

Till Cornbread Do Us Part: Valentine's Day Reflections

Written by Jack Sparacino

Tuesday, 10 February 2015 10:29



Valentine's Day, February 14th in the clutches of winter, still gets lots of attention every year despite its competition with football, basketball and all the storms, as many people love it because of its focus on, well, love.

Or dread it because of all the commercial associations, maybe because they feel they lack the right someone to share it with. As in a valentine. Back in grade school, our teachers encouraged us to send each other valentine cards and drawings. We enjoyed it, despite being blissfully oblivious to the holiday's origins.

According to Wikipedia, "Saint Valentine's Day began as a liturgical celebration of one or more early [Christian](#) saints named [Valentinus](#) . . . The day was first associated with [romantic love](#) in the circle of [Geoffrey Chaucer](#) in the [High Middle Ages](#) , when the tradition of [courtly love](#) flourished . . . Valentine's Day symbols that are used today include the [heart-shaped](#) outline, doves, and the figure of the winged [Cupid](#) . Since the 19th century, handwritten valentines have given way to mass-produced [greeting cards](#)

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Tons of cards. Perhaps predictably, some people developed cynical reservations over the years about Valentine's Day. Guys sometimes use it as a convenient excuse to offer a nice gift to their wives or girlfriends, perhaps as a gentle way of asking to be let off the hook for all the times they were unavailable, physically or emotionally. Or in some cases just plain out to lunch. Literally. Maybe with their other girlfriend or just enjoying a mid-day snack with friends playing poker or watching sports. All good until some joker at the network decided to run an ad that reminded them of that certain saintly day coming up.

Wouldn't it be nice if guys— and gals – just behaved like their honey's valentine all year long, without a holiday to nail down a scheduled recognition of their affections? Maybe if they knew the very best 'secret handshake' style words and phrases that some folks have used for decades to stay in their sweethearts' good graces. My concern here is that if I share these publically, well they won't be much of a secret anymore and may lose some of their special powers. Oh well, this is the age of full disclosure or transparency or . . . well, you know. Anyway, here they are. Just keep them to yourselves, ok?

But first a disclaimer. These ten phrases will help to sustain a happy courtship and marriage, one that will hopefully last many years. They work better when they seem sincere and are best when they are genuinely genuine. Veteran players, though, also know not to use them too often unless the situation grows desperate. As in they really messed up and her hair is on fire or their key won't unlock the door.

“Great idea—why didn't I think of that?” This one gives an extra bang for the buck. It establishes Mr. Special as self-effacing while pointing out what should be obvious, namely that women are usually the source of really good ideas (except when they're not).

“Take your time.” What gal doesn't like having a few extra minutes or even weeks to figure out a plan? Get themselves really ready, truly sure of themselves. Like whether to keep Mr. Special around for another year (or week).

“Put it on my card.” Here we can be talking serious money, though aren't most women more sale conscious than men? For example, how many bargain basement fiascos weren't

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dominated by women? Well, that is, until they really started throwing some sharp elbows and a few male EMTs were called to the scene.

"Wow that (hair, etc.) color looks great on you." This plays straight down the middle of the gender bias fairway. It works in much the same way that no matter how beat up a guy's pickup truck is, you can bring a smile to his face by complimenting him on what a great "classic" he's driving.

"Where would you like to go for dinner?" Yeah, we could be talking some fairly serious money again, but we all have to eat and it's cheaper than diamonds or a designer sweater (hey, I just learned in *Town and Country* magazine that some sweaters can cost over a grand!). Just don't ruin the moment by letting your date stay on their smart phone until dessert arrives.

"My fault, I'll clean it up." Who doesn't appreciate having someone they like standing at the ready with paper towels, a pail and a mop along with some of that good lime green disinfectant? Having your back is one thing, backing up your miscues (messcues?) with an energetic cleanup campaign is sometimes even better.

"I must be the luckiest guy/gal on earth to have met you." This one is a direct descendant of Jackie Gleason's Ralph Kramden character from "The Honeymooners," as in (boomed to Alice) "Baby, you're the greatest." If all goes well, both of you are young enough at heart to not even remember this great old TV show.

"That (fill in the blank) of yours is the best I ever ate. Even better than my (grand)mother's." Many people have an inflated sense of their culinary skills, so a cooking compliment has to really go over the moon. And what better reference point than Mom's cornbread, spaghetti sauce, fried chicken, meatloaf, etc. Psst . . . remember to go for seconds and keep this compliment between the two of you.

"Where to, sweetie?" Who wouldn't like their dearest to offer to take them anywhere they choose? This is another potential land mine, though, unless you're willing to get dragged along on (oops, happily accompany Mr. or Ms. Right) to the mall, his parents' house, or a snooty restaurant where \$100 a head barely takes the edge off your appetite.

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"No kid ever had a better mother/father than you." This one had better be sincere though reams of supporting data aren't necessary as it's impossible to prove and in truth is probably an exaggeration just by definition. But given the high degree of difficulty associated with great parenting and its transcendent importance, this is one heck of a compliment.

OK, the secret's out, these are the all-time best relationship preserving (bailout?) offerings. But for those who remain baffled by Valentine's Day and its real context and meaning (I just opened a pack of coupons that included—one after the next—a special massage company gift card with little hearts all over it and **then** a promotional ad for an exterminator company) here's another little notion. Our best pets can be our valentines, too. Who wouldn't say right out loud how much they love their dog or cat . . . or horse? While we're making up our minds about those other, human objects of our affections, how about a hug and a kiss for Maggie or Sam the dog . . . or Fails the horse?

Where to, sweetie?