

#RELATIONSHIP

GIFTS OF LOVE

Nostalgic reminiscence of thoughtful gestures

Mementos of love are something special. Not many people safekeep them in a box but gifts that stand out are kept in our memories forever. To find out what curious presents people have received over the years, we talk to Raihan Ahmed, a communications specialist, and Urmee Sarkar, a chef. Over the years they have received some curious tokens of love. Their story is a quintessential story we all relate to, and hence, through Raihan and Urmee, we explore dynamics of gift-giving. The blue envelope was from her. His name, penned in blue-black ink.



The fragrance of the wrapped card penetrated through the paper. "Neat," he thought. It put a smile on his face. He was certain that the mail came from her. It had to. It had all the signs of first love!

Love's first letter holds a special place in many of our hearts. What now comes through the complex web of codes in our electronic mailbox, was once mailed through the post, or to make things far more interesting — a lover's intermediary — perhaps a friend or even a cousin far too young to understand what love meant but content with the ice-cream treat that came with each delivery.

The idea of expressing one's love through printed cards is not a 20th-century marvel. It dates far back and has a lot to do with the

express but not nearly the words of the heart, and that is where the scribbling along the blank space made it up," said Raihan Ahmed.

"This small customisation added a more personal touch. I always felt my handwriting was subpar. No wonder I got rejected so many times!" he shared with a laugh.

"Spellings were important too," reminded Urmee Sarkar. "It was fun to count the spelling errors, especially in Bengali love letters. Sometimes, people went overboard with their feelings without even realising the impact of that one spelling error; even typos were an eyesore," she added.

A mixed TDK tape...and a whole lotta love

One cannot possibly fathom what it meant to follow music in an era when there were no online video sharing services or satellite TV channels. Radio came as the savour and people would be glued to their sets on certain days of the week to listen to the latest releases aired on Top of the Pops and Billboard Top 100.

"Perhaps, that is why a mixed tape cassette with a long list of thoughtful, love songs meant so much to our generation, and the generations preceding ours," said Raihan. "Listening to World Music on Bangladesh Betar, keeping notes of any songs we heard at a

advancement of the printing industry. However, for the sake of convenience, we may treat it like a boom of the nineties! That is when "love" was re-packaged by companies, and we were lost in their new-found charm. Hallmark, Archies, Azad Products — they were the giants in the field of selling "love" to a generation of teenage boys and girls.

"The joy of finding a card that reflected our exact feelings was unmatched. Sometimes, we found cards that came close to what we wanted to



friend's place and then going to Rainbow at Elephant Road to get the songs recorded in blank TDK cassettes was the way to go."

A tape with handpicked love songs meant so much, and still does perhaps. Only the mode of presenting the gift has changed over time.

"I always appreciated a cassette full of love songs. It spoke about the feelings of the person. It was also a reflection of their personal tastes. Just by listening to the cassette, one could feel whether it was customised or just a selection of love songs made by the famous Kabir Bhai of Rainbow," said Urmee.

"A collection of cassettes gifted over the years also spoke of the evolving nature of human relationships. While I have all the songs transferred to MP3s, the actual mixed tapes still evoke a sense of sweet nostalgia," added Urmee.

A frying-pan! I did not know whether to laugh out loud or hit him with the pan,

as I always joked I would. There he was, almost a stranger to me, on our first date, gifting me a frying pan. He made a mockery of his sentiments into a startling gift. The chef in me was delighted, too bad my heart did not share the same enthusiasm.

"That was my first date with Ayan — a guy I met in high school," Urmee fondly remembers. I was friends with Raihan back then and truth be told no one made him more jealous than Ayan and his thoughtful gifts."

Some people, like Ayan, went beyond the love letter and a selection of songs, and took the effort to know what interested their loved ones. Each person is unique and a customised gift often strikes a chord within us.

"I have always been a history buff. Ayan used to call me 'Indie.' I still have those medieval coins in my box of treasures. His personalised gifts — although all went in vain — still bring back flashes of time that now seem so innocent. I still have the gifts, but lost all touch with the fellow," said Urmee.

The impact of Ayan's gifts was so profound, that even Raihan remembers them. "The guy was pretty difficult to beat. He would gift Urmee all these customised things that I knew (even Urmee knew) were so close to her heart. One fine day it was frying pans, the next day it was century-old coins. He knew what would impress a girl!"

She used to write poetry; never seemed the type who knew words came so naturally to her. Not solely on love but on how she felt. How she viewed the world around her. I think we were in grade 11 when Shahreen gifted her book of poetry to me. Rumour had it, she loved me. Honestly, I thought we were just friends until the day I received perhaps the greatest gift I ever received — a poet's work.

Lovers often turned to poetry as a means of expressing their deepest emotions and sentiments in a creative and artistic manner. It served as an emotional outlet, a means to communicate complex thoughts into beautiful lyrical words.

"I did not know how to react when one fine day, Shahnaz handed over her book of poetry to me. It was a testament to her feelings from an early age till her teen years. She kept all the silly rhymes and doodles, the corrections she made to her poetry. I was astonished, not by the quality of her work but by the thought that may have gone into presenting it to me," said Raihan.

"Many years later," Raihan continued, "I received a call from Shahnaz asking me to return her diary if I still had it with me. It was an awkward meeting; we kept it short. She thanked me for keeping her 'silly diary' for so many years. But I could not express my gratitude towards her for feeling such fresh and untainted emotions towards me, even though I could never reciprocate them."

While basic human emotions remain the same, with time the expressions change. And this is exactly what happened. People still share the occasional song, but perhaps, no mixed tapes or CDs. Social media has taken over our lives and it is through this that people now exchange their romantic inclinations.

Raihan and Urmee are now happily married. When asked to pick a favourite, they both unanimously agreed that letters were perhaps the best gift someone from our generation could give to his/her loved one. "But then again," Urmee said, "There is always the boxing gloves that Raihan gave me on our first wedding anniversary. Now, that's something thoughtful!"

**By Pothbhola
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed**