

HERE by GRACE PALEY

Here I am in the garden laughing  
An old woman with heavy breasts  
And a nicely mapped face

How did this happen  
Well that's who I wanted to be  
At last a woman  
In the old style sitting  
stout thighs apart under  
a big skirt grandchild sliding  
on off my lap a pleasant  
summer preparation

that's my old man across the yard  
he's talking to the meter reader  
he's telling him the world's sad story  
how electricity is oil or uranium  
and so forth. I tell my grandson  
run over to your grandpa ask  
to sit beside me for a minute. I  
am suddenly exhausted by my desire  
to kiss his sweet explaining lips.

Isn't this poem delightful? The word imagery is so descriptive and true to life. We can just see this woman sitting with her legs apart, as older women are likely to do, with a grand-child on her lap. The delightful surprise of this poem is the passion she feels for her "old man."

February is the month of passion, red hot passion illustrated by red flowers, red hearts, red heart shaped boxes of candy. In February, we are constantly reminded of romantic love as the stores tempt us to celebrate Valentine's Day with cards and flowers and gifts.

We know the story of St. Nicholas and Christmas, but the story of St. Valentine is not well-known. He was a Roman priest when the emperor, Claudius, persecuted the church. Claudius issued an edict that prohibited the marriage of young people. This edict was based on the hypothesis that unmarried soldiers fought better than married soldiers because married soldiers might be afraid of what might happen to their wives or families if they died. Even though polygamy was the norm young people wanted to marry and Valentine encouraged them to marry within the Christian Church. Valentine was eventually caught, imprisoned and tortured for performing marriage ceremonies against command of Emperor Claudius the second. In the year 269 AD, Valentine was sentenced to a three-part execution of a beating, stoning, and finally decapitation, all because of his stand for Christian marriage. The story goes that the last words he wrote were in a note to his jailer's daughter. He inspired today's romantic missives by signing it, "from your Valentine." He was canonized by the Catholic Church and became St. Valentine.

Passion is usually equated with eroticism and romance, and heat, white hot passion. The emotion also denotes commitment and excitement. In a religious connotation passion means focus, single mindedness. To be passionate means to focus on a goal, with singlemindedness of one's will. People in religious orders take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience so that they are completely devoted to the religious life. They are not distracted by the money, sex or decision making.

In the month of February, we think of Valentine's Day and romantic love such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote in her passionate poem to her husband, Robert Browning.

How Do I Love Thee, let me count the ways? This declaration of true love has been memorized and recited by young lovers ever since it was written in Victorian England.

<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/how-do-i-love-thee-sonnet-43>

Emily Dickinson, the poet, lived almost as a recluse but her poetry is filled with quiet passion. Billy Collins explores and exposes this quiet passion in his poem called Taking Off Emily Dickinson's Clothes. Read and enjoy. <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/taking-off-emily-dickinson-s-clothes/>

What is your favorite love story? Is it from the movie, *The Titanic*? The image of the young lovers clinging to each other as the *Titanic* sinks has become almost iconic. We all love a good love story and history and myth are replete with stories of tragic lovers. For instance, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, *Lancelot and Guinevere*, or *Helen of Troy and Paris*.



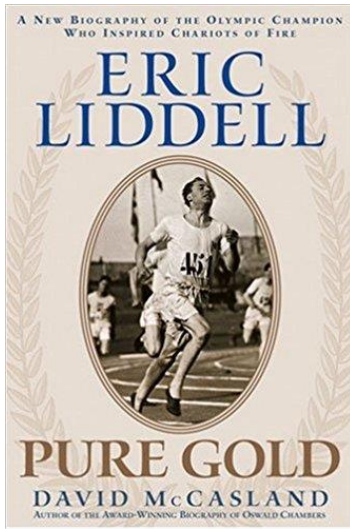
A beautiful classic love story comes from India. In 1632, the Mughal emperor, Shah Jahan built a mausoleum for his wife, Mumtaz Mahan, who he called Jewel of the Palace. She died in childbirth and he was so grief stricken that he built one of the most stunningly beautiful buildings in the world in her honor. Built of white marble, the iconic domed Taj Mahal, sit on the bank of the Yamhuna river, as though suspended in air. It is the jewel of

Muslim art in India and is one of the universally admired masterpieces of Muslim art and architecture.

Through-out history there have been heroes who lived lives of passion based on their religious convictions. For instance, the movie, *Hacksaw Ridge*, tells the story of Desmond T. Doss, WWII American Army Medic, who served during the Battle of Okinawa, and because of his religious conviction, refused to carry a gun even into battle. He rescued seventy-five Americans under extreme fire in the battle for Hacksaw Ridge and became the first man in American history to receive the Medal of Honor without firing a shot.

Another example is Eric Liddell. Liddell was born in China to Scottish missionary parents. He attended boarding school near London, and became known for his speed as a runner. He was chosen to represent Scotland in the 1924 Summer Olympics. Liddell refused to run in the heats for 100 meters even though he was favored to win because they were held on a Sunday which was against his religious conviction. Instead he competed in the 400 meters held on a weekday, a race that he won and he became a Gold medalist. He was a hero in his country and could have become wealthy as an international hero, instead, he returned to China in 1925 to serve as a missionary teacher. He remained there until his death in a Japanese civilian internment camp in 1945. Liddell's integrity remained throughout his life. While in the camp, ravaged by malnourishment and ill health, Liddell spent his time teaching children and sharing what he had.

When Winston Churchill managed to secure his freedom in a prisoner exchange, Liddell declined and instead offered his place to a pregnant woman who was also in the camp, saving not only her life but her unborn child as well "I believe God made me for a purpose—for China. But he also made me fast, and when I run, I feel his pleasure."



Liddell's Olympic training and racing, and the religious convictions that influenced him, are depicted in the Oscar-winning 1981 film *Chariots of Fire*. We may have forgotten Eric Liddell's story but we cannot forget the theme music also called Chariots of Fire.

The 20<sup>th</sup> Century has had many unforgettable heroes who have changed the course of history. Their passion for justice and their devotion to their goal many times brought imprisonment, and sometimes death, but they were true to their calling. Who are your favorite heroes? Who do you identify with? What are the causes you identify with?

Throughout the centuries many people, compelled by their faith or their fate, have given their lives to a profound, passionate communion with God. Those who became saints expressed wild, ecstatic love in physical, erotic moments. For example, St. Francis of Assisi wrote this short poem called,

Wring out my clothes.

Such love does

The sky now pours

That when I stand in a field

I have to wring out the light.



St Teresa of Avila writes of her experience of being pierced by God's love. And Bernini, the sculptor, using Teresa's own words, depicted Teresa in moments of ecstasy in the famous Santa Maria Della Vittoria, Rome. The sensuality of the sculpture is directly inspired by St. Theresa's own writings, in which she describes her mystical experiences in overtly erotic terms; "... *Beside me, on the left hand, appeared an angel in bodily form... He was not tall but short, and very beautiful; and his face was so aflame that he appeared to be one of the highest rank of angels, who seem to be all on fire...*



*In his hands, I saw a great golden spear, and at the iron tip there appeared to be a point of fire. This he plunged into my heart several times ... and left me utterly consumed by the great love of God. The pain was so severe that it made me utter several moans. The sweetness caused by this intense pain is so extreme that one cannot possibly wish it to cease, nor is one's soul then content with anything but God. This is not a physical, but a spiritual pain."*

With her head thrown back and eyes closed Teresa collapses overcome with the feeling of God's love

What is your passion? All I want to do is \_\_\_\_\_. I live to \_\_\_\_\_. I am crazy about\_\_\_\_\_.

Fill in the blank. That is your passion. If you are unclear about your passion, look at your checkbook and your calendar and see how you spend your time and money.

Fire is equated with passion, all engulfing, aflame with passion. In the heat of passion, what would you give your life for? Who would you die for? What is worth your life?

