

First Impressions

Written by L.A. Plume
Wednesday, 06 January 2010 04:53

Dear Ms. Plume, I'm going to visit the hometown of a man I've been dating for several months.



Although we will not be staying with her, we will be visiting his mother, and I would like to make a good impression and take an appropriate gift. What do you suggest?

Sincerely, Beth

Dear Beth,

You never get a second chance to make a first impression. Sometimes when people are bashful, or a bit intimidated, body language is the first clue. Be sure to look her in the eye when you speak to her. Looking past someone or at the floor, or not speaking clearly, does not make the best impression. Be aware of your posture, stand straight, speak directly to her, and take the first opportunity to genuinely compliment her. If possible, make the compliment more specific than simply commenting on how lovely her home is. If you see that she collects something in particular, or has a beautiful specimen garden, find an opportunity to ask her about that, thus drawing her into a conversation where she can tell you about her interests.

As for a gift to someone whom you have not met, taking something indigenous from your home area is usually safe. From the Lowcountry, a bag of grits, southern biscuit mix, benne wafers, local wine, etc., is a nice choice. Consumable items can be put away, served, passed on to someone else and are often interesting topics of conversation. Usually a selection is available in the airport gift shops. Savannah, for instance, has a nice selection of cookies in delightful tin boxes with local scenes. They also have a section of Paula Deen spices, cake and cookie mixes and other assorted items. Just for the record – I would pass on the hoe cake mix; even though these are not cakes, but biscuits, which is confusing in the first place, this would not be a

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the top of my list for creating a good first impression.

Consumable items are also good because they save everyone the embarrassment of giving and receiving something which the hostess may not wish to display, and you may not see again on your next visit. That plastic bulldog statue which you thought was so appealing just may not fit in with her sterling silver collection of horses. A low maintenance plant is also a good choice. It just depends on whether you are arriving by air, car, have a chance to shop when you get there before your visit, and what comfortably fits into your budget. A nice bottle of wine is a staple gift and you can find one for less than \$20 if you do some research.

The best gift you can take is a good attitude. If the occasion warrants it, offer to help – in the kitchen, the garden, or whatever seems appropriate. Don't act as though you are there to have her wait on you. And whatever the agenda is – be cheerful and participatory. If the plan is to go snake hunting for the day and you are not so fond of snakes, go merrily along with a big stick, think of it as an adventure and be glad your mother prefers hunting in flea markets for vintage dish towels.

Finally, when the visit is over, make sure you send a thank you note – handwritten, not a preprinted card; this should arrive within a week of your visit. Sending flowers as an additional thank you is also appropriate.

Have a nice visit!

L. A. Plume