

Valentine's Day

Swoonworthy Now But It Wasn't Always All Hearts and Flowers

by Deb Lehman



Valentine's Day occurs every February 14 when candy, flowers and gifts are exchanged between loved ones in the name of St. Valentine. But who is this mysterious saint and where did these traditions come from?

Contrary to popular belief, the origins of St. Valentine's Day were dark, bloody and hardly the stuff of great romance, according to *NPR*. Claudius II, Roman emperor, executed two men, both named Valentine, on Feb. 14 in the third century. Their martyrdom was honored by the Catholic Church.

Still others believe that the holiday originates from a Pagan fertility festival called "Lupercalia," which was celebrated on February 15 by sacrificing animals and smacking women with animal hides.

It wasn't until the Middle Ages that the holiday became associated with love and romance, a tradition that first started from the common belief in France and England that birds began to mate on February 14

And who was Cupid and how does he relate to Valentine's Day? According to *Time*, by the turn of the 19th century, the cute little boy with the bow and arrow became linked to Valentine's Day due



to his love-matching powers.

Chaucer and Shakespeare romanticized Valentine's Day and it gained popularity throughout Britain and the rest of Europe. Soon, people began penning love letters to celebrate Valentine's Day, and by the early 1910s, an American company that would become Hallmark began distributing Valentine's Day cards.

According to Hallmark, a whopping 145 million Valentine's Day cards are exchanged every February 14. This makes Valentine's Day the second biggest holiday for exchanging greeting cards, after Christmas.

Candy and flowers might be some of the most common gifts for Valentine's Day, but according to the National Retail Federation, the category that we typically spend the most on for February 14 is jewelry, at a massive \$5.8 billion in 2020.

The second most-paid-for gift on Valentine's Day 2020 was an evening out with \$4.3 billion, followed by clothing, candy and then flowers.

According to *Good Housekeeping*, Valentine's Day is one of the most popular days to pop the question, with as many as six million couples getting engaged on February 14.