

I SLIPPED THE card into Rick's suitcase. My imagination vacillated between giddy and tortured for the next six hours, knowing he would land in the chill of a New York winter, retrieve his sweater and see the envelope sealed with a lipstick kiss. My fear that it was too many words said too soon was dashed when I received his call. His voice was shaky.

"Are you OK?" I asked, pressing my lips into the phone with hushed urgency.

"I got your card ...," he said with a sniffle. "It was the most beautiful card I have ever received."

I swooned, elated. I truly knew he felt, for that one minute, loved.

He dumped me one month later. His life was "too complicated."

Writing cards felt vital to my communication of love (a throwback to my New England roots), almost like an itch I had to scratch. Regardless of the short-term inevitability of each relationship, I kept on.

Jeremy was an L.A. transplant from Chicago. He was jaded from the demise of his 25-year marriage. He didn't do Valentine's Day, so we had a candlelight dinner seaside on Feb. 13. The light chitchat turned quickly into an argument over our differing values. My subtext was, despite my past hurts, I was still a hopeless romantic. I wasn't holding on to the past. He was. What he didn't know was that I had sent him a romantic card anyway.

On the morning of Feb. 14, amid the fluttering of red tinsel hearts and sale-priced candy, I was in Ralphs in dirty sweats and a hoodie shopping for cat litter and a Swiffer mop when I received his call.

"Tell me where you are," he said, wheezing slightly.

"I am at Ralphs buying cat litter," I said.

He hung up. I continued shopping.

I had a tub of odorless kitty litter in one hand and a mop in the other when he came running wild-eyed and red-faced into the supermarket. He beelined for me and threw his arms



ABBY OUELLETTE For The Times

L.A. AFFAIRS

From the heart

I WRITE WHAT I FEEL AND SHARE IT. NOT EVERY GUY IS READY FOR THAT, SO FOR NOW MY WORDS ARE FOR ME.

BY KIM O'HARA

around my neck, sobbing.

"Your card. It was so beautiful," he said, tears streaming down his face. "I ran the whole way here to tell you thank you. Thank you."

We broke up when he lost his job and moved in with his parents in the Midwest.

I thought maybe I should stop writing cards.

During the pandemic, I sat on the beach in Santa Monica and wrote letters to myself and God and often sat in silence without an agenda to "try love again."

Amid my well-intended revision of *amore*, I got a wild hair that perhaps my story was I missed someone from my past. Finally, the solution! "Mr. Right" was always there. I just

hadn't seen him. The stoner from high school? The comedian from college?

I started on Classmates.com. Nothing. I didn't recognize anyone. I grew despondent and then angry at myself for my despondency.

I thought about the trail of cards and relationships over the last seven years. Was my writing just a desperate ploy to manufacture the assurance of love? An attempt to not be left behind?

Then came Barry. My ninth-grade boyfriend. Through a series of unconnected conversations with unrelated people on Zoom, my 14-year-old boarding-school love arose from my subconscious. Our awkward dalliance outside the school dance,

he in his prep school blazer and me with my middle-class clothes and high hair. I could not recall his name now 38 years later, but it felt urgent. I searched the boarding school yearbooks online, zooming in on grainy images of PDFs until I saw a face I could recognize. A LinkedIn search revealed he lived in Los Angeles. I left him a voice message.

He called me back a day later. We made small talk, and I complimented him on his wife and family.

"Divorced," he grumbled. "It's a mess."

The tone in which he said "It's a mess" had been acerbic. It overshadowed my desire for him to be "the one," but I agreed to meet at the beach the follow-

ing day.

As we walked amid the surf, he shared his dating life since his divorce and detailed more than I cared to hear about certain arrangements. He paused and looked out to the water, contemplating his next words.

"I still have your letters," he said. "In my parents' attic."

Something inside me stirred. The punctuation at the end of the learning curve was coming.

"Why?" was all I could say.

"They were some of the most beautiful letters I have ever read," he said. "So romantic. I could never throw them away."

I suddenly felt the gravity of the trail of my words all the way back to ninth grade. Imprints of lost love in bundles under eaves in Connecticut.

Barry and I never talked again.

I wrote a series of cards recently for a boyfriend who was embarking on a two-week trek. I was acutely aware of my vulnerability in wanting him to have a piece of me on his journey. I curated seven cards with passages from Kahlil Gibran and John O'Donohue's blessings.

"Open one each day," I said, handing him the bundle.

He broke up with me a few days after his trip.

"The cards," I said. "Did you read them?"

"No," he said. "But I will."

In that moment, I wished he wouldn't.

I'm not giving up on love in this city of Los Angeles, but I am putting a pause on writing men letters for a while. My words are too precious — and for now, just for me.

>The author is a book coach and publishing consultant in Los Angeles. Her book "No Longer Denying Sexual Abuse: Making the Choices That Can Change Your Life" will be released Feb. 26. Her website is kimohara.com.

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