



## BURT WOLF TASTE OF FREEDOM VALENTINE'S DAY



### ST. VALENTINE AND HIS DAY

Every February 14<sup>th</sup> America turns to thoughts of love and expresses those thoughts by giving heart shaped boxes of chocolate, red roses, and greeting cards with messages of love.

Valentine's Day has its roots in several legends—the earliest goes back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. There appears to have been two St. Valentines and they both lived during the 200s. One was a Christian priest who refused the order of a Roman emperor to stop preaching. He was thrown in prison and beheaded on February 14<sup>th</sup>. His execution was based, not only on his refusal to stop lecturing on the value of Christianity but also because while he was in prison he had the audacity to perform a miracle. He cured the jailer's daughter of her blindness. On the night before his execution, he wrote the jailer's daughter a farewell letter and signed it "From Your Valentine." That note can be considered as the first Valentine card, even though the duration of their relationship was rather short.

The second St. Valentine was an Italian bishop who was imprisoned because he secretly married couples in violation of Roman law. Claudius II, also known as Claudius "the Cruel," was the emperor everybody loved to hate, which was especially true for guys who were in his army. Accordingly, there was a considerable amount of draft dodging. Only single men were forced into the army so getting married as young as possible became extremely attractive.



One day, Claudius decided that young unmarried soldiers also fought better than soldiers with wives and children, so he outlawed marriage for young men. Valentine however continued to perform secret marriages for young lovers. When word of the bishop's actions reached Claudius he had Valentine imprisoned.

Even though he was behind bars young people would visit him. They would bring flowers and notes expressing their support and championing the idea of making love not war. The concept of making love rather than war was too much for Claudius so he had Valentine put to death on—February 14<sup>th</sup>. The criminal code in ancient Rome was based on one strike and you're out.

During the Middle Ages, people in France and England noticed that on February 14<sup>th</sup>, birds began to pair and mate, particularly swallows. In ancient Greece the return of the swallow marked the return of spring and sexual activity on the part of most animals and some humans. With mating in the air, February 14<sup>th</sup> became a proper occasion for sending love letters and tokens of affection.

St. Valentine, a heroic, sympathetic and romantic figure, had become one of the most popular saints in England and France. By the end of the 1300s, French and English literature contained a number of references to the custom of sending love letters and small gifts. We also see the first examples of lovers who selected each other on February 14<sup>th</sup> calling one another their Valentine.

When two people agreed to be each other's Valentine, they would write down their names on a strip of parchment. The men would wear the marked paper in a hatband while the women would place the strip in their bodice. If they still had a thing for each other when Easter arrived they would undertake a more formal exchange of gifts and announce their intentions to a wider audience.

But even before St. Valentine and the birds entered the picture there was a Roman holiday that honored the goddess Juno. On the night before her feast, young Roman men would gather at the grotto of the wolf-



god. The names of young women were placed in a box, from which they were drawn by the men. Chance directed the selection and the couples would go off together to the feast. It was a time for lovemaking and for curing any ills that might interfere with lovemaking. The gathering took place on February 14<sup>th</sup>. As you can see, something was going on with the 14<sup>th</sup> of February.



The early Christian Church wanted to do away with this pagan love-in and substituted the names of saints for the maidens. They chose St. Valentine's Day for the new but not necessarily improved celebration. What you ended up with was the selection of your lucky saint for the year. Nice but not necessarily as interesting as a hot date.

### LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Originally love was about having children and that was it. Our ancestors poured endless energy into getting couples together in marriage with the objective of producing children. The family decided who would marry whom, and the success of the marriage was judged by the number of male children.



For centuries falling in love was an extremely dangerous business. Marriage was fine because it was controlled by society; falling in love on the other hand was beyond everyone's control, including the people who were falling in love. If a mere couple were going to put their own feelings and emotional desires before the needs of their society then the fabric of the entire community might easily come apart.



But during the 1200s, that is precisely what began to happen and it all got started in the south of France. It was a social revolution and one of the major steps we have made in the direction of individualism versus community control.

During the past hundred years, North Americans have seen an extraordinary decrease in infant mortality. It is safer to have children than ever before and the

children we produce have a greater chance of survival than they did in the past. One result is that couples no longer feel the need to reproduce in order to prolong the life of the society. Childbearing has become a matter of personal choice and the relationship between sensual pleasure and procreation has been separated. Romance, to a great extent, is now freed from society's supervision.



### MEETING YOUR MATE

In the old days, if your family did not choose your mate for you, in a kind of preemptive strike on your emotions, you might actually get to meet someone on your own. In the end, of course, you'd ultimately need your family's approval but at least you might end up playing a part in choosing your mate. There were



three basic places where potential lovers could meet.

The first was the church—excellent place to check out a future partner. Much of the community was present.

Everyone had dressed for the occasion. You got to see the family and with a little luck you might get a moment to say, "Hi—confess here often?"

The local fountain was also a good spot. Before indoor plumbing made public wells obsolete, young men and women were constantly going off to the fountain to bring home a bucket's worth. Fountains are also reminders of the places in nature where vastly different species of animals come together to drink—not unlike certain neighborhood taverns are often called "watering holes."



Another way to meet that "special someone" was to go to a festival. Festivals were the perfect place to start a romance. Lots of men and women of different ages gathered in the same place and at the same time. They were eating and drinking and dressed in their best clothes. And sometimes, they were masked. With a mask on your identity was a secret, which made it easier

to move about the crowd and meet somebody new.

For thousands of years, people have designed places for people to meet on romantic terms. A meeting place must have certain facilities. There must be places to sit. Light foods and drinks should be available. And most important the space must allow a certain amount of anonymity. For the past few hundred years the best place to meet was a café. You can sit down, order a drink, and appear to be in the company of other people without looking like you intend to meet someone. It's the perfect cover.

Restaurants are also excellent places for romance. Before you really know each other, the public aspect of the restaurant is very reassuring. Behavior is held in



check. But that check can actually enhance the couple's intimacy. In a restaurant, you are under the surveillance of the restaurant's staff and the other patrons—simple gestures take on added meaning in public places. If one person leans across the table and takes the other's hand, the great cultural taboo against sensual contact in public has been defied. People do it all the time, and onlookers always take note. Violating the unwritten code of behavior brings the couple closer together.

## APHRODISIACS

For thousands of years, traditions and rituals have surrounded the foods of lovers, with a particular interest in those foods that are believed to arouse sexual desire. They are called aphrodisiacs after Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, beauty and fruitfulness. For a long time the focus was on food that came from an animal with a reputation for great sexual activity. The hope was that the same abilities would appear in anyone who ate that animal.

Guys would look at a salmon swimming for hundreds of miles from the open sea to the river it called home—fighting rapids, fighting hydroelectric dams, fighting famous chefs, and all in the name of love.



Other foods were considered aphrodisiacs because they had a texture that seemed sexual—oysters, mushrooms, figs and passion fruit fall into that category. Others get on the list because of their shape. Bananas, eggplants, carrots, asparagus, cucumbers and sausages have all, from time to time, been classified as aphrodisiacs. The ancient Romans included arugula in their collection of love inducing foods and planted it near statues of Priapus, the Greek god of male sexual power.

The fourth group of aphrodisiacs maintain their standing based on rarity and cost—champagne, caviar, goose liver pate, and top quality chocolate.



And the special foods we eat as part of our romantic encounters are often combined with special places. A particular restaurant becomes "our place" and is saturated

with meaning and memories.

Romantic dinners should always include candles. The light that a candle casts, flatters the food, the table setting and the faces of the diners. Candles are also symbols of life—they represent a specific amount of time—they burn for a while and are eventually snuffed out by someone or they die out on their own. While they are burning they represent the flame of life or in the case of a romantic dinner the burning flame of love. And since we no longer need candles for light they have come to represent luxury.

## CHOCOLATE

In the western world, the food with the most magical, famous and elaborate history as an aphrodisiac is chocolate. Chocolate was being drunk in Central America and Mexico for hundreds of years before the Europeans showed up. Columbus was the first one to see the cacao bean which is used to make chocolate, but the conquistador Cortez may have been the first European to taste it when he was offered a cup by Montezuma, ruler of the Aztecs. Montezuma considered chocolate to be the ideal beverage for an amorous evening.

Chocolate is especially important on St. Valentine's Day because it contains phenylethylamine, which has been called "the love molecule". The physical changes





in body chemistry that are associated with being in love are caused by the release of this chemical into the brain.

Bright colors, especially red, are considered to be

important for lovers. Red is alive and vibrant—it is the color of passion. We color our hearts red. We give red roses. We wear red lipstick and powder on rouge. Red looks warm—it attracts the viewer. But it is also a signal for danger. Stop signs are in red. As a result, red can send a mixed signal—not unlike May West’s invitation to “come up and see me some time”—enticing but dangerous. Never-the-less we always include red foods in romantic menus: a double threat is a red strawberry dipped in chocolate.

### ROSES

Research scientists have uncovered and analyzed fossilized roses that date back over 40 million years. Throughout most of their history, roses have been a source of pleasure and fascination, with a particularly mystical quality.



The rose is the symbol of the Virgin Mary, and originally a rosary was 165 dried rose petals wound up tight and made into a chain. In medieval times, roses were used to make medicine and perfume, and love potions. They were dried and used to stuff pillows and make carpets and hats, and even umbrellas. Roses were a basic part of cooking, especially in Middle Eastern cuisine. In Europe and the United States, rose-flavored waters were a basic part of cooking until the middle of this century.

### VALENTINE’S DAY IN THE U.S.A.

Commercial Valentine cards have been around since the beginning of the 1800s, but it was Esther Howland, the daughter of a stationer, who in the late 1840s turned Valentine cards into big business. She was still a student at Mt. Holyoke



College and she used her talent for creating tender messages to produce hand painted tidings of love on



note paper which she trimmed with imported lace. By 1850, she was grossing over \$100,000 a year.

Throughout the second half of the 1800s, Valentine cards

became more and more popular, eventually ending up as a mass market item. Near the end of the century, chocolate manufacturers entered the business with heart shaped boxes and heart shaped candies.

Americans of all ages take part in Valentine’s Day even though it is not an official government holiday.

Elementary age school children often make Valentine cards as part of a class project and then place them in a decorated mail box. On Valentine’s Day the box is opened and the cards distributed to each student.



These days, Valentine’s Day produces more spending than any other holiday, with the exception of Christmas. Most of the money is spent by men between the ages of 30 and 50 and they spend it primarily on cosmetics, perfumes and jewelry—and sometimes they even buy something for their girlfriends.

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