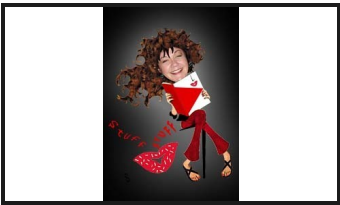


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FEATURE STORY

Sending an S.O.S.

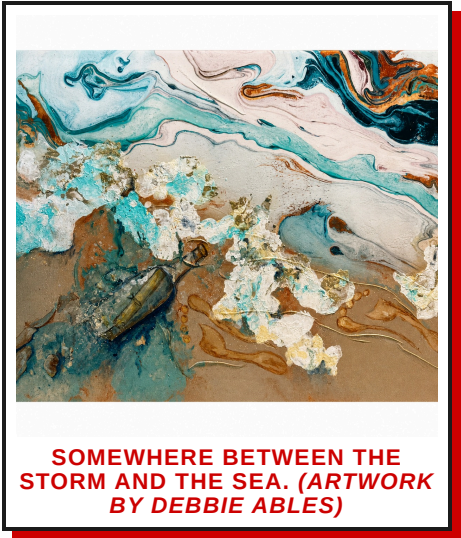
A Sting concert, a storm that arrived like a stage cue, and the question that took years to answer — what would your message in a bottle say?

Story by Debbie Ables

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One of the most fabulous concerts I ever attended was at Cincinnati’s Riverbend Music Center. Sting was on his Symphonicity Tour with the Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra. It was held in an open-air pavilion on a warm July evening. It was a heavenly atmosphere. The orchestra, backup singers, and Sting were all in black elegant suits or sexy dresses.

The orchestra started and he appeared on stage to sing “An Englishman in New York” — it was electric. He followed with “Fields of Gold,” “Every Breath You Take,” “Shape of My Heart,” “Desert Rose,” “Roxanne,” “When We Dance,” “Fragile,” and “If I Ever Lose My Faith in You.” You can see the pattern of his material that evening — all positive, make you think, feel something inside lyrics.



INSIDE

The Message & the Music: a brand-new crossword straight from this story — plus a Song Scramble bonus round for the encore crowd.

And “Cast Your Own Message in a Bottle,” an editable tip sheet you can fill in, download, and keep.

REAL TREASURE

The world’s oldest message in a bottle — 132 years at sea, a German ship’s goodbye, and a family’s lucky find. Page 3.

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THE STORM, THE WOLF & THE BOTTLE

Then came one of his most mysterious songs, “Moon Over Bourbon Street.” As he sang, a storm started rolling in slowly. Darkness came in with the cloud cover and the air felt thick. A slight wind blew in and we could feel the temperature drop 10 degrees quickly with a soft mist spraying into the covered arena. He must have manifested the atmosphere he wanted for the spookiness of this song.

With a large clap of thunder in the last verse he delivered as a backup singer howled like a wolf. He finished the song and over the microphone he thanked God for his participation. The audience all clapped and he returned to his repertoire with his last song, “Message in a Bottle,” which states “I’ll send an S.O.S. to the world.”

My life was forever changed that night. It made me think... What is my purpose here on Earth? What would my message be in a bottle?

I have thought of that many times since and only now know what that would be. It would be to trust your judgments and make decisions in your days ahead that have a positive effect on you and those around you.

What would your message in a bottle be? What S.O.S. to the world

would you send?

WOULD IT BE...?

SOME OF THE MESSAGES I’VE IMAGINED SINCE THAT NIGHT

1.

Would it be world peace?

2.

Would it be to watch over a loved one?

3.

Would it be to say you were sorry for anyone you may have wronged?

4.

Would it be that you hoped to be reunited with your Furbabies at the Rainbow Bridge?

5.

Would it be that you hoped whoever opened it would respond back or meet you at a location — even if it was years in the future, or you had passed, and a daughter or son got in touch from a response to a number or address you left in the bottle?

If you’re wondering what to put in yours — I’ve added some ideas on page 5.

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132 YEARS IN A BOTTLE

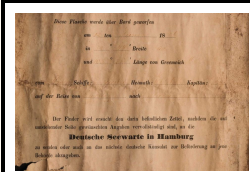


Photo: German Naval Observatory form, 1886 — via Wikimedia Commons, public domain

The World’s Oldest Message in a Bottle Actually Worked

On June 12, 1886, the captain of the German sailing barque *Paula* threw a bottle overboard in the Indian Ocean, 950 km from Australia. Inside was a printed form asking the finder to note where it turned up and mail it back to the German Naval Observatory in Hamburg — part of a 69-year experiment to map ocean currents and find faster shipping routes. Thousands of bottles went into the sea. Only 662 ever came back.

In January 2018, Tonya Illman spotted something sticking out of the sand near Wedge Island, north of Perth — while digging out the family car. Her son’s girlfriend tipped out the sand and found the note: damp, rolled tight, wrapped in string. The date, the coordinates, the ship’s name, the captain’s handwriting — all of it matched the *Paula*’s original meteorological journal, still sitting in a German archive. The bottle and note spent 131 years and 223 days waiting in the dunes, and it still counts as the oldest message in a bottle ever found.

Photo: The *Paula*’s 1886 message form, German Naval Observatory — via Wikimedia Commons, public domain.

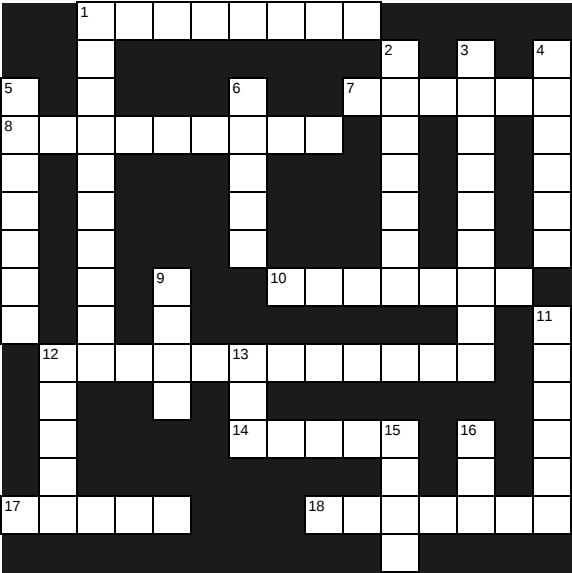
The finders never got to keep it quiet in a bookcase — the note was a printed form, not a love letter, but the romance is the same one Debbie felt at Riverbend: somebody, somewhere, sent a message to the world and waited to see who would answer. Of the 663 slips returned to Hamburg over 69 years, not one bottle had ever been found with its note still inside — until the Illmans’. Yours doesn’t need an ocean or a century. It just needs to be sent.

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THE MESSAGE & THE MUSIC

A CROSSWORD FROM THE NIGHT THE STORM SANG ALONG

Every answer comes from the story you just read — the songs, the storm, the bottle, and the night the sky joined the orchestra. Type your answers right into the squares below, then print it, save it, or hand it to a friend who was there that kind of night. (Solutions at the back? Not this time. The bottle keeps its secrets.)



- ACROSS
1. Marooned sender, hopeful author

7. Sting's original band — they sent the first S.O.S.

8. Royal Philharmonic Concert ____ (not London's)

10. It clapped in the last verse — perfect timing

12. The barley-covered ballad he sang at sunset

14. It rolled in slowly, right on cue

17. Where a castaway hopes it washes up

18. What's sealed inside — yours to write

- DOWN
1. River city where the magic happened

2. Street the moon hung over while the storm rolled in

3. Music Center that hosted the night

4. “____ Rose” — he sang that one too

5. The Police classic — put out the red light

6. The headliner in elegant black, orchestra at his back

9. What the backup singer howled like

11. Where the message travels

12. What he might ever lose — in you

13. Three letters sent to the world

15. Soft spray that rode the 10-degree drop

16. Love is the Seventh ____ (his first solo album)

CLEAR ANSWERS

REVEAL ANSWERS

PRINT PUZZLE

Tip: click any square and start typing. Use your arrow keys to move around. Nothing here is saved to a server — it's all yours.

BONUS ROUND: SONG SCRAMBLE

UNSCRAMBLE FIVE TITLES FROM THE SETLIST — THE ENCORE STARTS WHEN YOU FINISH

1. NIEFSLD OF GLDO

2. GYRREVE THABRE OUU YTEA

3. XANROEN

4. SGAHEP OF YM RAHET

5. GNWEH WE DNACE

CHECK MY SONGS

CLEAR SONGS

Type the unscrambled title in each box (spaces optional). Green means Sting would be proud.

SCAN TO PLAY ONLINE

Type your answers right on your phone or computer — the interactive puzzle with working clues and auto-advance is just a scan away.

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CAST YOUR OWN MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

AN EDITABLE TIP SHEET — FILL IT IN, DOWNLOAD IT, KEEP IT

The night that storm sang along with Sting left me with one question I couldn’t shake: what would *my* message in a bottle be? Here is how I would write one that means something — add your own twist in the boxes below, jot down who (or what) each tip pairs best with, and download your finished sheet to keep or share. The first eight are yours to fill in fully; the last two are a teaser for what’s coming next issue.

1. DATE IT LIKE A TREASURE.

Put the full date — month, day, year — on your letter. “Found after” is half the romance; the finder knows exactly how far your words traveled through time, and it makes the note a genuine artifact instead of a prop.

MY OWN TWIST (WRITE YOUR OWN)

THIS TIP PAIRS BEST WITH...

a person, a song, a memory...

2. WRITE TO ONE PERSON, NOT THE WORLD.

Even though an S.O.S. goes “to the world,” a message addressed to “whoever is reading this” feels warmer than one aimed at nobody. Talk to the finder like a neighbor. It’s a letter, not a broadcast.

MY OWN TWIST (WRITE YOUR OWN)

THIS TIP PAIRS BEST WITH...

a person, a song, a memory...

3. SAY WHERE YOU ARE IN LIFE.

One line about your corner of the world — the town, the season, what you were doing when you wrote it — anchors the message in a real place and moment. Twenty years from now, that line is the treasure.

MY OWN TWIST (WRITE YOUR OWN)

THIS TIP PAIRS BEST WITH...

a person, a song, a memory...

4. SHARE ONE PIECE OF HARD-WON ADVICE.

This is the heart of it: trust your judgment, and make decisions that have a positive effect on you and those around you. One honest lesson beats a page of quotations. Keep it short and keep it true.

MY OWN TWIST (WRITE YOUR OWN)

THIS TIP PAIRS BEST WITH...

a person, a song, a memory...

5. MAKE ONE SMALL REQUEST.

Ask the finder to do one tiny good deed and “release it forward” — pay a compliment, call an old friend, do a kindness in your name. A message that asks for nothing gets admired; one that asks for one small thing gets acted on.

MY OWN TWIST (WRITE YOUR OWN)

THIS TIP PAIRS BEST WITH...

a person, a song, a memory...

6. INCLUDE SOMETHING LOCAL AND SMALL.

A pressed flower, a ticket stub, a photograph, a recipe card, a small coin — something flat and small. It’s proof of where the bottle began, and it gives the finder something to hold while they read.

MY OWN TWIST (WRITE YOUR OWN)

THIS TIP PAIRS BEST WITH...

a person, a song, a memory...

7. WATERPROOF EVERYTHING BUT THE MYSTERY.

Zip-close bag, wax paper, or a jar with a good seal. Preserve the letter, but let the ink and paper be ordinary — the finder should feel it was made by a real person, not a museum.

MY OWN TWIST (WRITE YOUR OWN)

THIS TIP PAIRS BEST WITH...

a person, a song, a memory...

8. GIVE THE FINDER PERMISSION TO KEEP GOING.

One line: “If this bottle finds you at a hard moment, let this be the sign you were waiting for.” A message that arrives exactly when someone needs it is the whole legend of the bottle.

MY OWN TWIST (WRITE YOUR OWN)

THIS TIP PAIRS BEST WITH...

a person, a song, a memory...

9. SEND IT PROPERLY.

Seal it, weight it (a little sand or pebbles so it rides low and doesn’t tip), and set it adrift from a legal spot — or gift it instead: buried in a garden, tucked in a wall, hidden on a trail, or handed to a grandchild for their own launching day.

Want the rest of this one — and the rest of the kit? The full Bottle Notes sheet is reserved for subscribers. **Unlock the whole sheet in the next issue.**

10. WRITE YOUR S.O.S. IN CODE — JUST A LITTLE.

Start with those three famous letters — S.O.S. — or a riddle, or a map to wherever you’ve hidden it. A tiny puzzle makes the finder a participant instead of a bystander, and it pairs perfectly with this issue’s crossword.

Want the rest of this one — and the rest of the kit? The full Bottle Notes sheet is reserved for subscribers. **Unlock the whole sheet in the next issue.**

PRINT / SAVE MY NOTES

DOWNLOAD EDITABLE COPY

Your notes live only in your browser. Use “Download Editable Copy” to save your filled-in sheet as an HTML file you can open, edit, and print anytime.



SCAN TO FILL IN ONLINE

Fill in your tips on your phone or computer, then download your finished sheet — the editable version with working fields and download button is just a scan away.

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