

Kisses on paper

Chocolates and flowers may be classic Valentine’s Day gifts, but the traditional way to celebrate 14th February is with a few lines you have penned yourself. After all, in the era of Snapchat, texting, etc., nothing is more moving than a heartfelt love letter.

In the name of the rose? No, of love!

Given the sales figures, the oft-asserted claim that Valentine’s Day is merely the brainchild of entrepreneurial florists doesn’t appear too far-fetched. In recent years, some EUR 120 to 130 million has been spent at German florists alone around 14th February – fully twice as much as on other days. But the true roots of the practice are of a far more emotional nature. According to legend, back in the 3rd century AD, Italian Bishop Valentine of Terni agreed to marry soldiers even though state law insisted that they had to stay unmarried. As a consequence, so the legend goes, the “bishop of affection” was hanged on the 14th of February. Since then, the date has been associated with love and lovers and celebrated with poems, individually decorated cards and later also small gifts. Flowers and pre-printed greeting cards only became popular after the Second World War. Even so, many people are now harking back to the original tradition.

“My blind eyes are desperately waiting for the sight of you”

When a British insurance company held a Valentine’s Day poll asking people to submit their favourite love letters, the response was overwhelming. The result was unanimous: the top spot went to a note that country singer Johnny Cash wrote to his wife, June Carter, on her 65th birthday. “We get old and get used to each other. We think alike. We read each other’s minds. (...) But once in a while, like today, I meditate on it and realise how lucky I am to share my life with the greatest woman I ever met.” Napoleon, Ludwig van Beethoven and even rock guitarist Jimi Hendrix all made the top ten, as did actor Richard Burton, who wrote to Elizabeth Taylor: “My blind eyes are desperately waiting for the sight of you. You don’t realize of course, how fascinatingly beautiful you have always been, and how strangely you have acquired an added and special and dangerous loveliness.”

Tickets to a hidden world

Declarations of love such as these immediately get the mind racing. For who wouldn’t like to receive words such as these? Or even pen them? A love letter is like a ticket to a hidden world of emotions, a carefully formulated revelation of previously closely-guarded secrets. In an age in which everything is distributed en masse through likes and retweets, words written for only one person – *the* one person – can be almost breathtakingly intimate. They are also wonderfully luxurious, given that a hastily typed “X” is often the closest thing we get to expressing affection nowadays.

“I know many young women who receive many e-mails and text messages, but never a letter written with feeling,” says British author Jojo Moyes, whose best-selling novel ‘The Last Letter from Your Lover’ tells the story of a young journalist who stumbles across a love letter in her newspaper's archives. The story is fictitious, but the quotations that open each chapter are genuine: while writing her book, Moyes advertised and asked online for people to submit declarations of love from real life. The letters she received were full of passion, pain and humour, but also despair, such as this one: “I wish I could be the person who rescues you, but that simply won't happen.”

“I love you non per 14 giorno”

But it's better to be really frustrated than artificially jolly. Authenticity is everything, says Swiss linguist Eva Lia Wyss, who has collected and analysed more than 7500 love letters in Zurich University's “love letter archive.” She believes that hardest love letters to read are those taken from preset texts or literature. After all, the detached copy-paste principle is the polar opposite to how we are actually feeling. “Letters are often written when people are getting to know one another or developing a relationship. That's mostly the most passionate time,” she says.

An article entitled ‘Liebe auf den ersten Block’ (Love at first pad), published in *1001* magazine by the German Journalist's School in Munich, tells the story of a very special budding relationship: when Achim, a young German tourist, meets an Italian woman called Pina near Rimini in 1959, the two immediately strike up a friendship – yet don't have a common language in which to communicate. So they buy dictionaries and writing pads and proceed to master each other's language and culture syllable by syllable, falling in love in the process. “I love you non per 14 giorno, sempre, sempre,” Achim notes. He is proven right: almost 60 years later, he and Pina are still together.

Writing about love isn't enough

Perhaps that's because he followed the advice of a very famous writer quoted in the first volume of the wonderful and now cult collection “Letters of Note” (compiled by Shaun Usher): in 1971, actor and future US President Ronald Reagan wrote his stepson a very personal letter of congratulation on his wedding day. It ends with the words, “p.s. You'll never get in trouble if you say, 'I love you' at least once a day.”

Author (naming optional): Julia Bender

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Homage to a noble love story: Limited Edition Heritage

Baroness Otilie von Faber and Count Alexander zu Castell-Rüdenhausen married in 1898, thus beginning the new noble lineage of Faber-Castell. Count Alexander was the sixth-generation head of the company. The couple had the Faber-Castell castle remodelled in stone, reworking the ladies' salon and the gentlemen's room too. The luxurious fountain pens "Limited Edition Heritage" draw their inspiration from both these rooms:



Nostalgic elegance: It was in the castle's ladies' salon that Otilie von Faber-Castell dealt with her correspondence. She preferred to write in royal violet, her favourite colour. Romantic detail: The intertwined letters A, O, F and C on the cap of the fountain pen represent the initials of Alexander, Otilie and the new family name of Faber-Castell.

Product: Fountain pen Otilie, Limited Edition Heritage, Graf von Faber-Castell.

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Poetry in green: The fountain pen Alexander comes in a limited edition of 1,898 alluding to 1898, the year in which Otilie and Alexander were joined in matrimony.

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Pure romance: On Valentine's Day, handwritten messages remain extremely popular.

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Straight to the heart: an artistic declaration of love, hand-lettered for Valentine's Day.

Products: Pitt Artist Pen and fountain pen Ambition OpArt Sand, Faber-Castell.

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