

SINGLE WOMEN: RECLAIM VALENTINE'S DAY

Remember in first grade when you had a crush on little Jimmy? Starting February first, you struggled with whether you should make him a valentine card. But what if he didn't make you one! Your other big worry was if little Suzie would give you one. They were equally big worries. And, would you get as many as Janie?

Valentine's day has taken on an entirely different meaning now that you are an adult. Now, it's not do you have a lot of friends who will give you a card. Nor do you think twice if Susan (no longer Suzie) does or doesn't give you one. The only remnant from your childhood Valentine's Day is whether James will give you one. Over these few decades, the emphasis for you has shifted from something you shared with your friends to ROMANCE.

While there are a number of beliefs about how Valentine's Day got started, the more common ones are connected to murder and rape. One version says Valentine's Day is named for a Christian saint who was murdered for marrying men and women at a time the Emperor needed men to go to war. If married, goes this story, men wouldn't want to leave their families. The emperor needed single soldiers so he killed the man who was marrying the couples.

Another version, going back to pagan days, says Valentine's Day actually derived from a lottery that was held for young men (maybe teenagers) to win a young woman (maybe a teenager) for the male's sexual pleasure.

You can choose any story you prefer just as you can choose how to relate to Valentine's Day. It can be a day of shame because you do not love and are not loved by a special man, or you can honor this day by acknowledging those people who make your life better. Back in elementary school, you knew Valentine's Day was not about lovers, but about love and caring and friendship.

If you are single, Valentine's Day ranks up there as one of the two most hated holidays, along with New Years. Too many women say they "hide out" on February 14. (If you are married, this day can be cause for divorce when husband either forgets to buy you something special or has his secretary get you a generic card.)

The commercialization of the day contributes to making singles feel left out, such as hotels offering special room rates with champagne and chocolates, florist's ads show men beaming with a bouquet for their "belles." A client recently told me she can't enjoy the day because she lacks a necessary ingredient – a man.

As long as you connect romance with February 14th, you are at the mercy of a man not being in your life. On the other hand, you can take charge of the day, returning it to the meaning it had for you when you were a child – a day of showing your friends you like them, and you care enough to make (remember doing that?!) them a special card.

Dr. Karen Gail Lewis is founder of Unique Retreats for Single Women, weekends bringing small groups of women together to shift their thinking about being single in a society prejudiced against single women. She's a marriage and family therapist, author of *With or Without a Man: Single Women Taking Control of Their Lives* and other books about single and married women. Join her for a FREE teleseminar on *Unspoken Truths About Being Single in a Married World*. Register at DrKarenGailLewis.com