

COMMENTARY

Of hearts and flowers

*Say it with e-mail:
The just-in-the-nick-of-time
Valentine greeting for anyone*

By Lisa Z. Meritz

If you're like me, married to a Valentine's Day Scrooge, you're probably not anticipating a card today.

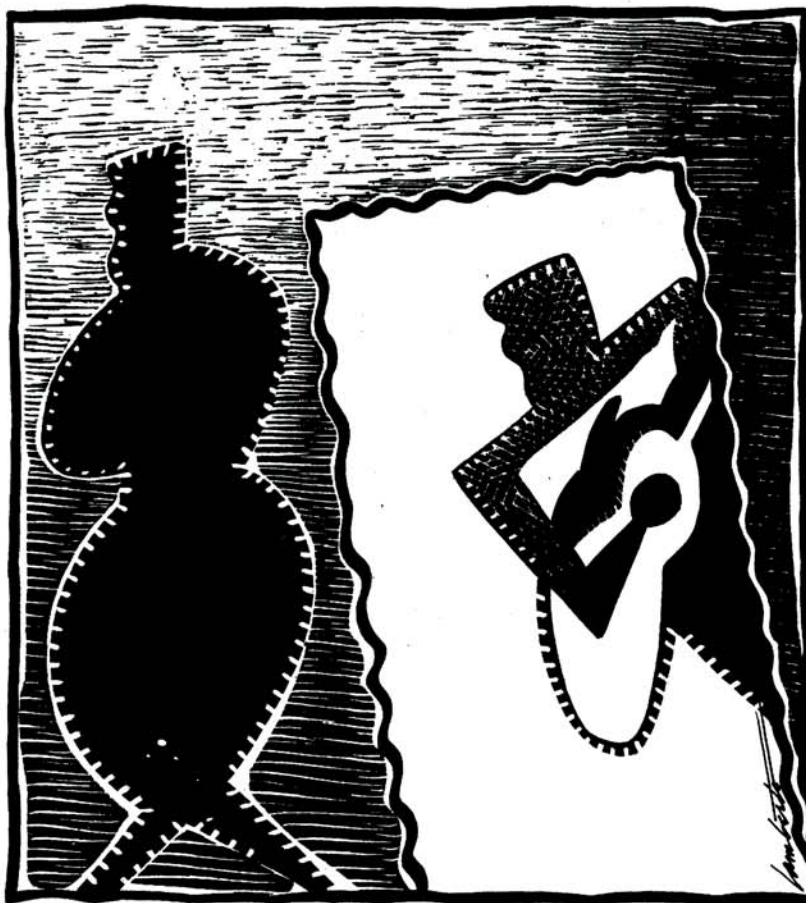
But my Valentine's Day Scrooge is a techno nerd and because computers make delivering messages so easy, I might just get an e-mail filled with love.

How unromantic you say! How impersonal! But, *au contraire*, you've never read one of my guy's missives. They're spontaneous, creative and quirky. Just like him.

Actually computers have been helping him meet his romantic obligations for years. He started out by making me desktop cards replete with hearts, flowers, x's, o's and original poetry. Even the occasional misspelling was endearing. I knew I was in love after our first date when my husband sent me an illustrated postcard of his own creation.

Continuing his tradition of combining words and art, last Valentine's Day, I got computer wallpaper — an original piece of art with repeating "I Love You's" spanning my computer screen. What a surprise! I got to stare at this manifestation of his love all day. This year, I think it's going to be an e-mail. But who knows?

Just as my husband's expressions of love have evolved, Valentine's Day cards have constantly been changing since their inception in the 15th century. A recent visit to Hallmark's Internet site showed me that the celebration of Valentine's Day began with the exchange of expensive gifts. In the 18th century, valentines became popular, but because of the high cost of the postal service, instead of mail, lovers left love tokens and valentines on their beloved's doorknob.



The 19th century ushered in the age of commercially printed valentines. And in that century, the Penny Post made valentines accessible to the masses. For those who couldn't write their own valentine poems, "Valentine Writers," books with verses, were popular.

And now you can say "I love you" with e-mail or send flowers, real or on paper, via the Net. Yes, for those with good taste, but small budgets, the Internet lets you send a photo of flowers rather than the real thing — perfect for teenage love.

And, if you forget, it's never too late. Say you arrive at your office, 8:30 a.m. on Valentine's Day, buried in paperwork and the phone ringing off the hook. Roses arrive for your boss' secretary. You wonder why. Then you glance at the calendar, and suddenly it dawns on you — it's Valentine's Day and you haven't done a thing. Not to worry — e-mail to the rescue.

Lisa Z. Meritz is a writer in Philadelphia.