

A century's worth of Valentine memories

Written by CAROL POMEDAY
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<http://www.ozaukeepress.com/images/021314/valSM.png>

Holiday's beauty endures for 97-year-old who keeps a special collection close to her heart

At age 97, Violet Lindner of Port Washington loves Valentine's Day as much as she did when she was a girl who eagerly decorated boxes to hold valentines from classmates or when she was a young woman being courted by her late husband Robert.

She puts a red bow on the cage of her parakeets, named Bill and Co, and also on her antique doll and butler door-stop. Splashes of red, her favorite color, are everywhere this month.

Lindner has a stash of crocheted white and pink hearts with ribbon hangers that she made and gives to people who visit.

"The grandchildren hang them on their Christmas trees," her daughter Gayle Wellenstein said.



Lindner treasures the cards her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren make for her, preferring them to store-bought cards.

One year, her great-grandchildren made red wooden hearts she hung all around the house.

Early in her marriage, Lindner decided to surprise her husband on Valentine's Day and cut the sandwiches she made for his lunch into heart shapes. He was a supervisor at the Wisconsin Electric power plant in Port Washington, and all the men ate lunch together.

When he unwrapped his sandwiches, the other guys teased him mercilessly.

"When he got home, he told my mother, 'That was really nice of you, but let's do it at home from now on and not send them to work,'" Wellenstein said.

February is also when Lindner brings out the treasured antique valentines she inherited from

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her mother-in-law Lily Drier Lindner, who lived in Cedarburg.

The valentines were made in the early 1900s and reflect the Victorian era with sentimental poetry and intricate three-dimensional scenes filled with hearts, flowers, cupids and bluebirds.

Lindner carefully unwraps each one, which she stores in acid-free paper. Her mother-in-law received them from family and friends and her husband Conrad.

The most elaborate one is a flower-bedecked carriage driven by cherubs. The door opens to reveal a boy holding a plum pudding and a girl with a bouquet of flowers. Cellophane covers the lacy windowpanes. Lindner's mother-in-law received it from her husband, who simply signed it Con, before they were married.

There is no verse, but two lacy hearts are embossed with the words "love token."

During the era in Germany, men sometimes sent locks of their hair as love tokens. Perhaps Conrad had snipped a few locks of his hair for his betrothed.

One of Lindner's favorite valentines depicts a magical silver sailing vessel with a fragile paper sail and golden rigging. Three young girls are aboard the ship.

The romantic verse reads:

When the star of evening shineth

In the purple twilight sky,

I recall the gleam responsive

In the starlight of thine eyes.

Another favorite is a stand-up apple tree filled with pink blossoms that's full of activity. A ladder leans against the tree and a boy is climbing the tree while a girl picks flowers and a bird peeks out of a birdhouse.

Several of the valentines are a series of three to four hearts or scenes strung together with ribbon, while others are elaborate, lacy hearts that fan out like an accordion.

The valentines are treasured not only because of their beauty and sentiment, but also because Lindner was close to her mother-in-law, who died in 1959.

"She was an angel," Lindner said. "Everyone got along with her. She was very good to me, and I just loved her."

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Image Information: FOUR GENERATIONS admired valentines made in the early 1900s that Violet Lindner, 97, (center) inherited from her mother-in-law Lily Drier Lindner. The cards were admired by Lindner's great-grandchildren (front row, from left) Mayah and Logan Richards and Addison Wellenstein, (back row) daughter Gayle Wellenstein, granddaughter Jaymee Wellenstein Richards and great-grandson Austin Wellenstein, who was held by granddaughter-in-law Leeann Wellenstein.

Photo by

Sam Arendt