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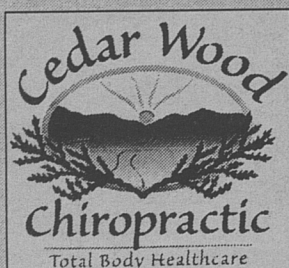
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views: Valentine's Day, International Style

Several years ago, my sixth grade class prepared for a Valentine's Day party, complete with selecting cute cards that we would drop into the personally designed, heart-laden grocery bags taped to the desks of our fellow classmates. And my first lesson in love would come at the high cost of learning about the prohibitive nature of l'amour that spans beyond international borders.

Yvette La Salle (not her real name) was my first crush at the tender age of 11. She only joined our classroom that January, as her family moved to the Great Plains from the city of lights and love – Paris (France, not Texas.)

Perhaps it was her foreign accent, or the gleam of her braces when she smiled, but I thought she was the most beautiful specimen of female beauty that Nicoma Park, Oklahoma had ever seen.

Since her first day at our school, when Mrs. Stuart introduced Yvette to her new homeroom, I think I knew how love felt. Around her, I had the palpating heart, the clammy hands, and dare I say, the rising evidence of male attraction that only the on-set of puberty can produce. I was hot for her! So I wanted just the right way to express my interest, in the form of an elementary grade Valentine's Day card. My choice was boy and girl puppy dogs, frolicking on the front of the card. The boy puppy dog's eyes were looking longingly into the big-lashed eyes of the girl puppy dog. It was bold, but dammit, I was in love!

When the day of truth came, I nervously weaved through the rows of desks in the fifth and sixth grade classroom – delivering my cards into all the bags of my classmates. (Everyone had to get one; it was a Catholic school for god-sakes). I anxiously saved Yvette's card for last. But taking my cues from Pepe La Pew, the bold and sophisticated skunk of cartoon fame at the time, I approached Yvette's desk, and made the drop. I spied her reading all her cards, but saw no special recognition of mine.

"What's wrong?" I thought to myself. While most kids just signed their names to the impersonal cards (in obvious preparation for sending holiday cards as adults), I had added an affectionate and personal greeting.

Something like,

greg d. kubiak

"You're the best!" as I recall. Days, weeks went by. Nothing. I worshiped Yvette from afar. Only with the approach of our St. Patrick's Day party, (thankfully, *sans* cards), did I confront Yvette regarding my love for her, that could not speak its name. I caught her in the hallway – on the way from morning recess to milk and cookie time – and stumbled through reminding her of my heart-bearing Valentine's card a month before.

Sensing my discomfort with the topic and the feelings that back it up, Yvette let me down gently by declaring, "I just don't like you THAT way, Greg!" And added, "Besides,

While straight U.S. citizens and permanent residents can sponsor their partners in this country, binational, same-sex couples can not.

my family will return to France this summer."

Heartbreak!

Indeed, her father, a petroleum geologist, was only to return to his job near Paris that summer, taking my dear Yvette with him where she continued to learn her times tables, while I later learned I was gay.

While I had heartache at age 11, it's nothing compared to the pain and institutionalized discrimination that U.S. immigration laws and policies perpetrate on people today. While straight U.S. citizens and permanent residents can sponsor their partners in this country, binational same-sex couples can not. Some binational couples, who fall in love and hope to settle in the U.S., must jump through unseemly hoops to live their dream.

Remember when Jack married immigrant housekeeper Rosario, on a previous season's

episode of *Will and Grace*, so that she would not be deported? This is too often the painful resort of what gay men and lesbians must do as well, in order to keep their new family together – except for legitimate relationships.

Luckily, we have an organization that fights against the discrimination of immigration laws on GLBTs. The Lesbian and Gay Immigration Rights Task Force (LGTIRF) – with 16 chapters and New York headquarters – works to change the laws and help the people hurt by them. They support the Permanent Partners Immigration Act (PPIA) sponsored by Rep. Jerry Nadler (D-NY), which would correct the barriers that same-sex couples face under immigration policy. And one of their big events each year is sponsoring fundraisers on Valentine's Day to recognize the struggles of binational couples and support their cause. Besides the events in New York, Washington and San Diego, we can all support this cause directly and learn

more through their website at www.lgirtf.org.

The world is growing smaller. Economic, transportation and technological realities have shrunk the distance that separates us – in both the business ventures and personal relationships that enrich our lives. And 9/11 will not change that. So it's time our immigration laws catch up to recognize the rights we all deserve.

If Yvette and I were older when we met, if she "liked me in that way" and had we fallen in love, we could have overcome the challenge of immigration laws and become a couple. But if I had fallen for her younger brother Brett instead, we'd not have been so lucky. ■

Greg Kubiak, the Valentine's card deliverer, can be reached via this publication or by e-mail, GKubiak@aol.com.