THE HISTORY OF VALENTINES DAY

by: Heather Dean

Valentine's Day started in the time of the Roman Empire. In ancient Rome, February 14th was a holiday to honor Juno. Juno was the Queen of the Roman Gods and Goddesses. The Romans also knew her as the Goddess of women and marriage. The following day, February 15th, began the Feast of Lupercalia. The lives of young boys and girls were strictly separate. However, one of the customs of the young people was name drawing. On the eve of the festival of Lupercalia, the names of Roman girls were written on slips of paper and placed into jars. Each young man would draw a girl's name from the jar and would then be partners for the duration of the festival with the girl whom he chose. Sometimes the pairing of the children lasted an entire year, and often, they would fall in love and would later marry. Under the rule of Emperor Claudius II, Rome was involved in many bloody and unpopular military campaigns. Claudius the Cruel (figures he would have such a title- doesn't it??) was having a difficult time getting soldiers to join his military legions. He believed that the reason was that Roman men did not want to leave their loves or families. As a result, Claudius cancelled all marriages and engagements in Rome. The good Saint Valentine was a priest in Rome, in the days of Claudius II. He and Saint Marius aided the Christian martyrs and secretly married couples, and for this kind deed Saint Valentine was apprehended and dragged before the Prefect of Rome, who condemned him to be beaten to death with clubs and to have his head cut off. In protest, the young people and his supporters came to the jail and threw flowers and notes through his cell window, so he would know that they, too, still believed in love. One of these young people happened to be the daughter of the prison guard. He allowed her to visit the priest and they would have long talks. She helped keep his spirits up by telling him that he did the right thing by opposing the Emperor and ignoring his laws against marriage and performing them secretly. He suffered martyrdom on the 14th day of February, about the year 270. But not before he left a note thanking her for her kindness, loyalty and friendship signing it " From your Valentine." That note started the custom of exchanging love messages on Valentines Day. In 496 AD, Pope Gelasius set aside February 14 to honor Saint Valentine. The pastors of the early Christian Church in Rome endeavored to do away with the pagan element in these feasts by substituting the names of saints for those of maidens. As the Lupercalia began about the middle of February, the pastors appear to have chosen Saint Valentine's Day for the celebration of this new feast. So it seems that the custom of young men choosing maidens for valentines, or saints as patrons for the coming year, arose in this way. In the Middle Ages, Valentine became associated with the union of lovers under conditions of duress- enter Will Shakespeare and his tales of Romeo and Juliet among others. Maidens in this time would put their names on heart shaped pieces of paper and put them in jars for the men to pick out as fate decided. They wore these heart shaped pieces of paper on their outer sleeve. Thus came the saying "wearing your heart on your sleeve." In today's society we buy cards, gorge ourselves on chocolate, candy and cheesecake (if your lucky chocolate-candied-cheesecake). We expect flowers and maybe dinner in exchange for our affections from our significant other(s). So when you're cramming that bon-bon in your face, remember the saint who got bludgeoned and decapitated, all for the sake of love.