

The New York Times



City Room

Blogging From the Five Boroughs

Share Your Darkest Tales of Valentine's Day

BY JAMES BARRON

FEBRUARY 7, 2011

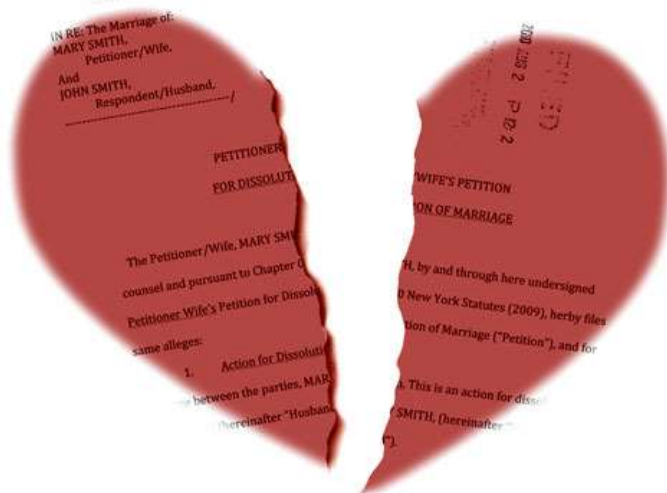


Illustration by The New York Times

It's time for some predictions about next Monday.

Candy and jewelry bought this week will be left on a pillow, placed on a candlelit table just in time for dinner, whatever. Sweet nothings will be whispered.

Cards will be delivered that will make the recipients smile. Cards will be delivered that will make the recipients wonder, "Who sent this?" Cards will, um, fall into the wrong hands, making spouses, significant others, girlfriends or boyfriends wonder somewhat more than "Who sent this?"

But City Room is not about hearts and flowers. City Room can be very passionate, yes, but City Room is most passionate about heartache. And when it comes to witnessing heartache, City Room doesn't have time to watch a lot of soap operas. City Room doesn't have time to go to a real opera, either. The Metropolitan Opera is doing "Don Pasquale" twice this week, along with "La Bohème" and "Iphigénie en Tauride." Pretty much wall-to-wall heartache.

But who knows more about Valentine's Day pain than divorce lawyers? They told us their stories about the darker side of Valentine's Days. You can tell us yours — about, for example, relationships that went sour or ended, or maybe the worst Valentine's Day present you ever received — [in the comments box below](#).

Here is another prediction for next Monday. Somebody will say "happy birthday" to Mayor [Michael R. Bloomberg](#). Valentine's Day really is the mayor's birthday — he will turn 69. We at City Room would also wish [Jimmy Hoffa](#), the Teamsters leader, a happy 98th birthday if we knew where to find him.

[Vikki S. Ziegler](#), adjunct professor at [Fordham University School of Law](#) and partner at [Walder, Hayden & Brogan](#)

Sending somebody dead roses? I've heard that. Sending a Victoria's Secret bill to your ex-husband with charges for personal items that are not to be used with him — that's a day in the life of my job.

Having your car written on with foul language, with strawberries and chocolate — I'm offended because I'm a chocolate and strawberry lover — or texting pictures of yourself and your new significant other on Valentine's Day with the message, "Look what you're missing"? These are real-life scenarios.

I heard about a sex tape sent over to the soon-to-be-ex-spouse around Valentine's Day some years ago, before the Internet and technology took on a life of its own. I think it was VHS. Whatever the format, it's something, No. 1, you never advise a client to do.

It was akin to [Pamela Anderson and — what was that gentleman's name?](#) It was graphic and it was short, but it certainly left an indelible picture.

It was the wife who sent the tape to the husband. The husband's attorney said, "We're going to crush wife's attorney," and sure enough, the case was settled quickly.

Harriet Newman Cohen, partner, Cohen Stine Kapoor LLP

The corporate press release made it sound like the abdication of Edward VIII.

The married male chief executive of the multibillion-dollar corporation and the married female general counsel and ethics officer, having "fallen in love" and desiring to pursue their relationship, had done the "honorable thing."

Rather than hide their relationship and continue in their jobs, concealing the conflict of interest inherent where one lover is the subordinate of the other, they had gone to the board of directors, disclosed the relationship in future terms and announced that they would be leaving the company.

In truth, though, they knew that his wife's divorce lawyer was preparing to sue for divorce based on his adultery, naming the general counsel as co-respondent, with the result that the board members would learn about the relationship from the tabloids instead of from the lovebirds themselves.

For a year, the chief executive had done his utmost to keep his wife and the divorce lawyers off the scent. When his wife had discovered a love note from a lover with a unisex name — the general counsel's nickname — rather than admit the relationship, the C.E.O. had "confessed" to a relationship with a gay lover.

Nancy Chemtob, partner, Chemtob Moss Forman & Talbert

I'll tell you why as a divorce attorney I don't like Valentine's Day, but I like it for the same reason — it's my favorite and worst holiday at the same time. Nobody wants to go to court on Valentine's Day, so it's usually a catch-up day. The few times we end up in court on Valentine's Day, it's incredibly awkward. Everybody has Valentine's Day candy around and is saying "happy Valentine's Day," and then you have the two spouses. They should just close divorce court on Valentine's Day.

It's similar to when you have to do a deposition on someone's anniversary. There's an awkwardness, and both of them face off snidely: "Happy Valentine's Day, you — jerk."

Valentine's Day is the last hanger-on-er of holidays. January's the busy season in the divorce world. We have two busy seasons, January and August. Nobody wants to get divorced in November because of Thanksgiving or in December because of the holidays, Hanukkah and Christmas. But if you thought you were going to make it and you have a lousy Valentine's Day, the 15th is the busiest. The phone's ringing off the hook.

And the girlfriends, the mistresses, the wives — they all get found out on Valentine's Day. The girlfriend gets ticked off that he's out with the spouse, or the spouse goes out with a girlfriend/boyfriend, leaving the spouse at home, so it's like game over.