

Dear Jen

A letter to a friend

Christine Abbott



Dear Jen

It was lovely to receive the letter and photos you sent with your Christmas greetings. How the grandchildren have grown over the past year! I especially love the picture of Jess and Timmy planting an oak tree in your garden, with the thought of future generations being able to climb and make tree houses in the branches.

Our garden looks rather sad with just the Chinese lanterns giving some colour. Like you, I can't wait for the spring and all the bulbs coming into flower and the trees in bud. The wildlife in the garden thrives, we have a hedgehog that has taken up residence, so I hope it survives the winter, the squirrel who uses the veg patch as a store for the hazel nuts taken from the tree, and the variety of birds who entertain us on the feeders.

You said in your letter you had ants in the garden. I remember when we were children, digging nests up in the garden and being amazed at the intricate patterns they had made in the soil and watching them carry the leaves we tore up into little pieces back to their nest. We were such a lively pair. "You two have ants in your pants", your grandma shouted down the garden at us! I also recall our parents pouring boiling water over an ant nest because they were worried we would get bitten and that ant killer spray might hurt other living things.

Those memories got me thinking about ants and finding out a bit more. Did you know that there is a species of ant in almost every corner of the world that we inhabit, from cities to deserts? And that's not the only surprising fact. I read that although we are individually, of course, much larger than an ant, the total biomass of ants is greater than ours – that's astonishing.

We don't really pay much attention to them, except when they interfere with our lives, and they don't cause the destruction to the planet that we do. That's because everything ants do, make, and discard is biodegradable.

They handle their own waste and that of other species returning it to the earth to enrich it. They grow and harvest their own food, at the same time as supporting the ecosystem for others to thrive. For example, leaf cutter ants take decomposing matter on the surface and drag it underground to feed fungi that in turn provide them with food to harvest.

All those tunnels we were intrigued by as children are a complex network of living spaces, cemeteries, food stores, waste dumps all completely biodegradable. The transportation processes that create and use the tunnels also allow for drainage and for minerals and nutrients to feed the soil. Feeding on other small insects they help to destroy pests that threaten other species. Indeed, wood ants are so important in controlling forest pests they are protected by law in some countries. Ants create their own medicines, disinfectants and even, as we found out as we itched after our childhood games, chemical weapons that are biodegradable improving the soil condition for the planet. They are not a problem for the planet even with their density and productiveness because simply everything they make, and use is returned to the earth and enriches it.

The biologist E.O Wilson commented that 'it is the little things that run the world'. It seems that ants run their world - but they **do not overrun** it and in fact their existence makes it a better place for others ...

When we were children we observed ants, learned about them, fascinated by these little creatures on our doorstep, the same creatures that our parents killed as the nuisance who spoiled the family picnic, caused us to itch a bit and created ant hills in the carefully mown lawn.

Perhaps the next generation, will see ants as creatures to learn from rather than about. So, as we approach 2022 let's raise a glass to ants; that we learn from them how to run organisations and communities that don't overrun our planet.

I hope you and the family have a great 2022 ☺

In friendship

Christine

Hollidobler B, Wilson EO (1995). Journey to the Ants; A scientific story of exploration. Harvard University Press

About Christine

Christine is an experienced action learning facilitator and OD practitioner with a background in the NHS and Social Care. She teaches part time with the Open University Business School, designs, facilitating and delivering programmes and courses for the [Centre for Action Learning](#) with a variety of private and public sector organisations across the UK and around the World. She enjoys research and writing and is on the Editorial board for the Journal Action Learning Research and Practice.

She loves ceramics, both collecting and making (latest learning project) and anything else jazz and art.

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A note about AMED

Sadly, so far, nobody has expressed a willingness to take over from the outgoing AMED Council. So in the circumstances, the EGM on 26 May is likely to confirm that AMED will finally cease to operate as an educational charity by the end of 2022 at the latest.



AMED stands for the Association for Management Education and Development, www.amed.org.uk. We are a long-established membership organisation and educational charity devoted to developing people and organisations.

Our purpose is to serve as a forum for people who want to share, learn and experiment, and find support, encouragement, and innovative ways of communicating. Our conversations are open, constructive, and facilitated.

Through AMED, we strive to benefit our members and the wider society. Exclusive Member benefits include excellent professional indemnity cover at a significant discount, free copies of the quarterly journal *e-O&P*, and discounted fees for participation in a range of face-to-face events, special interest groups, and our interactive website. We aim to build on our three cornerstones of **knowledge**, **innovation** and **networking** in the digital age. Wherever we can, AMED Members, Networkers and Guests seek to work with likeminded individuals and organisations to generate synergy and critical mass for change. www.amed.org.uk, or contact **Linda Williams**, our Membership Administrator, E: amedoffice@amed.org.uk, T: 0300 365 1247