



Valentine's Day

By Diana Cormack

For hundreds of years 14 February has been a special day. In ancient times people believed it was the day when the birds chose their mates.

Chaucer and Shakespeare were among many writers perpetuating this belief. Even earlier, the Romans chose their partners at the Spring fertility festival of Lupercalia, held on 15 February. The celebrations included the drawing of lots by unmarried men and women, to find a partner for the rest of the year, if not for life.

Two Valentines

With the coming of Christianity, the church tried in vain to do away with this popular custom, so reached a compromise. Fortuitously, in the third century AD, around that date, the Romans had martyred two Christians, both called Valentine.

One is supposed to have been a Roman priest who disagreed with the emperor's orders that his soldiers should not get married, but devote themselves to fighting in far off lands. Believing that God intended men and women to share their love and have children, Valentine married couples in secret. He was thrown into jail, where he is supposed to have fallen in love with the jailer's blind daughter and to have cured her through his faith.

There is a story that he wrote her a note on the eve of his execution signed "Your Valentine."

Love Token

Whatever the truth, Valentine's name was given to the pagan festival. Romantic poems, written to link the day with love and courtship, gradually developed into hand-made cards. The first valentine card was sent by the Duke of Orleans to his wife in 1415, during imprisonment in the Tower of London. They became popular in the Victorian era, when the custom of gentlemen buying expensive Valentine's Day presents for their ladies began to be replaced by elaborate home-made cards with sentimental verses secretly delivered by hand. Then manufacturers began to produce cards and people sent them through the post.

Today we send over 22 million valentine cards in the UK, costing £38 million. Though the messages they contain may well now be suggestive rather than sentimental, the essential element of anonymity remains, harking back to those days when a caring man simply signed himself as "Your Valentine."

Art works in N2

By Femke van Iperen

Although East Finchley does not exactly have the artistic reputation of Highgate or Hampstead it accommodates a number of important artists.

Take Lucien Simon; glass, stone and metal sculptor and painter. His catalogue reveals an extensive list of clients, from the Sultan of Brunei to BMW, and current exhibitions in Harrods' Picture Gallery and the Gallery Vivendi in Paris. Recently portrayed in *The Finchley Times*, other press like *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Independent* have not ignored Lucien's success.

A natural non-conformist

As Lucien walked me through his life story, his noncon-

formist characteristics surfaced slowly. He has been painting from the age of 19 but it all began long before that: "I was building things with junk from the age of five." Like most of his paintings today, mainly in acrylics, his first works were abstracts in pure colour. He painted nudes at one time but



Lucien Simon at work. Photo by Femke van Iperen

has sold them all.

Lucien describes himself as a serious, ambitious sculptor who 'paints at all prices'. Not exactly suffering from modesty, but with a degree of honesty, he claimed, "My paintings are happening, aggressive, bold, original, and hard to find. They are quite mad, wild colourful abstracts.

The art world tends to think of an artist as only a painter or a sculptor. I am neither. I am all those things. Now I weld as well and am getting into metal sculpting. My methods are totally unorthodox and I am essentially self-taught."

Endless inspiration

As we walk through his house, with four workshops and a combination of stylish browns, creams and blacks,

huge colourful paintings everywhere and glass sculptures scattered around, I wondered what stimulates him: "I dream about the ideas. Or I get inspiration from sun, sea, travel, magazines, nature, other artists and of relationships with people, but also with the plants in my front room. I grow flowers and paint them. I am forever experimenting and playing with different materials and colours."

Bringing me back to earth, East Finchley to be precise, he concludes unassumingly, "When I sell a piece, I am happy I can go on holiday, or pay the bills. I have had very big commissions, but I don't care who buys them, as long as someone does." Lucien can be found at www.luciensimon.com.



Dear Deirdre...

Every winter, especially around January/February, after all the excitement of Christmas and the New Year, I seem to get very down - sometimes for days on end. I'd like to be a bit more cheerful but I find it really hard to do anything except mope. How can I make myself feel better? Can you help?

Miserable Mike from Midhurst Avenue

Dear Mike,

You may be suffering from the 'Winter Blues'. A lack of sunshine can affect some people's psyche, causing them to feel a bit sad or depressed. It's also true that the 'high' of Christmas, having a good time with friends and family, can lead on to a 'low' period afterwards when many people feel more isolated than normal.

The good thing about knowing that you have this tendency, is that you can prepare for it well in advance. Don't wait for it to happen - once you're feeling blue, you'll be a lot less able to pull yourself out of it, start NOW.

Here are five things which can help - the more of them you do, the better you'll feel:

1) Keep physically active. Walk as much as possible, jump up and down, go for a bike ride, take up line-dancing or ten-pin bowling ... anything! Moving your body helps your mind feel better. Get moving!

2) Get out of doors - especially on those rare sunny days - to the park, a garden centre, the zoo or even to the country. Or just walk around the block. Two advantages to this: you get away from the house and have a change of scene; the sunshine (however little there is) will make you feel better.

3) Keep in contact with friends and family. Phone them or arrange to meet. Make the effort to socialise. Plan lots of things to do with other people.

4) Think positive. Start your day with the question: 'What am I looking forward to today?' (even if it's only something very tiny) and end it with: 'What was good about today?' (ditto the very tiny answer!).

5) Eat more food that gives you energy - fruit and vegetables, fish, chicken, nuts and seeds etc - and less food that makes you sluggish - sweets, cakes, biscuits, and salty, fatty processed foods. Make sure you're getting plenty of Vitamin B (found in liver, yeast, wheatgerm, wholegrain cereals, nuts, seeds and leafy green veg).

Have fun and ... good luck.

Deirdre

The Dear Deirdre column is written by Jane Revell, therapist and stress management specialist. If you have a problem you think I can help you with, please write to Dear Deirdre at THE ARCHER. All replies will be treated in confidence.

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Projecting the Future

Daphne Chamberlain

How it all began: When Alder school was in Long Lane, and Peter Bayley was there (with David Jason's brother), a certain geography teacher used to show films to his class.

One day he asked, "Who's feeling bright today?". Peter put his hand up, and was called out to the front. The teacher made two deliberate mistakes in projection, which the bright boy spotted. He was then allowed to run the film himself. At the end of the lesson, he "wondered what it would be like to work in a cinema". Never under-estimate the influence of a teacher!

A life in pictures

Peter has always been a film fan, and at 16 he answered an advertisement to work at

North Finchley Odeon (which was where Sainsbury's stands today). Believing firmly that cinema buildings should be kept open, he was upset when it was demolished. "Even if they become Bingo halls, they can be re-converted."

Anyone visiting the Phoenix on Open House days will remember climbing the steep spiral stairs and going across the open roof to Peter's projection room, dominated by two giant tape-wheels.

The day I visited, he also opened my eyes to the different sizes and proportions of films and screens, and the intricacies of fitting one to the other.

As for multiplex cinemas, in his view they are like concrete boxes. Recently he told *THE ARCHER*, "It is a joy to work in a real cinema. A single screen with a nice décor has much more atmosphere."