



**INSPIRED LIFE**

## ‘Please write me,’ she scribbled on a random egg in 1951. Someone just did.

Mary Foss Starn, now 92, slipped the egg into a carton and sent it out like a note in a bottle to see if anyone would respond. Someone did, 72 years later.



By [Cathy Free](#)

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Mary Foss Starn and several of her friends were packing eggs into cartons at an Iowa factory in 1951 when they hatched a goofy plan to liven up their workday.

The young women decided they would each sign their names and hometowns on a few eggs they picked at random, slip them into cartons and send them out like notes in a bottle to see if anyone responded.

“Whoever gets this egg, please write me,” Starn carefully wrote on several eggs with a pencil. She then added, “Miss Mary Foss, Forest City, Iowa” along with the date, April 2, 1951.

Most of the eggs she and her friends were packing at the produce and egg company in Forest City were destined for stores on the east coast, Starn said, adding that at age 19, she hoped someone in New York City would open an egg carton, find one of her eggs and become her pen pal.

“I’d never been to New York City — still haven’t — so I signed four or five eggs and off they went on the truck to who knows where,” said Starn, now 92.

When months went by with no response, Starn said she figured her eggs had long ago been cracked into omelets and she wouldn’t hear from anyone.

About a year later, she married Paul Starn and started a family. As her two daughters grew up, she often regaled them with stories of her mischief on the egg production line.

“We heard that egg story our entire lives,” said daughter Laurie Bascom, 67. “Our mom always thought it would have been fun to get a response.”

Last month, 72 years after Starn shipped out the eggs, that moment finally arrived.

Starn was with her daughter, Jacque Ploeger, last month when Ploeger received a Facebook message from one of her cousins who lives in Iowa, alerting her to a post about an egg that had turned up with her mother’s name on it.

Ploeger said she looked at the post, and once she’d picked her jaw up off the floor, she told her mother the news.

“Mom, remember those eggs you signed?” she told Starn. “One of them has been found!”

Starn did not believe it at first.

“It took a bit for it to sink in, but my mom laughed and said, ‘Well, yes, I guess I really did do that when I was young, didn’t I?’” recalled Ploeger, 70.

“It was pretty strange,” said Starn, who now lives in Mason City. “I thought somebody must have had a really good refrigerator.”

Ploeger said her cousin had come across a post about her mom’s autographed egg on the Facebook group page “Weird (and Wonderful) Secondhand Finds That Just Need To Be Shared.”

John Amalfitano of New Jersey had posted that he’d received the egg about 20 years ago from a neighbor, Miller Richardson, while he was living on Staten Island.

Richardson, an artist and antique collector, had wrapped the egg up and tucked it away inside a small box after finding it in a carton of a dozen eggs he’d bought in 1951, Amalfitano said.

“I went to Miller’s house one day to help him look for something, and we were going through boxes when I came across the egg,” he said.

“When I asked him about it, he said he’d kept it because of the writing on it,” added Amalfitano, now 60 and living in Dunellen, N.J. “He said he couldn’t understand why the egg didn’t putrefy over the years. It had dried out inside, but there was still some weight to it.”

Amalfitano said Miller, who has since died, gave him the egg, telling him, “You can keep it, because I know you’ll take good care of it.”

Amalfitano took the egg home, put it inside a silver egg cup for safekeeping and stored it inside his china cabinet for the next 20 years. He said he searched online once for Mary Foss in Forest City, Iowa, but couldn’t find her.

Then in mid-August, Amalfitano said he was looking for something fun to post about on the Weird and Wonderful Finds Facebook page when he thought about the egg. He quickly snapped a few photos and wrote a post:

“Here’s something you don’t see every day. It’s an egg, from 1951. (Egg is still inside, though petrified!)” he wrote, adding Mary Foss’s name and message.

“Wonder if she might still be alive!” Amalfitano continued. “Tried to locate her, but come up empty.”

Within hours, he said the post was loaded with comments, including many from people who wanted to help crack the mystery of the 72-year-old egg. People shared their own stories of finding decades-old eggs, including a woman who said she found an egg that was 50 or 60 years old in her grandparents’ chicken house, and the egg now resides in her mother’s hutch. Another woman wrote that she found a basket in an closet that contained eggs that were more than 50 years old. When she cracked one open, everything inside had dried.

Plenty of puns showed up on the Facebook post, including “Egg-cellent story,” and “It’s too cool to eggnore.”

By the end of that day, Aug. 17, Amalfitano said he was put in touch with Ploeger after her cousin saw his post.

He dialed Ploeger’s number, and she picked up the call.

He began to explain to her how he came across the egg, when the call took a turn that surprised him.

“In the background on the call, I heard this voice speak up,” he said. “She said, ‘This is Mary Foss.’”

All those years of saving the egg had paid off.

“Finally,” Amalfitano said to her. “I can’t believe I’m hearing your voice.”

Ploeger said the feeling was mutual.

“To know her egg had survived all these years, we were all as surprised as we could be,” she said.

Amalfitano and Starn spoke for a bit, and Amalfitano said the full-circle moment was extremely satisfying.

“An egg might be a simple thing, but this has turned into such an uplifting journey, and it’s impressive to know that the person who signed the egg is alive and has been found,” he said.

Amalfitano said he hopes to meet Starn soon, perhaps in Iowa, if he can find a museum or historical society that would be interested in telling Starn’s story and putting the egg on display.

“I’d absolutely donate the egg if they’d do that,” he said. “It just seems like a natural next step.”

Starn said that would be fine with her.

“I’m happy to have a new friend,” she said. “I finally have my pen pal and it only took 72 years.”

