

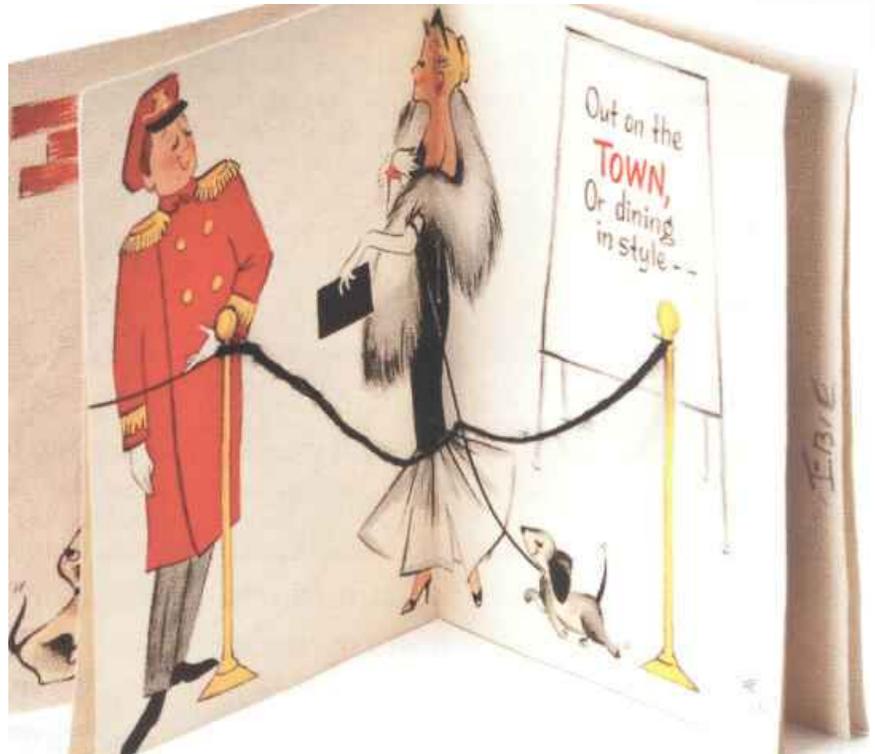
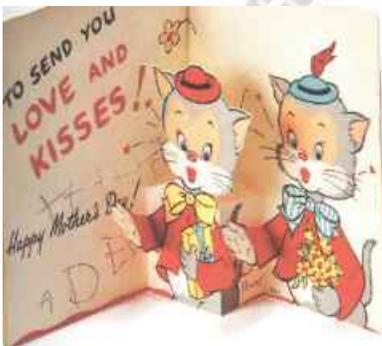


tooting a trumpet, appears in his entirety and blares birthday wishes when the card is opened. But the real communication is on the back of the card. Here my mother's cousin Temi, who had moved to California, used the occasion to update her East Coast relatives: "1. We are all well. 2. Hy bought a lovely old Spanish style house on the Sunset Strip. 3. Irene seems to be very serious about a very nice boy."

Greeting cards came into being and flourished in part as cheap substitutes for gifts—thus their popularity during the Depression—but some really are gifts in themselves. American Greetings' "Name the States game" includes a foldout map of the U.S., while another from Hallmark, with 14 stapled pages and its own table of contents, is called "Games for Girls Around the World." This is the only card that identifies its illustrator, Marilyn Conklin.

I can date important family events from the cards. The deaths of both my Aunt Sylvia and my Aunt Diana are apparent by the presence and then poignant absence of their signatures on the birthday and Valentine's cards. One Norcross valentine reminds me of my father's frequent business trips. The triangular card, with a sparkly salmon background, features a perfect little blond girl sitting primly on a stool, in a red dress with a bow in back, white anklets, and little black flats, holding a circlet of posies in her hands. Inside, my father has used my nickname, "Peggy"—he adored Peggy Lee—and signed and dated it: "Amsterdam 1958."

But he must have brought the card with him from New York, because it is clearly American. Was it my mother or father who



ABOVE. A 1958 Hallmark birthday card uses actual yarn to tie together images of a jet-setting gal-about-town

thought of this in advance? And was the message—"You're nice / You're sweet / You're very dear / You're loved just heaps all through the year"—meant to reassure me that even though my father was often away, he still cared about me?

The Gibson cards dating from the early 1960s (for my seventh, eighth, and ninth birthdays) stand out for their unique design and presentation: vertical 4-by-8-inch rectangles made of a thick poster board, they open right to left and always feature a boy and girl engaged in some sort of activity. The first is a virtual snapshot of the period. The two youngsters sit on the floor in Western gear in front of a TV, their backs to us. The boy, in the foreground, has his toy guns out and pointed; the girl, in a fringed skirt, plaid shirt, and neckerchief, sits with her arms raised, presumably in excitement, while they watch what seems to be *The Lone Ranger*.

Most amusing is the Hallmark card for my mother's birthday in 1958 (see above). On the cover of this eight-page, stapled volume,

which my father obviously bought and helped us sign, a blond woman in a tight red dress and heels sits gabbing on the phone and drinking a cup of coffee while the vacuuming, and her puppy, wait. In the second frame, she's on the run with a hatbox and other purchases; in the third, she's wearing a flared black evening gown, sparkly jewelry, and a stole; in the last, she's cozying up to a book in an easy chair, her knitting by her side. All the panels are attached by a piece of real black yarn, which begins as a telephone wire and ends in a knitting skein.

Was this woman some fantasy of my father's? A joke? My mother never shopped for clothes, never went "out on the town," never sat and talked on the phone while she put up her feet. She was too busy collecting and capturing the relationships around her. From these documents, these oddly true artifacts of our family life, I have a newfound respect for her insistent gathering. For this and her abundant devotion, I will always be in her debt.