



Conversation Hearts

BY CHRIS FRANCIN

VENICE GULF COAST LIVING MAGAZINE

You can't help but feel a bit of romantic magic when you hold these cute, little hearts in your hands, drop them into a Valentine's card envelope, or see them decorating a cupcake. Way back when, some of us might remember when we hoped we would get a candy heart from that special someone. It is nostalgia at its best, and most often can bring a smile to the young and the young at heart.

These tiny sugary Valentine treats have a sweet history dating back to the early 1900s when Oliver Chase, who invented a machine that pulverized sugar and was able to cut out a variety of shapes, opened the doors to the New England Candy Company (NECCO) along with his brother. The duo found a way to stamp words directly onto the candy with red vegetable dye,

producing a very popular treat for the February holiday as well as for weddings and anniversaries.

At that time, the candies were known as the conversation hearts and were produced in many flavors such as cherry, vanilla, mint, and orange. The candy was also known as NECCO Hearts, Candy Hearts, and Sweethearts. The original sayings were longer messages that were eventually cut down to shorter 2-3-word phrases such as "Be Mine" and "I Love You." By the mid-1900s, these conversation hearts became the most popular candy in the months leading up to Valentine's Day.

As the years passed, the messages on the hearts reflected the sayings of the era and were also used as a marketing tool to promote movies and businesses with specific sayings that supported the venues. Consumers were also able to mail in their ideas for messages that could be stamped onto the hearts.

These candy messages are reviewed each year with the addition of new sayings stamped on the hearts and others being deleted. Today, more than 8 billion of these sweet hearts are produced, reminding us that messages of love are all around us and can even be found on our favorite candy.



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