

A day and a way for valentines

By ALEC CHAPA
For The Daily Astorian

Year after year, the time always rolls around for chocolates and roses, for dinner and wine, for poetic and heartfelt words.

The idea of setting aside a day not just for your valentine, but for everyone's valentine is almost itself romantic, and understandably so.

It's amazing when two people come together to form a deep trust in each other, a bond strong enough to persist even through the absurd, all because of something we call "love." Through these relationships, each person can perhaps come to be more in the presence of the other. Surely whoever this person is, they could use some appreciation from time to time! So we make it a point to express our affection in one fashion or another, and say something along the lines of "Yes, I still love you and recognize your importance."

Of course, there are so many ways to go about expressing this affection to a partner. Does he like blue? Does she care for poetry? Maybe your partner enjoys simple time in nature with you.

All of these characteristics make a person who they are, and over time, the crevices of their character are revealed. Whatever these characteristics are, and whatever moments they are discovered in, as two people develop a relationship the more they begin to share a mutual understanding of each other.

In a sense, a relationship is the stringing together of ourselves with the fibers of another, where the fabric is perhaps even more unique than its parts. The more the relationship becomes unique, the more meaningful it becomes: that's why best friends, and only best friends, know all the details!

In addition to being unique, relationships are also living. As each person continues to grow and change, the ways to express their meaning and importance also changes. Not only is there room for creativity; in some ways, it's unavoidable.

As a result, these two aspects of relationships make Valentine's Day interesting: On this day, we try to find a way to relay this deep emotion, even in spite of its illu-



Alec Chapa



Valentine's Day has become redundant and predictable.

Photo Illustration via Thinkstock

Writer's Notebook

sive and mysterious nature. Interestingly enough, however, the holiday has become redundant and predictable.

Year after year, it's no surprise when store shelves become filled with the same chocolate assortments, along with the teddy bears, sometimes so large they could be mistaken for passengers. Don't forget the balloons bearing "Happy Valentine's Day" on it. Store managers place the order in advance, despite not really knowing who will come in looking.

As for the last-minute procrastinators, they can count on that same store to have the same single roses time and time again — there's always time. Despite how unique

and unpredictable the holiday could be, the same gifts seem to sell, and in some ways it makes sense: For one thing, we don't want our partner to be lonesome in the crowd of teddy bears and roses.

So we hurry off to the shops, in search of the perfect gift. Although we hope to find the perfect gift, who knows? And if we don't find it, we feel like we should at least get something. There is a sense that the material gift is most important, as if it were the sole form of expression, without which we would be terrible valentines!

This doesn't always happen, but when it does, we lose sight of the spirit of Valentine's Day because we, in a sense, lose sight of our valentines. Even if we found the perfect gift, it would be stale all by itself: Where's the kiss to go along with it? Or the touch of their hand in yours, and spending time together?

Without a valentine, why not just buy ourselves the teddy bears?

Of course, we search for the perfect gift with the best intentions, but subtly the material gift creates separation by shifting the focus away from the gift's intended.

Sometimes we forget the object of our affections in the hunt for a material representation.

Fortunately, when we lose sight of the holiday, all it really needs is a little refocusing. We need only remember to keep loved ones in the spotlight: show them affection in any way that helps, whether material or otherwise, and remember to not let minor imperfections take away from the attention we give them.

Simply put, a Hershey's kiss may be sweet, but it's only affectionate because it reminds us of its human counterpart.

Alec Chapa is a student at Clatsop Community College, studying philosophy and education. English instructor Julie Brown recommended him for this column. He is from San Antonio, Texas.

The political party of 'No way!'

By NICHOLAS KRISTOF
New York Times News Service

WASHINGTON — Perhaps the most important thing Washington will do this year is decide whether to approve President Barack Obama's nominee for the Supreme Court.

But Republicans have already announced their decision: "No way!"

It's rich for Republicans to declare pre-emptively that they will not even hold hearings on an Obama nominee, considering that they used to denounce (while their party held the White House) the notion that judges' nominations shouldn't proceed in an election year.

"That's just plain bunk."

Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, said in 2008. "The reality is that the Senate has never stopped confirming judicial nominees during the last few months of a president's term." His sense of reality has since changed.

Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., said in 2008, "Just because it's a presidential election year is no excuse for us to take a vacation."

In fairness, Democrats have also been hypocritical. In 1992, when George Bush was president, then-Sen. Joe Biden said an election-year vacancy should wait to be filled the next year.

A pox on all their houses!

Let's tune out politicians' rhetoric in both parties and look at the merits of the arguments. Supreme Court justices don't die in office very often, and in recent decades they have mostly chosen to step down before election years. But despite what Republican senators would have you believe, there

have been a number of Supreme Court vacancies filled in election years.

In the 20th century we had six:

- In 1912, the Senate confirmed Mahlon Pitney, nominated by William Howard Taft.

- In 1916, the Senate confirmed both Louis Brandeis and John Clarke, nominated by Woodrow Wilson.

- In 1932, the Senate confirmed Benjamin Cardozo, nominated by Herbert Hoover.

- In 1940, the Senate confirmed Frank Murphy, nominated by Franklin Roosevelt.

- In 1988, the Senate confirmed Anthony Kennedy, who had been nominated by Ronald Reagan the previous November.

A counterexample is Abe Fortas, whose nomination to be elevated from associate justice to chief justice in the summer of 1968 was killed by a filibuster by Republicans and Southern Democrats. But that's a horrifying bit of history for Republicans to rely upon, because the main reasons for opposition to Fortas were that he favored civil rights and was Jewish. His ethical lapses mostly emerged later.

Republicans suggest that it's standard for a Supreme Court vacancy to be held over when it occurs during an election year. Since 1900, I can find only one example of that happening — in the fall of 1956, after Congress had adjourned and Senate confirmation was impossible.

It's ironic that this tumult should bedevil a replacement for Antonin Scalia, who emphasized the constitutional text. The Constitution gives no hint that the Senate's "advice and consent" for nominations should operate only in three out of four years.



Nicholas Kristof

A pox on all their houses!



Doug Mills/The New York Times

People demonstrate at a protest organized by People for the American Way outside the Supreme Court building in Washington, Feb. 15. The Republican Party used to be serious and prudent, but today it's seems less about governing than about obstructing, Nicholas Kristof says.

If Republicans block Obama's nomination, Scalia's vacancy will last more than a year, compared with a historical average of resolving nominations in 25 days. To date, the longest Supreme Court nomination in American history lasted 125 days, and it looks as if we will easily break that record this year.

The larger issue here is obstructionism. When I was growing up, the GOP was the serious, prudent, boring party, while the Democrats included a menagerie of populists, rascals and firebrands. Today it's the GOP that embraces the George Wallace demagogues, and its aim is less to govern than to cause gridlock. That's not true of everyone — the House speaker, Paul Ryan, seems to have genuine aspirations to legislate.

But to be a Republican lawmaker today is too often to seek to block appointments, obstruct programs and shut down government. Politics becomes less about building things up than about burning them down.

Both parties are open to expanding the earned-income tax credit, to early childhood programs, to better approaches to heroin addiction, to supporting women with obstetric fistula, to reducing violence against women worldwide. Yet practical measures to address these issues stall in Congress.

The party of Lincoln is now the party of "No," refusing even to invite the president's budget director to testify on an Obama budget, as is custom-

ary. Congress is expected to accomplish next to nothing this year.

Donald Trump and Ted Cruz are the apotheosis of this disregard for governing. Cruz's entire congressional career has involved antagonizing colleagues and ensuring that nothing gets done. And Trump barely bothers with policies, just provocations.

All this is ineffably sad. I expect politicians to exaggerate and bluster. But I also expect them to govern, and that is what many in the Grand Old Party now refuse to do.

In that case, should they really be paid? Just as we have work requirements for some welfare recipients, maybe it's time to consider work requirements for senators.



THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873

STEPHEN A. FORRESTER, Editor & Publisher • LAURA SELLERS, Managing Editor
BETTY SMITH, Advertising Manager • CARL EARL, Systems Manager
JOHN D. BRUIJN, Production Manager • DEBRA BLOOM, Business Manager
HEATHER RAMSDELL, Circulation Manager