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Valentine's Day... A Change From Serious To Light-Hearted

If, as often said 'all the world loves a lover', then Valentine's Day surely has the widest appeal of any celebration.

School kids in Observerland like those across the United States are busy writing their names on the back of colorful Valentines. Grown-ups, young and old alike, pause before the valentine displays thinking who might enjoy one of the bright, cheery cards.

Boy friends arrive with candy or flowers and the women look for something for "that special guy."

Lovers get cards, grandparents get cards and teachers are deluged with Valentines, even from little imps who have been sassy all year long.

It's not a serious day, it's a fun day, but it wasn't always so.

Once upon a time Valentine's Day was a time for serious commitment of the heart.

Like so many holidays, it was cele-

was sure to fall in love. Cupid, arrows, and colorful birds are still used to decorate Valentines, just as they were decades ago.

Several Valentines found in a family scrap book are examples of the kind of sentiments that were expressed in the mid-Victorian era.

One was a tiny card decorated with gold rococo cupids and flowers that must have accompanied an elaborate gift

Cupid has started on his way.

Across the silver sea

And so, in honor of the day

He bears this gift to thee!

Let it tell thee loud as the bugle blast.

Of a rapturous love that shall over last

While the bugle blast metaphor is about as romantic as an air hammer, and the



brated long before it acquired its present name. One ancient belief was that birds chose their mates on Feb. 14. Obviously, a lot of folks decided that what was good enough for the birds was good enough for them.

During the Middle Ages in England, Scotland and parts of France, there was a game played on Valentine's Eve. The young people gathered and drew names and the name drawn became the holder's sweetheart for the following year -- his Valentine.

Some Valentines!

Our 1972 youngsters would probably instigate instant rebellion against such an arbitrary system of choosing a date. Those used to today's free-wheeling dating system would want no part of a year's commitment pulled out of a hat.

At one time in Sicily, young women believed that the first man they would see on Valentine's Day would be their bridegroom before the year's end. If he was already married, it would be someone who looked like him.

The Sicilian girls, like kids expecting Santa, were up before the sun to catch a glimpse of the lucky man.

Although these customs sound completely out-of-date with our times, bits still remain.

That lovable golden winged cherub, Cupid, is right out of Roman mythology.

Cupid was the son of Venus, goddess of love and one wounded by his arrow

words may strike us as funny and stilted, someone kept it as a personal treasure.

Another Valentine from the same book was made of a lacy white paper doily pasted on yellow paper with a sentimental verse inserted at the bottom:

There is no joy to charm me
Unless that joy is shared by thee

One moment dream about thee

Is worth a long and endless year

Of waking thought without thee

My own love, my only dear

Today's greeting card writers seem far better able to cope with combining sentimental thoughts and conversational tone.

Just as the number of Valentines people send today is a rebellion against the "one and only" cards of past years, so the "penny dreadful" of the early 1900's was a sharp reaction to the heavy sentimentality of the Victorian era.

The penny dreadful was a single sheet of cheap paper. It contained an ugly caricature and a biting verse at the bottom. Fortunately, these too, seem to have lost their appeal.

Valentine's Day has evolved so now it means cards for everyone, cookies and cakes, parties and pleasant, if not always dead serious, sentiments.