

MINNESOTA
Parent

March 2013



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Sean
Toren



**ON ROMANCE.
(BELATED)**

PHOTO BY DANA CROATT

What—it's March already? Valentine's Day missed again? It was blown last year, too. No drawn bath with scented candles. No babysitter and dinner out. No flowers or a Whitman's Sampler or even a Hershey's kiss.

Is there a spouse in hot water? Pouting? Threats of moving my ass(ets) offshore?

No, I've been through this before. I stayed calm and told my partner 'Edna' how disappointed I was that she'd forgotten me again.

Wait...you thought I was talking about my own epic fail? Not on your life. I'm the envy of straight men and other non-

romantics everywhere. I have so many 'get out of jail free' cards in my wallet I finally just had it tattooed across my forehead. I can't get in trouble for forgetting birthdays or anniversaries or greeting card holidays, because my wife forgets them first.

This is a mixed blessing for someone who survived what we gravely refer to in my family as The Great Valentine's Day Massacre of 1979.

It started with my father completely forgetting Valentine's Day. After biting her tongue most of the afternoon, my mother finally let loose—admitting that she wished Pop had gotten her something, anything, that showed he'd remembered.

Even something as simple as (hint, hint) my mother's favorite guilty pleasure at the time, "peanuts and M&Ms mixed in a bowl." This mixture allows for capricious, whimsical combinations of salt and chocolate, depending upon mood.

My father slinked out of the house to get the simple gift and cool things down, but instead made things worse by getting a big, yellow bag of peanut M&Ms (you know, a peanut INSIDE an M&M), allowing for no capricious combinations.

Things got colorful the moment he poured the M&Ms into the bowl—in the form of fiery, polychromatic sparks shooting out of my Irish-New Jersey-mother's ears.

I scooted off to my room, so I don't know if a second M&M trip was made or how they managed to resolve it. What I do know is that this was formative in my understanding of romance.

Love philosophy

To explain I'll have to address the philosophical question that heavyweights Kant and Nietzsche and Carrie from *Sex in the City* all wrestled with, with varying degrees of success, which is: How do we show "I-heart-you" romance? How do we prove to a partner that "you are my one-and-only"? That "I'm the only one for you"? That's what all this romance stuff is about, right?

The two-part answer we all landed on (OK, except for syphilitic Nietzsche) is: Effort—and Interest.

It sounds simple, and it is. First: the Interest part. My father made a subtle but telling mistake that proved he had not only NOT been paying attention to my mother's specific, hot-headed request for the one simple thing that would make her happy—but also that he had not been paying attention to the last couple years, where any party we had involved the serving of peanuts and M&Ms mixed together in a bowl.

What she wanted was what we all want, really (no, besides salt and chocolate)—for our partner to show



enough interest to ‘get us’ and then to ‘show us’ that they get us.

Society understands this. Over time, we’ve built in almost fail-safe mechanisms for making sure the more mnemonically challenged (or shy or emotionally uptight) get a little help. I mean, what is Valentine’s Day except a way of putting a reminder on a calendar that we can’t just love our peeps, but that we need to tell our peeps that we love them, too?

Which leads me to the Effort half of the equation.

In the past, our romantic ancestors had to breaststroke across Nordic seas, stumble over prairie fires, and even stave off growling wolves (mine did, anyway) to deliver their version of edible underwear to their beloved. It was ‘easy’ for them to prove their love.

Not so now, with edible underwear deliverable with a smart phone app. And not so for my father back in ’79, either. The truth is, though, if he’d simply driven to five stores and struck out at each one, but then presented Mom with a hand-made card that said, “Lifetime supply of peanuts and M&Ms—for my little peanut!” he’d have been golden.

You can be, too. Here comes the nugget you’ve been waiting for: you have to understand your partner’s deepest, M&M-and-peanuts self—and then you have to show them that you get them—and rub it in with some elbow grease. Just exhibit a little effort like driving across town for (hint, hint) those pork dumplings I like so much (I know you’re reading this, Edna).

And if Jiaozi Express was closed and you had to go somewhere else, I wouldn’t fault you for it. Heck, a simple card would do it. Even a Post-it note. Or a little “I love you,” stuck inside a fortune cookie, or scrawled on the back of a gas station receipt. Whatever. I’m easy. A little interest. A little effort. It’s all I ask.

Sean Toren loves living the full catastrophe in Minneapolis with his wife and son. He can be contacted at mnga@mnpubs.com with thoughts or suggestions.



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