

Letters of Love: A Special Gift for Valentine's Day

I received my first Valentine's Day card just two weeks before my second birthday.

My mother kept a scrapbook account of my childhood and youth. Today, the pages fall apart at a finger's touch, but my birth certificate, school report cards, memoranda of various achievements and events, and cards sent to me in celebration of birthdays and holidays remain as intact as the day she glued them to the paper.

And there are some Valentine's cards, three of them now 70 years old.

Recently, while going through some personal papers, I also found such cards from my wife as well as a few I had given to her. Kris loved holidays of all sorts, and a week or so before February 14th, she'd plaster posters and cards on the refrigerator and on some of the walls of our home, mostly for our children's pleasure.

Over all these decades, my sentiments about Valentine's Day have varied. As a kid, I'm sure I enjoyed the treats this holiday delivered to the classroom. For a good number of my adult years, I was much less of a fan. Several times—had you visited the grocery store in the town where my wife, children, and I lived—late in the afternoon on Valentine's Day, you'd find me in checkout line along with several other guys, all of us with a sheepish look and all of us holding an assortment of roses, boxes of chocolates, and cards.

And now? The pendulum has swung, as it does, and I've become an advocate of the Day of Hearts. It brings to mind my wife, who died 20 years ago this May, and the joy she took from such a small thing. Even more, I've come to realize that

Valentine's Day, though aimed primarily at romance and marital love, belongs to all of us. It's the one day on our calendar that celebrates love, pure and simple, and we can give expressions and gifts of our love as we wish, to our significant other, to our children, to our parents, to our friends.

Regrettably, perhaps, some [polls](#) reveal that this feast day of love is one of our least popular of holidays. Some dislike Valentine's because they regard it as a holiday designed by floral shops and chocolatiers, others resent being forced to express an affection they already feel and daily demonstrate, and some men in particular feel, not without reason, that a day decked out with Cupids, flowers, candies, hearts, and often mawkish sentimental verse makes the occasion distinctly feminine.

These objections may be valid, but here are two arguments for joining the Valentine's Day court in 2024.

First, given the rancor and bitterness spewed daily across our political and cultural landscape, it strikes me that our country could do with a lot more talk about love and a lot less about hate. Valentine's Day affords that opportunity, that reminder of the heart and its affections, on however minor a scale, with family, friends, and lovers.

Second, we live in an age of sound bites, texts, and electronic jabber. We have cheapened our sentiments and our language. Sending a meme of hearts, flowers, or kisses requires little thought and a tap on the send button. If we read some love letters from the past, such as the ones on this [site](#) from the likes of Major Sullivan Ballou, Johnny Cash, and Zelda Fitzgerald, we realize how thin a gruel our own expressions of affection have become.

So, here's a thought for this Valentine's: Candies, cards, flowers, and dining out are still the day's most popular

gifts, but this year we can either supplement or replace them entirely with a hand-written letter to those we love. You don't have to be a Hemingway or a Shakespeare to write a beautiful and moving tribute. All you need is sincerity, affection, and the willingness to share your feelings.

Buy the card, buy the box of special chocolates, buy the dozen red roses. But somewhere along the way, slip in a letter you've written telling your lover, your relative, your children, your friend, what they mean to you and why you love them.

The roses will fade. The chocolates will be consumed.

But your words, good and true, and written from the heart, will abide.

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