



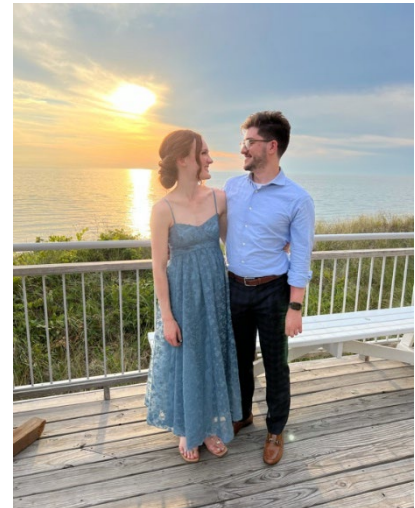
Perspective/Opinion

Do Love Letters Still Matter?

By Eileen Peterson, BS – Fourth Year Medical Student

What do you think of when you hear the phrase “love letters?” Do you think of sappy, gushy, over-the-top confessions of love? Do you picture a simple question like “Do you like me?” written on loose-leaf paper? Maybe there are hearts doodled in the margins. Do you think of eloquent sonnets written long before our time? Or do you laugh and shake your head that all of this is silly anyway?

It’s easy to get swept away by young love. It’s exciting and terrifying to feel deeply, to let another person in and see you for all that you are. It is devastating when things don’t work out with someone you had hoped was “the one.” For a long time, the Notes app on my phone has been a haven for all my sappy, embarrassing, intimate, and deeply personal feelings surrounding love. The Notes app holds some of my finest work. It’s where I (still) write too many love letters to count. Depending on the day, these love letters were gushy, scathing, heartbreaking, or everything all at once.



There was one thing all my letters had in common: these were love letters I would never send.

For years, it felt too personal to let someone read my love letters. What if they judged me? What if they didn’t feel the same way as I did? These love letters felt like my deepest secrets, and they were mine alone. Until I met my partner. He helped me realize that I didn’t have to keep these love letters tucked away, that they didn’t have to be secrets after all.

My partner might tell you that we started dating virtually in 2020, when COVID kept all of us away from the MCW library, and he went back to Denver to finish M1 year from the comfort of his family home. We had FaceTime calls every day, usually for hours at a time. I felt so lucky that he wanted to be my friend, and I started to consider him my best friend. I didn’t realize that these FaceTimes were ‘sort-of’ dates. After a long summer spent virtually, he came back to Milwaukee for the start of M2 year. We both thought it would be fun to hang out in person, so

we had our first “solo hang” – what I thought was a super cool way to describe two best friends hanging out, and definitely NOT a date.

Spoiler alert, our “solo hang” turned out to be a wonderful made-for-the-movies first date. It only took being together in person to see that we were more than best friends. I also realized that none of my other friends had wanted to do *daily* FaceTime calls over the summer... perhaps that *had* been a bit date-y. Like I had done many times before, I started to capture all my emotions and daydreams in my Notes app. I got back into my love letter habit. But this time it was different. I felt more comfortable to be who I am, and I started to share these love letters with my partner. What had once been so scary started to feel natural. And he wasn’t freaked out to read them.



To me, love letters represent what we want to say, what we wish we could say, and sometimes what we are brave enough to say.



Just as it takes courage to ask your school crush to the dance, and it takes good friends and a lot of Swedish fish to recover when that crush says ‘no’... Just as it takes courage to pick yourself back up after a bad breakup and to let yourself be open to something new... It also takes courage to tell someone how you feel, to write a love letter and let someone read it. Love letters don’t have to be cursive writing on fancy paper or sparkly, singing Hallmark cards. Love letters can just be a sticky note on a fridge, a text to a friend, an email of appreciation, or an embarrassing poem on a Notes app.

Try it out – you might be surprised at how good it makes you feel.

Eileen is a fourth-year medical student at MCW-Milwaukee campus. She is applying for OB/GYN residency. She is originally from Brookfield, WI, and she enjoys singing in the MCW a cappella group Chordae Harmonae, practicing yoga, and rock-climbing. Daniel is also a fourth-year medical student, and he is applying for Psychiatry residency. He is originally from Denver, CO, and he enjoys reading, baking bread, and rock-climbing. Eileen and Daniel are doing the couples match, and they are excited to see where they end up for residency!