



LOVE'S BEST WHEN YOU GIVE IT AWAY

A Valentine's Story
by Valerie H. Briggs

When we think of Valentine's Day we think of hearts and lace, flowers and candy, and of sharing tokens of friendship with those we care about. But most important of all, this special day is for sharing our feelings of love with those around us. On just such a day I received a very special Valentine that has come to mean even more to me as each year brings yet another Valentine's Day.

Mary was an eleven-year old girl whose parents had passed away in an automobile accident. She lived with her aunt, a bitter middle-aged woman whose health was not good and who was greatly annoyed with the burden of caring for the child. The aunt never failed to remind Mary that if it weren't for her generosity, she would be an orphaned waif. But even though her aunt was cold and distant and scolded her frequently, Mary was still a gentle and sweet child. In fact, from the moment I met her I was impressed by her bright smile and gentle brown eyes and how thoughtful and kind she seemed to be.

Often after our Primary class was over she would stay after, preferring to help me as I gathered my teaching materials and straightened the chairs. She would clean the blackboard and neatly arrange the room for the next class, often risking making her aunt angry as she would then arrive home a bit late. We became a bit more acquainted as we would visit during these quiet moments, but Mary was a quiet child and sad very little. She did speak lovingly of her mother, even though she was still a young child when her mother died. Mary remembered a loving, tender, and kind woman who spent much time with her.

After our class time the Sunday before Valentine's Day, I gave each class member a heart-shaped cookie Valentine. Some of the children had brought Valentine's cards to share with me. After everyone had left the room, Mary came up and handed me a soft tissue-wrapped package and wished me a happy Valentine's Day. "Please open it now," she said. "I made it special just for you." I gently unwrapped the tissue paper and saw a simple woven paper heart. "It's very nice, Mary. You did a very fine job making it. Thank you." Mary smiled and said, "It's more than a Valentine's card. You can open it." "Oh, yes, I can see that it's like a basket," I replied, gently opening the heart. "But," Mary continued, "you can't see what's in it. And you can't touch it or taste it or feel it, but Mother always said it makes you feel good all the time, especially at night when you're all alone and need to feel safe." Once again I opened the woven heart basket and peeked inside. "What is it, Mary? What's inside this basket that will make me feel so good?" "It's love," she whispered softly, "and my Mother said, it's always best when you give it away. She showed me how to make the heart basket when I was very little and I still have it. When I feel alone or sad I get out my heart basket and open it up. Then I remember how much my mother loved me and I feel all warm inside. It makes me happy."

I could feel a lump growing in my throat and I put my arm around Mary and gave her a hug. "Oh, Mary. I can feel the love in this basket making me feel all warm inside, too. I will keep this special Valentine's basket nearby me so I can always feel its special love."

People often wonder, I'm sure, about the small heart-shaped woven card that I keep on the shelf in my living room. But when they ask, I take it down and tell them this story and then open the heart basket so they, too, can feel the love it holds inside. And Mary's words always come back to me: "LOVE'S BEST WHEN YOU GIVE IT AWAY."

