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sample

A Day for Lovers



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The tradition of Valentine's Day apparently traces all the way back to ancient Greek and Roman fertility festivals and holidays. 14 February was a special Roman holiday honoring Juno the Queen Goddess of women, love and marriage.

The next day began the Festival of Lupercalia, in honor of Faunus, god of agriculture, to celebrate the official return of spring. The festival was celebrated in part with love lotteries. One part was a lottery where the children of the village were paired. All the names of the village girls were written on individual pieces of paper which were then placed in jars from which each village boy would draw a name.

That boy and the girl he drew then became partners and were paired for the duration of the festival, sometimes for much longer. Many remained couples and eventually married. Apparently the men, seeing an opportunity here, didn't miss out either.

Eligible women's names were also written on slips of paper and put in a box from which the men drew a partner for the 'rituals' of this pagan festival. Ironically an even more ancient pagan festival ritual happened the following day as part of the spring festival and in honor of Roman founders Romulus and Remus.

First sacrificial animals, usually a goat and a dog, were sacrificed by Luperci priests at the entrance to the cave where the brothers were thought to have been raised by a she-wolf. The goats hide was then cut into strips which were then dipped in the sacrificial blood.

Then roving bands of young men struck their fields and women with the bloody strips of the sacred animal hide, which they graciously received believing the whipping made them and their fields more fertile and protected them against wolf attack.





Later on with population increase and declining wolf attack women were rewarded with a gift of ribbon rather than a whipping. Then 1 March, Romans further honored Goddess Juno in her role as protector of women with the Festival of Matronalia where gifts were given to wives by their husbands.

By honoring their bonds of love and marriage through these gifts it was hoped that Juno would sanctify their marriage and protect their homes.

Saint Valentine didn't enter the picture until he was clubbed to death and lost his head to Emperor Claudius II on 14 February 269 A.D. As a Roman priest his 'crime' was to secretly marry young couples during a time when the emperor, known as Claudius the Cruel, had banned marriage because he wanted everyone to remain single, loveless and in the army to fight his many wars.

Valentine didn't agree and continued marrying young couples until Claudius

imprisoned Valentine and sentenced him for execution.

He became an instant martyr to the cause of love. Young people, who still believed in love much more than Claudius, persisted to come to the prison where they threw flowers and notes of encouragement into his cell window. On the day of his death he left a note of thanks to the prison guards' daughter who had befriended him and lifted his spirits while he waited to die. He signed the farewell note that he left for her, "love from your Valentine".

In the years that followed the people remembered his martyrdom and honored his name by sharing notes of endearment which they gave to one another on the day of his death, often inscribed with the words, "love from your Valentine". Over time all these festivals, holidays and traditions mixed and spread through Europe and far beyond.



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