

your life

The Poetry of Love

The Romance of the Written Word

The phrase "love letter" might evoke images of paper scrolls being lavishly adorned with curly script applied by an ink-dipped quill. Although billets-doux aren't necessarily a thing of the past, they have undergone some significant changes since the pre-ballpoint era.

"There have been a number of changes in love communications, some of which are quite dramatic. Almost all the changes we see have been fueled by the development of information technologies," said Tim Meyer, professor of communications at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay.

TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGES

With the advent of the Smartphone, Facebook and Instant Messaging (IM), technology has indeed changed the way people communicate. Meyer, who has done research on communication preferences of men and women, has seen the composition of original love letters all but virtually disappear.

"In romantic communications, IMing and text messaging predominate," Meyer said. "One of the burgeoning areas is social networking websites. Facebook is what's driving connections among people, including within romantic relationships."

As technology has changed the way in which we communicate with each other, the messages themselves have also received a makeover. "Technology has changed the hierarchy and value of what we communicate," Meyer said. "It's less personalized and intimate when technology comes into play."

Instead of composing original works of poetry or prose, it seems love-struck individuals today often rely on written works from the past to convey their feelings.

"People use poems or famous lines from literature they find online," Meyer said. "It's like an electronic Hallmark available at our fingertips."

With technology creating endless avenues for communication, it would seem easier than ever to stay connected with your partner. While this may be true to a point, recognizing the limitations of technological communications is key to using them effectively.

"The more high-tech we become as a society, the more effort we need to put into personal ways of connection. Otherwise, intimacy can get lost," said Shelley Riutta, holistic psychotherapist at Radiant Life Counseling in Green Bay.

POWER OF THE PEN

Riutta encourages the couples she works with to use letter writing as an ongoing way of staying connected. "So much of the satisfaction and happiness experienced in a relationship is due to good commu-

nication, including in the written form," Riutta said.

Regardless of whether you live with your partner or not, Riutta suggests skipping the email every now and again and sending a letter the old fashioned way, through the mail.

"There's something about getting a letter in the mail that can be really powerful. It has a longer shelf life than a text or verbal compliment," Riutta said. "Plus there's something special about seeing your partner's handwriting."

The power of a handwritten letter is acknowledged even by couples who use texting or IMing as their primary means of daily communication. "What it says on part of the sender is I cared enough to spend some time and write this out and get it to you. That means a lot," Meyer said.

Letters of admiration are just one way in which the written word can benefit a relationship. Utilizing the written word can also be helpful when couples encounter a bump along the road.

"If there's something challenging going on in a relationship and verbal communication is troubling, writing it out can help capture what needs to be shared. On the receiving end, you can read and reread the information to understand it and process it on a deeper level," Riutta said.

EXPRESS YOURSELF

Cindy Bartel, couples therapist at the American Foundation of Counseling Services in Green Bay, recommends couples be playful and spontaneous in their written communications to each other.

"Written communication can help couples have a deeper understanding of how they feel about each other," Bartel said. "It's clear because it's visual and can be read over and over."

Even if you aren't a natural poet, there are easy ways to express your feelings. Try sending your partner a personalized greeting card or make your own using pre-made versions as inspiration. "You can get an idea off of a card or just add words of your own to make it personal," Bartel said.

Sneak a simple love note into an unexpected place like your partner's lunch box or appointment calendar for him to find as he goes about his day. "Couples can leave loving notes for each other on their refrigerators or white boards," Bartel said. "You could even write a little message on the bathroom mirror in lipstick or in the steam from the shower."

Even with busy schedules, couples can fit these simple suggestions into their daily routine. "It takes such little time," Bartel said. "We're all busy, so let's maximize the time we do have."