

Communication is key to long-lasting relationship

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Valentine's Day is upon us again. Some of us love it; some of us love to hate it. One billion cards are sent each year for Valentine's Day, making it the second highest day in the sales of cards, exceeded only by Christmas. According to the Greeting Card Association, 85 percent of Valentine's Day cards are sent by women (surprise, surprise).

The historical basis of Valentine's Day is a bit fuzzy, but very early people were sending each other greetings expressing their feelings of affection. One of the greatest love stories is that of President Harry Truman and his wife, Bess. They first met in Sunday School. He was 6 years old and she was 5, but Harry had his eye on Bess even then. They graduated from high school together in 1901 and went their separate ways. It was nine years

before they were reacquainted, and Harry began his pursuit of Bess. They lived 20 miles apart, but that was not a problem for Harry. He courted her by mail, and their correspondence continued through nearly 50 years, including their nine-year courtship and 53 years of marriage.

Harry entered politics in 1922 and assumed the Presidency in 1945 when President Franklin D. Roosevelt died. Bess never liked living in Washington and would spend extended periods back in their home state of Missouri. When they were apart they kept in touch by writing almost daily. June 28, their wedding anniversary, was always a day to commemorate in writing. Even when they were together on that day they would write anniversary notes to each other and deliver them by hand. After years of marriage, President Truman once wrote to Bess, "I still believe my sweetheart is the ideal woman, and

my daughter is her duplicate." Not flowery but sincere.

Turn back the clock about a hundred years for another great love story. Robert Browning first wrote to Elizabeth Barrett in 1845 after reading a volume of poems that she had written. Over the course of the next 20 months, they wrote almost 600 letters to each other. They married in 1846. She continued writing poetry, inspired by her husband's great love for her. The famous lines "How do I love thee, let me count the ways ..." were written by Elizabeth Barrett Browning out of their courtship by correspondence and the early years of their marriage. They had only 15 years together before Elizabeth died in her husband's arms, yet their love has inspired many lovers through their writing.

What do both of these love stories have in common? The couples began and nurtured their relationship

through correspondence. They communicated not only their love to each other, but they shared the day-to-day events of their lives in their letters. We can never have too much communication with those we love. That is how we get to know each other better. As we write or talk, we give something of ourselves to our beloved. It's a year-round Valentine.

In these days of deployment when we are saying goodbye to loved ones, it is imperative that we communicate with each other. Whether by email or snail mail, by videotape, VTC or telephone, we cannot let the distance defeat us. There will be times of loneliness and frustration, but don't give up. You and your loved one can be a lifeline for each other and for your relationship - if you keep up your communication. Just like the Trumans and the Brownings.

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