Sweet Memories of Valentine's Day

Getting the Messages

WHEN I was in third grade, in Buckhorn, Mississippi, my folks did not have any money for us kids to buy valentines for our classmates. We did not know what to expect when we went to school on Valentine's Day.

When the teacher started giving out valentines, there were two for me. When I opened them, both verses were so sweet that I was sure both of the girls who gave them to me really loved me.

I read and reread them many times whenever I had time to do so that day. The first said, "I will gladly buy out any store and send you messages galore, if you will read them line by line and say you will be my valentine."

The second one said, "I'd be happy all the day, if with you I could play. Joy for me would never end, if I had you for a friend."

When I go back to Mississippi to visit relatives, I still see one of the girls who sent me a valentine, and it always brings back memories of third grade.

—Marlin Swanson, Bakersfield, California

Gift That Keeps Giving

EVERY YEAR, as Valentine's Day approaches, I recall when my mother would faithfully give my dad a box of chocolate-covered cherries and a card.

Dad would always respond, "Thank you, honey, for the candy and the beautiful Valentine's Day card."

When Dad left the room, my mother, my sister and I would all have

a big laugh. My mother had been giving Dad the same valentine card for 14 years.

—Vince Cudia, Anchorage, Alaska

A FAVORITE saying that my mother, Hilda Baus, used to repeat is, “Love is free but, oh, how it costs.” And so our love, whether for friends, relatives or a secret someone, cost plenty of time and effort every Valentine’s Day.

As children in our Pennsylvania home, we made our own cards—elaborate projects of lace, ribbons and more. If we wanted to add something that we didn’t have at home, we had to pay for it at the stationery store. It made you think twice about whom to give your heart to.

We made cookies, brownies and two kinds of fudge for the day. Of course, we coveted the gorgeous, heart-shaped boxes of candy and other goodies in the 5- and 10-cent store.

I can’t recall a single time we ever got a piece of store-bought Valentine’s Day candy until February 14, 1940, when we each found a little bundle of candy hearts hidden in our napkins at supper time. They were the ones with the little messages on each: “Kiss Me,” “Be Mine,” “Cutie Pie” and so on.

The candy hearts must have come from my mother, although she never admitted it. Thereafter, they became a tradition, one that eventually surprised and delighted my children and now their kids. Of course, the candy hearts found in their napkins said things like “Fax Me,” “Awesome” and “Cool.”

Making your own valentine cards and baking your own treats are still two of the best ways I know to show someone you love them. Those traditions have taught me the importance of indulging the

impulsive side of love that makes us do things like stealing a kiss, serenading a sweetheart or wrapping a message of love in a child's napkin.

—Ruth Ceran, Ocala, Florida

Lifetime Valentines

MY MOM had given this valentine (above) to a girlfriend of hers in the 1930s, when she was in elementary school in Buffalo, New York.

This friend of my mother's kept it over the years and then mailed it back to my mom for Valentine's Day about 15 years ago. In the letter that accompanied the valentine, she let my mom know how much the valentine and my mother's friendship had meant to her over the years. Mom passed along the valentine to me, her only daughter.

Every Valentine's Day, I take the card out of my china closet and place it on my mantel for everyone to see and to tell the story. I cherish having this memory of my mom's youth and the impact she made on many people's lives.

I will also hand this valentine down to my only daughter to help her keep warm memories of her grandmother and to cherish the true meaning of friendship in her heart.

—Kim M. DeCarlo, Lanoka Harbor, New Jersey