” or whether to let one of the kids in the stands go for it.

OCTOBER 2, 2012

If you are interested in having a conversation about comic books, American sexual mores,

prostitution in Germany and France, military service, Denmark, Israel, racism, how to avoid getting annoyed about the small things, the excellence of the tamale place up the street, and a little bit from the Bible on the side, John at the Avondale Post Office can do all of these things, while simultaneously mailing your packages in a friendly and efficient manner. This dude is absolutely a postal sensation.

JANUARY 10, 2013

Feeling like I've reached a new level of appreciation at the Avondale Post Office. John has requested that I bring him back just one postcard from any countries I visit when I travel. Not sure what I'll choose for him but I'll try to pick an image that doesn't include a large group of unhappy and impatient people waiting in line.

FEBRUARY 15, 2013

I'm working on taxes and the pile of receipts does not lie: 98 trips to the post office just for mailing packages in 2012. More love hours [spent waiting in line] than can ever be repaid.

MARCH 28, 2013

Devastating USPS news this morning in Chicago. I learned that John, the Avondale Post Office's most valuable player, has been transferred to another team. This leaves only the absolute slowest workers I have ever seen. Logan Square Post Office, I'm gonna be missing you.

MAY 19, 2013

Since the post office isn't capturing my passion as much lately, I'm starting to feel inclined to start a blog about the assholes across the alley. After their party last night, maybe something like a new Tumblr called:

Lifestyles of the Dumb and Inconsiderate?
Drunk Men Pissing in Public and the
Women and Children That They Force to
Clean Up After Them the Next Morning?
Field Recordings of Urination?
Summer Conversations with 911 Operators?

MAY 20, 2013

Got to see a total customer meltdown at the

Avondale Post Office this morning. A woman was absolutely furious with Reta and the situation escalated when the customer wanted a phone number to complain and Reta refused to give her one. I've gotten into it with Reta myself on one occasion, but when a customer pulls out that old chestnut, "I pay my taxes; you work for me," and starts wielding their iPhone like it's some kind of weapon, it's just kind of embarrassing. The Avondale Post Office absolutely has gone to shit since they transferred John though. I'm actually starting to miss the Logan Square PO lately. It's generally not service with a smile but at least Yolanda has style and knows what she's doing.

Reta was very nice to me yesterday. As a regular, I need to get on her good side and stay there.

I'm sorry there haven't been more post office updates lately. Now that the weather is warmer, all of the intensity has shifted to the battle with the neighbors across the alley. A house a couple doors up is gearing up for a party tonight so I might have some really lovely photos of men pissing in the alley tomorrow. Because nothing

honors our fallen troops quite like lots of public urination in full view of children.

MAY 28, 2013

Another tense customer vs. Reta vs. other customer showdown at the Avondale Post Office when a man tried to return the Love Ribbon stamps he was sold because he didn't like the design. Customer tells Reta, "This is the worst service," to which she immediately responds, "Well, you have the worst attitude." "I'm a customer," he insists, and Reta fires back, "And the customer isn't always right." Another person in line gets involved, taking Reta's side and telling the man that his nine-year-old behaves better.

When it was my turn to be helped and I needed a stamp for a letter I was mailing, I tell Reta: "Oh, not that design!" when she goes for the Love Ribbon. Once she realized I was messing she was pretty amused. "OH! You're jerkin' me! You're jerkin'." I'm beginning to appreciate Reta. She's far from perfect, but is about the best the Avondale Post Office has right now.

SEPTEMBER 18, 2013

I haven't been to the Logan Square Post Office in a while so I thought I'd quickly check in on Yelp to see how they are doing. From this description, it sounds like Pam is no longer working there. That's too bad. She could deliver effective and enjoyably sassy customer service about once every three months, when she wasn't too busy grilling you to determine if you were using Media Mail service in a way that might be fraudulent:

“Update: I think the tall skinny woman with the really short golden hair on top has either been transferred, fired, or she quit. Regardless, she has not been there since February as far as I can tell. I've gone from one star to two.”

OCTOBER 2, 2013

One of my professors in grad school once told me that being an artist is only about 50 percent studio work and the rest of the time is spent dealing with administrative stuff.

I don't have the same ideas about what a studio is that I had 20 years ago, but lately

I'm thinking he was being pretty conservative. It's probably 95 percent administrative stuff. That is why it's vitally important to make every trip to the post office as creatively rewarding as possible.

NOVEMBER 21, 2013

A friend from Canada is visiting Chicago this week and I am touched that because of my writing, he is going to try to make a point to visit the Logan Square Post Office while he is here.

He should definitely try to mail something back to Canada. The clerks at the Logan Square Post Office will love helping him with the customs form, or criticizing the way he has filled it out.

DECEMBER 3, 2013

Today for a change of pace while up north, I visited the exceptionally grandiose Evanston Post Office. I was sending a box to Baltimore and the clerk handed me a customs form. I asked, "Why do I need to fill this out? This package

is domestic.” Look of complete confusion. I pointed to the address again and a moment later, upon reconsidering my clearly handwritten “FRAGILE” marking, the clerk exclaimed, “Oh! I thought it said FRANCE!”

Be patient with the postal workers up there. They seem to be having a tough time of it. Also, they do the Media Mail interrogation bit over there (“It doesn’t have a letter inside?” “No. Just. Books.”)

DECEMBER 3, 2013

In our increasingly boring, digital, and privatized world, it is important to have visceral experiences of waiting in line, commiserating with fellow travelers.

DECEMBER 6, 2013

Media Mail is possibly the last real bargain in the United States of America. When people illegally come to this country in search of the American Dream, it is the ability to mail a book from one side of America to the other for \$2.53 that they are pursuing. And it is the experience

of distrust when they are asked if their package contains anything other than a book—such as a personal letter that might disqualify the use of Media Mail—that they will receive. But that too, is America.

DECEMBER 6, 2013

An often forgotten moment from Claes Oldenberg's 1961 "I Am For . . ." statement can be found at the end of this excerpt:

I am for an art that is political-erotic-mystical, that does something other than sit on its ass in a museum. I am for an art that grows up not knowing it is art at all, an art given the chance of having a starting point of zero. I am for an art that embroils itself with the everyday crap and still comes out on top. I am for an art that can be shipped via Media Mail.

Next time someone asks me what my artistic medium is, I'm just going to say that I work in Media Mail.

DECEMBER 9, 2013

There was a kind of snow day pep rally happening behind the scenes over the back room intercom at the Avondale Post Office this morning. It was a combination: “It’s wet out there, bring an extra pair of socks so your feet don’t get cold,” and “If people didn’t shovel their steps you don’t have to deliver their mail. It’s too dangerous and they should have done it. When they don’t get their mail, they’ll learn.”

DECEMBER 14, 2013

Checking in with Air Berlin in Copenhagen this morning was like visiting the Logan Square Post Office in another country. A flustered clerk holding a different phone handset up to each ear is such a cliché of shit going wrong that it should be outlined as a forbidden behavior in the employee handbook. It is the airline equivalent of a cop eating a donut in public.

DECEMBER 24, 2013

I have to go to the post office this morning. Today is usually the day when I like to excitedly

ask the worker behind the counter, “Will it arrive in time for Christmas?!” Once they realize I’m just messing with them, this joke usually goes over well.

JANUARY 1, 2014

The streets are so bad right now, it’s as though the Mayor has entrusted the Logan Square Post Office with the snow removal contract.

JANUARY 7, 2014

It has been a while but today I stopped by the Logan Square Post Office to see what is new for 2014. Okay, mostly I just needed stamps, but I hadn’t been there in a while and was curious about the current state of things.

Yolanda with the eyebrows was processing passports. She’s really good at everything, so that was lucky for the people who needed that service. The biggest change is that they cleaned all of the dead bugs out of the light fixtures! If you’ve never been there, you have no idea how huge this is. Some of those bugs fought in World War II!

The other big change is that they appear to have permanently rolled the solid metal gate down over the three north cash registers. Sales displays for gift shipping boxes and other supplies now completely block those counters. This leaves four other registers to the east but that feeling of open space and possibility is gone—replaced with a cold wall of steel nothing.

When it was my turn in line, I told the clerk, “You know, even though I know that this station has never actually had seven people working the counter at the same time, it’s sad that they pulled that gate down. Because before, at least we could dream.” She kind of smiled but had no comment because she probably knows that if she said anything I’d just go and post about it on Facebook.

JANUARY 7, 2014

I really should have said before that the Logan Square Post Office is named after Roberto Clemente but I guess I tend to block this out. The one thing that post office and Roberto Clemente have in common is that if you

gave everyone waiting in line a baseball bat, they'd definitely use it to smash the shit out of something.

JANUARY 27, 2014

I just used the full power of my Master of Fine Arts degree to help my mom, over the phone, figure out how to attach a scan of a chicken wings recipe to an email to her hairdresser. And with that, I'm off to the Logan Square Post Office with two big bags of packages in -2 degree weather. What did YOU do today?

FEBRUARY 19, 2014

Today I visited the Lakeview Post Office for the first time. What a great post office this is! Named for the folk musician Steve Goodman, there is a nice display of Goodman ephemera that explains who he is. The post office also has an absolutely fantastic 1930s WPA mural. When I reached the counter, where I was helped by a pleasant young employee, I fully expressed my enthusiasm: "This is a great post

office! I've never been here before. You've got a fantastic WPA mural from back when the government invested in this country's infrastructure and gave opportunities to artists!" He told me that when he first started working at this office, he would stare endlessly at the mural and notice all of the details. I wish I lived closer to Lakeview, if only to mail everything from this place. It is a treasure.

FEBRUARY 22, 2014

I'm forever searching for that post office sweet spot—the time right in between “Oh shit, the post office just opened everyone go mail something and pick up packages!” and “The line is shorter but all of the workers have started going on lunch breaks.” I'm thinking that if I can arrive at 10:50 AM this morning, I might just nail it.

MARCH 11, 2014

Where one door closes, another opens at the Avondale Post Office. Reta has been transferred all the way down to Atlanta! I will miss Reta's

“the customer isn’t always right” style. She was tough but efficient, and one of the good ones. New on the scene is Toni. Toni appears to have a solid command of the various services offered by USPS, knows her shipping forms, and maintains a buoyant mood throughout the work day. She does do that weird thing though where people talk through every stage of the transaction, but it’s all cool because she knows what she’s doing.

MARCH 17, 2014

It’s getting increasingly difficult to find fault with the Logan Square Post Office. Today there were four people working the counters (including Yolonda who has a really great short hair-style now).

I was helped by a new employee who spoke with a wonderful auctioneer-style rapidity as she blasted through the endless litany of tedious shit that postal workers are forced to recite, such as: “youneedanystampsmoneyorderstrackinginsurancepoboxesorotherserviceswithyourpurchasethisafternoon?”

She has also mastered the ability to reach over and click the “No” button herself, without even looking at the touch screen, in order to barrel past a new and inconvenient step where the customer has to manually confirm that their package does not contain anything liquid, fragile, or potentially hazardous.

Shockingly, the Logan Square Post Office has entered, if not the twenty-first century, at least the twentieth century by adding new light-up numbers over each register counter, as well as a little electronic beeping sound that chimes when the next postal worker is ready to help you. With the rapid gentrification of Logan Square, this place is going to start selling locally grown craft brew artisanal commemoratives in no time.

APRIL 18, 2014

My transmissions from the Avondale Post Office have generally had a positive tone lately. Lines have been short. Spirits have been elevated. Things have been good.

Today was a different experience, however. I

got the slowest employee, the one who is easily distracted and must always participate in all of her coworkers' transactions, offering her valuable corrections and insights. Today she was further impaired by ankle pain, which appeared to have made it very hard to type. The ankle bone is connected to the finger bone, after all.

Today is also the first day—not of the rest of your life—but of a new procedure at the USPS. Workers must now type in not just the zip code for each package, but the street number and the first letter of the street name, and confirm that there is a match. Shockingly enough, some addresses are not in the system, which resulted in a package that the clerk refused to accept. So assuming the address is correct (I checked and I did copy it accurately from the order), I can either put stamps on this thing and throw it in a mailbox without taking it to the counter, or I can crowdsource this fucker and ask all of you, my dear friends, if anyone happens to be traveling from Chicago to Greensboro, North Carolina, this week?

MAY 25, 2014

The other day I saw a young man at the Avondale Post Office receiving some typically slow service as a clerk tried to find his missing package in the back room. With a self-satisfied smile, he said out loud, to no one in particular, “This is why the US Postal Service is dying.”

Don't be this guy. This is the post office equivalent of going into a place that offers a student discount and claiming that you are a “student of life.” They've heard it before; the people waiting in line have heard it before. It's tiresome. Try harder; be more creative.

**SELECTED SUGGESTIONS FOR
ALTERNATE TITLES FOR THIS
BOOK MADE BY FRIENDS**

Backstamped

Post Medium

I Shall Die Here

Goin' Postal

The Post

You've Got Mail

Dead Letter Office

Signed, Sealed and Sometimes Delivered

Stampless

Next in Line. Eternity at the US Postal Office

Marked Fragile

First Class, Last in Line

Postweight

Posted

Hell Bent for Letters

Never Let Me Go: How I Learned to Stop
Worrying and Love the PostMaster/Mistress

Forever

Return of the Sender

Post-Postal

Yours, Forever

Our Line Could Be Your Life

Fuck You, Postal Fuckers

Medium Post

Anything Fragile, Hazardous,
Liquid, or Perishable?

Not Bad for Government Work

Post hoc ergo propter hoc

Thanks to the following for their input:

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