



Back In Time

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What Is Love?

By the time I attended the Prince of Wales College in the 1950s it was a co-educational institution that was known to all as the British Schools (plural) because it was actually two schools—one for girls and one for boys—rolled into one. This was a boon to me in many ways, as my parents had neglected to provide me with a sister and, as a child I was woefully ignorant concerning the mysteries of the fairer sex. The Schools thus helped to initiate me into this vital aspect of life in addition to educating me in the fields of reading, writing, arithmetic, and so on.

El British, as it was affectionately referred to by students, was housed in a large, old building in a quiet residential neighbourhood in Pocitos, with high-ceilinged classrooms on two floors. There was a gymnasium-cum-assembly hall on the ground floor, and an open-air, paved playground around the back with a high, red brick wall surrounding the perimeter and another, lower one that separated the boys from the girls. In my early years I was not particularly interested in what the girls were doing on the other side of the wall, but puberty changed everything.

Every society has its codes of courtship, and at *El British* there was an established procedure for informing that special someone that they had conquered your heart. In retrospect I'd have to agree that our method lacked the stylish elegance of, say, serenading your beloved from beneath a balcony, but it was our way and we saw nothing wrong with it at the time. Our system was simple: we used bus tickets. When the digits on a bus ticket added up to twenty-one, that slip of paper was considered the equivalent of a Valentine card that said, "I love you." A twenty-one ticket, as precious as a four-leaf clover and about as hard to find, represented pure and innocent puppy love. Smitten ones would never approach the object of their affection directly, but would entrust the ticket to faithful intermediaries. Discretion prevents me from revealing any more about my first forays into the complex realm of love. Suffice to say that the groundwork was laid for the experiences of later life that, over time, provided the continuing education that began on the playground all those years ago.

Over the course of a lifetime I have watched others work their way through those same mysteries of the heart, and in the fullness of time have been asked by some to share my thoughts on the subject. As, for example, on the occasion of a family wedding, when I toasted the happy couple and reflected on the age-old question: What is Love?

If love is a mystery
who should I choose
to help me unravel all the clues?
To have and to hold me
till death do us part
And love me mysteriously
with all their heart

If love is a journey
what should I pack
as I take to the road or the railway track?
Something borrowed?
Something blue?
Some for me and some for you

If love is a party
who to invite
to wine and dine and dance all night?
To watch the magical moonlight wane
and toast the dawn
with pink champagne

If love is a compass
who'll be my north
to point my way from this day forth?
To steer me, guide me
keep me straight
that I might find my true estate

If love is a challenge
I must decide
who'll be standing by my side
My rock of ages
cleft for me
from now through all eternity

My love is here!
It's time to go
and now instinctively I know
to pack all the sweetness
that I can find
and leave my selfishness behind

For love is a lifetime
Love is a flame
Love is when both of us
feel the same

If love is eternal
and love is true
Then now and forever
I choose you