

## Holiday boasts interesting history

The idea of not judging a book by its cover could be extended to Valentine's Day. Beneath all the TV commercials, window displays and endless red and pink heart candies, mugs and boxer shorts is an ancient celebration that evolved from ancient Greece.

According to the Greek biographer Plutarch, the holiday, then called Lupercalia and celebrated on Feb. 15, was a purification ritual devoted to Pan, the god of sheep and the countryside. Pan helped shepherds by scaring wolves away.

During the celebration, boys half undressed like Pan ran through the streets whipping people with braided thongs. Young women let themselves be lashed, believing it would help conception and delivery.

It is also legend that men drew women's names from a lottery and paired themselves with their draw for the rest of the year or at least for the duration of the celebration.

The story of how the celebration of Lupercalia is tied with Saint Valentine has many versions, but the story's base is similar.

During the same epoch, Christians such as Bishop Valentine of Terni advocated the sanctity of marriage and faith to a single partner. Why, history can't tell, but possibly after making a nuisance of himself at a celebration, Claudius II had Valentine beheaded one Feb. 14, circa 270 A.D.

Christians declared Valentine a saint. When they became the ruling power, they substituted their saints' names for those of old Greek and Roman dates and celebrations. The goal, it seems, was to abolish the celebrations entirely.

It seems that they succeeded on the European mainland, but somehow Lupercalia/Valentine's Day survived on the British Isles after being carried over by the Romans.

By mediaeval times, the English applied to themselves the popular belief that birds mated in mid-February, thus adding further meaning to festivities.

Geoffrey Chaucer, author of the *Canterbury Tales*, wrote "For this was on Saint Valentine's Day, when every fowl cometh to choose his mate (mate)."

Valentine's Day was a far more serious affair then than it is today. At this time, a man's choosing a woman as his Valentine equaled a marriage proposal. "And cosyn, uppon Fryday is sent Volentyne's Day, and every brydde chesyth hym a make (mate)," wrote Dame Elizabeth Burews to her cousin and future son-in-law, John Paston.

Valentine's Day remained an "engagement day" for several centuries. For those not ready to marry or already married, Valentine's was a day for exchanging gifts such as garters, gloves, poetry and jewelry, often through the old lottery system. From one young man to his sweetheart: "Blush not, my fair, at what I send, 'tis a fond present from a friend. These garters, made of silken twine, were fancied by your Valentine."

Among the wealthy, gifts were sometimes lavish. Lady Arabella Stuart received a jewel worth 800 English dollars from the Duke of York. Who knows how much money that is in today's dollars, but 800 anything must have been a fortune at the time.

So instead of maligning Hallmark lines such as, "It's Valentine's Day, lights, camera, how 'bout a little action?" or "Who says opposites attract, look at us," think about perpetuating an ancient custom.

-Jacqueline Woge

## Kick Valentine's Day off the right way!



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## PLAYS

Continued from Page 10B

the most prominent gay playwrights whose play *Torch Song Trilogy* won two Tony Awards.

Terrence McNally's *Andre's Mother* plays on a more serious tone. It deals with a young man's attempt to reconcile with his lover's death and establish communication with his lover's mother.

*Safe Sex* and *Andre's Mother* will play from Feb. 13-15. Performances start at 6 p.m. in the Pocket Theater of Villard Hall. A \$1 donation will be accepted at the door.

-Ming Rodrigues

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Feb. 13: Bean West Conference Room, 7PM

Application Deadline is February 17, 1992  
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## VALENTINE HOLIDAY FUN RUN/WALK

Entry deadline:  
Thursday, Feb. 13, noon  
Partners' race but singles are welcome  
Course route: A two mile course on a flat portion of UO campus  
Entry cost: \$1 per person  
**PRIZES!**



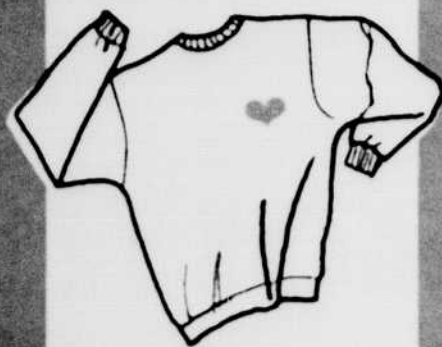
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Celebrating

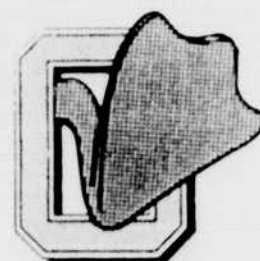
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