

Dear Laura,

My name is Meredith and I'm a big fan of yours! Ever since "That 70's Show," I've thought you were brilliant, and now in "Orange is the New Black" you've truly outdone yourself. You are an exceptional actress and I really love your work!

This may sound like the most ridiculous thing you've ever heard (and I'm not crazy, I promise) but I really feel like we could be good friends ☺ haha. I've always felt like if I ever had the opportunity to talk to you that we would get along really well and have a really fun time hanging out. I know the chances of me meeting you in this life are pretty slim, but I wanted to send you this letter to let you know how amazing I think you are and that I care about you. I know this sounds bizarre, but I wanted to reach out to you and talk to you about something that is really important to me and close to my heart.

I've never been a big fan of when people try to put "labels" on others or try to fit them in "boxes." They seem to do it to make themselves feel more comfortable or so they can better "understand" others. Personally, I really understand what it feels like to be labeled and told what kind of box I should fit into. Growing up, I was raised in a white, middle class family in the Midwest with a dad as a preacher (and yes, I *might* have fit into that preacher's daughter stereo type a little bit haha). My whole life I always knew that I was different, that I didn't completely agree rules and expectations that were set for me, including when it came to religion. The black and white rules of Christianity seemed ignorant and a little suffocating at times, so when I turned 18 years old I left home to explore the world and my faith. God and His values of grace and unconditional love had always been instilled in me, but I wanted to experience and find out who I was within my faith and God's plan and purpose for my life.

I've always had this profound passion for seeking truth, purpose, love and understanding of others, and experiencing life to the fullest. So I went off to University, where I majored in Spanish and fucking up haha. While at University I made a lot of great friends, great memories, and bad decisions (I learned a lot). In the midst of getting caught up in some things and feeling lost, I had a good friend sit down with me one night. We talked about some of the things that I was wrestling with and at that point I was feeling pretty low. Knowing I was seeking clarity and encouragement, she reminded me of something I had once known but had lost sight of. She told me that my value and salvation is not determined by the stupid mistakes I had made, but rather the decision I made a long time ago to accept Jesus

as my Savior and to have a relationship with God (and I know at this point you're rolling your eyes and thinking that this is very cheesy, and saying it out loud it does sound so, but I say this sincerely). Her words really struck with me and I meditated on that belief for a moment.

There is a big difference between religion and a relationship with God. I really didn't (and don't) agree with a lot of religious practices and rules that the church had set up. The perception and guidelines that church had set up didn't sit well with me and seem apathetic to the world we live in. A relationship is completely different. Sitting down, being still, and talking (some people say praying, but I'm not very elegant with words so it comes off as more of talking) with God builds a real relationship. I began telling God how I feel, what I was struggling with, what I needed help with, forgiveness, and guidance. Although there was no flash of lightning or fireworks (I was really watching for those), I felt peace and weight lifted from my heart. I still had a lot of questions and knew life was not going to be perfect, but I was going to keep the faith and trust in God's plan of where/ what He wanted to show me and teach me.

The last two years of University I ran off to live in Spain, where I continued to study and live. It really gave me the opportunity to learn and become part of a culture different from my own. I gained an enhanced cultural awareness, sensitivity to customs, and different walks of life. It also, was where I fell in love for the first time. I fell in love with a girl name Nathalie (she was from Sweden). From the moment I met her, everything changed and for the first time everything made sense. Being with her finally freed my heart and my head. It was indescribable, uncontainable happiness and freedom.

It wasn't long after we had been together that I came out to my parents (of course after two shots of tequila. Let me tell you, it was a happy day 😊 haha). My dad, previously being a pastor, didn't understand and in a lot of peoples' eyes that wasn't who I was suppose to be, that wasn't the box I was suppose to fit in. But I continued to pray and meditate with God and trust that His love and His approval is enough (not the church's).

So Nathalie and I continued to live in Spain for a while. Then when my visa expired, I needed to leave the country. Promising that we'd be together again, I had to leave central Europe for 30 days. So I flew to England to live with family for a while. After 30 days I moved to Sweden to be with Nathalie, soon discovering that the relationship wasn't going to work out. I then moved back to the states, living in Denver and South Dakota for a while, and now Chicago.

I'm so sorry for writing you this extremely long letter (I don't think I ever wrote this much even at University haha), but I really wanted to reach out to you.

In this world, there are a lot of different beliefs, religions, ideas, boxes, and labels. I (along with many others) do not fit into any of these categories and do not (cannot) live up to expectations of them. I am a lesbian and a gypsy (and no, not the kind you see on the show "My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding") that's English and Swedish, mixed with a little bit of hipster, and little hippy, and little punk at times. And above all, I'm a follower of Christ. It is impossible to label me or fit me into a box, but I am perfectly and wonderfully made by God. He does not make mistakes and loved me so much that He sent His only son to die, so that I may live.

Laura, again, I'm writing you this letter because I really care about you and think that you are an exceptional, beautiful woman inside and out. You make this world such an amazing place! I just want to encourage you to find sometime to be alone and still and talk to God and see how He moves in your life. Your Heavenly Father loves you and I know He'd love to build a relationship with you. Try not to put Him in a box. His gift is free and Eternal, He's just waiting for you to take it. And YOU don't have to fit into any boxes or labels to do so 😊

I hope you're doing well and having a great time shooting season 3 of "Orange is the New Black." If you ever want to get in touch, please feel free to reach out to me. My email is [holmbergmere@gmail.com](mailto:holmbergmere@gmail.com).

Forever your fan,

Meredith