

The Cupid Within

Caryn Hacker-Buechel reflects on this month's holiday of love.

My annual search for Cupid begins, approximately, on February 7. One week always seems to be enough time to catch a glimpse of that diminutive cherub. Active wings in silent flutter and a single purposeful arm extended "combat ready," in silent preparation to launch that energetic arrow, its tip bursting with the hopeful promise of renewed or new love. Why "combat-ready," you ask?

Complacency and apathy create a stagnant life. Living in the awareness of the energy of love creates change, harmony and newness... but the journey is not always an easy one.

The origins of St. Valentine's Day were born from legends of early Roman times and are complete with the drama of an angry Emperor Claudius II who, in an attempt to secure males for his army, banished marriage and engagements in Rome. Along came a compassionate priest, Sacerdote Valentine, who performed marriages in secret and was imprisoned, beaten and put to death on February 14, 270 A.D. Sainthood, as is often the case, came to Valentine years after his death.

This fabulous symbolic holiday offers modern Valentine adherents the opportunity to focus on the concept of love in a societally accepted format. Verbal and/or written declarations of heartfelt prose are commonplace along with customary chocolate confections that speak to the heart in a smooth and languid language of love.

Our connection to love and then to carbohydrates is a well-entrenched internal road. Typically, we were first held, rocked and fed by our mothers, who offered us sweet milk as our first food. We developed an association between that original loving bond and the first foods we consumed. This connection is actually "hard-wired" on the nerve-endings in our brain. It is no wonder that the words we use to describe those we love (honey, sweetie, cupcake, sugarplum, muffin, etc.) are carbohydrates. It is also not a great surprise that comfort foods are also carbohydrates. The quick trip through time to a moment of pure unconditional love happens instantaneously and can be triggered by the simplicity of a bite of chocolate.

The New Yorker's Malcolm Gladwell's best-selling book, "Blink," explains that many of our emotional reactions originate in our brain's tissues as chemical responses. Subconscious cues trigger instantaneous emotions, such as trust, acceptance and love, chemically and without conscious thought. Data from Syracuse University has demonstrated that it takes one fifth of a



second to fall in love. In the actual “blink of an eye,” 12 areas of your brain assess visual input and then work together to determine the possible release of euphoria-inducing chemicals such as dopamine, oxytocin and adrenaline.

We know oxytocin as a female friend. Often referred to as the “love hormone,” this polypeptide produced from our pituitary gland is highly involved in human bonding, trust development, empathy, nurturance and reproduction. It stimulates lactation and is also released during the fabulous throes of intimacy. Yes, oxytocin is our buddy. If asked what substances/items I would want if left on a deserted island, it would make it into my top three, just after a vigorous, fairly young alpha male and a seriously sharp machete. Lots of duct tape would be number four.

Chocolate, on the other hand, is full of phenylethylamine (creating a small sense of euphoria), and anandamide (producing a slight feeling of elation) and mixed with sugar it becomes an intimacy-triggering carbohydrate. Naples’ own chocolatier, Norman Love, has spent the last 30 years developing the outward creative expression of his internal understanding and appreciation of chocolate’s simplistic complexity. Not only did Martha Stewart name him as one of her favorite chocolate vendors in her *Weddings* magazine, Norman Love Confections was also selected as one of the top 10 places to purchase chocolates by “USA Today.”

“We make people happy. When you put your heart and soul into what you love to do, it is very rewarding,” commented a grateful Love. “We offer an affordable indulgence

to everyone and every day we see the instant pacification and enjoyment that a piece of fine chocolate can bring. If you can go to work and make people happy, it is very satisfying. That is what I do.”

The chemical changes initiated by a melting chunk of chocolate on the back of your tongue can only be enhanced by the focused awareness of love as a central theme for this holiday and for life, in general. Naples’ resident and international spiritual visionary Panache Desai reminds us that “Contrary to most great movies and love stories, the greatest love of all is found within—not in another.” Desai adds, “You can never truly love another until you’ve fallen truly, madly and deeply in love with yourself. It is this unshakable foundation of self-love that allows you the freedom to fully be yourself and freely express your love to another.” Desai’s message of vibrational transformation and unconditional love has touched the lives of tens of thousands globally. “By all means celebrate love on February 14,” adding, “but don’t forget that your heart beats in every moment of every day—and so too should the endless expression of love emanate from your being to all reality.” So...the first piece of chocolate is for me.

Caryn Hacker-Buechel, ACSW, DCSW, began writing books and articles for growing minds during her 30-year career as a psychotherapist and motivational speaker. She is the author of the children’s book: “A Bully Grows Up: Erik Meets the Wizard.” She lives in Naples.