

Valentine's Day: Say it with Chickens

by Roz Warren

At some point in the relationship, every man I've ever gone out with has looked at me sadly and concluded "You aren't very romantic, are you?"

I am not. I am loving and funny and loyal. But romance has never been my thing.

Hearts and flowers? Strolling hand-in-hand? Candle lit dinners for two?

No thanks.

Love at first sight? Not for me.

In contrast, the very first time my sister met her future husband, she knew that she wanted to spend the rest of her life with him. She was just 18.

Larry was, undeniably, a catch. Nice. Adorable. Sane. Stable. Jewish. Not to mention Harvard Pre Med.

But still...

"You're so young!" I told my sister. "Have fun! Shop around."

"I don't need to shop around," she said.

Apparently not. They just celebrated their 32nd wedding anniversary.

This is a fabulous achievement and they're my favorite married couple. And yet, going through life yoked to another person like that, no matter how wonderful that person might be, is my personal idea of hell.

I've always been this way.

When the other little girls were drawing pictures of bridal gowns in their school notebooks and dreaming about Mr. Right, my dream was to grow up, live by myself in a fabulous Manhattan penthouse and write books. (Except during my Emma Peel "Avengers" phase, when I wanted to grow up, chase bad guys with a debonair partner and effortlessly throw people who got in my way across the room.)

Here's how un-romantic I was: after "Snow White" aired on "The Wonderful World of Disney" and all my twelve-year-old pals were singing "Some Day my Prince Will Come," I refashioned the lyrics so they'd apply to me.

"Someday my prince will come," I sang, " and I'll tell him to fuck himself."

Despite all of this, as a child, I adored Valentines Day.

Every year my sister and I spent hours crafting hand-made Valentines for every kid in class from every art supply we could get our hands on. Construction paper. Glitter. Ribbons. Doilies. Stamps. Stickers.

Each was a personalized work of art. If your pal Suzie loved Barbies, you'd draw them on her Valentine. Patty was into horses? You'd festoon her Valentine with Palimino stickers. Doug, who loved "Mad" Magazine, got an Alfred E. Newman Valentine. For our very best

friends, we composed poems of the “Roses are red/violets are blue” variety.

On Valentine's Day, the class took turns going around the room delivering valentines to the shoebox “mailboxes” on each desk. Then, we opened them.

What a great moment! It was nothing but treasure. Glittering store-bought cards. Elaborately crafted hand-made cards. Vintage old timey Valentines. Dozens of little heart-shaped candies. Poems and notes and messages from your best friends. Sprinkle-covered heart-shaped cookies. Pink-iced cupcakes.

It was something I looked forward to all year. But it wasn't about romance. What did we know about romance? We were in elementary school. For us, it was a celebration of friendship.

When we hit junior high, Valentine's Day stopped being about friendship and began being about True Love. And I stopped caring about it.

Mark, the man in my life, is more romantic than I am (Everyone is.) After years of patiently waiting for me to come around, he's come to realize that as wonderful as he is, I'm never going to wake up one morning, look deeply into his eyes, and start singing “You are so beautiful to me.”

But we do exchange tokens of our affection on Valentines Day.

Because he's an artist, and bookish, I'll get him a pricey art book I know he wants but is too frugal to buy himself.

For years, he gave me a Whitman sampler each Valentine's day, until I finally confessed that I don't actually like Whitman samplers. “I

save them until the candy gets stale, I told him. "Then I throw them out."

So now he makes me a gift -- a painting, a collage or a hand-crafted, three dimensional piece. Something creative and unique, just for me.

Which, come to think of it, is a lot like those hand-made Valentines I so loved as a kid.

So, to a certain extent, with Mark, I've come full circle.

And yet, I sometimes think about trying to reclaim the joy I used to feel on Valentine's Day. Why does it have to be exclusively about Romantic Love? Why can't those of us who just aren't into that emotion (or who are between partners) be inspired by our grade school selves and celebrate the friends we love?

Not that I plan to go around handing out glittery hand-made construction paper hearts to all my pals.

Although, perhaps I should.

I'm thinking of going with something even more outside the box. I've consulted the Heifer International website and see that I can express my appreciation for our friendship on this special day by purchasing a llama for a third world family in your name.

Or, if we're not quite that close, how about a hen?

We non-romantic types can start a new Valentine's Day tradition! While others exchange romantic gifts and walk hand-in-hand on a moon lit beach, the rest of us can say "Thank God for our friends" and exchange celebratory poultry.

Roses are red/violets are blue/I'm so glad we're friends /here's a
chicken for you!

Happy Valentines Day.

