



## The World Still Has A Place For Words Of Love Written On A Postcard

February 22, 2016 by Don DeBat

Every home has a mailbox. Usually it is stuffed with credit card offers, utility and cable bills, offers for auto and life insurance and plenty of junk mail.

But every few months, a check arrives from someone who owes you money, or a letter or unexpected hand-written invitation comes from someone you really care about.

Millions of people have their eyes glued to tech devices these days, but there still is room in this crazy world for reading a few simple words written on a love note or a postcard that is delivered by the U.S. Mail.

Last week, everyone from Millennials to Baby Boomers and Depression-era retirees were elated to receive a valentine. "I was surprised and happy to get a valentine greeting this week from an old beau," said an 85-year-old North Side spinster with a twinkle in her blue eyes.

This writer's "house of cards" can be found in a giant glass bowl in the family room filled with a year's worth of birthday congrats and holiday greetings, and Father's Day and Mother's Day cards. Because they express simple messages of greetings of friendship and love, we just can't bring ourselves to throw them away.

That's why this Old-School newspaper columnist was intrigued when he learned about smART postcardsTM Inc., a Streeterville-based postcard company that creates engaging graphic materials designed to stimulate and entertain preschool children—age 3 to 5 years.



Preschoolers today are "almost universally exposed" to expensive mobile devices—from smart cell phones to tablet computers, according to a recent study in Pediatrics journal.

But shockingly, some Millennials admit they have never purchased a stamp and mailed a letter in one of those rusting blue mailboxes that seem to be disappearing from street corners everywhere.

Despite these disturbing trends, Kathleen Hess, president of smART postcardsTM Inc., believes in the tried and true concept of sending postcards to preschoolers through the U.S. Mail.

"This is an enjoyable way for parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and family members to entertain, intellectually stimulate and stay lovingly in touch with young children," said Hess, an architect and interior designer. Hess noted that there are 65 million grandparents in the U.S., and each spends about \$500 per year on each grandchild.

The idea for smART postcardsTM, was conceived to engage Hess' grandchildren—Anna and Klaira—and introduce them to a visual world based on her design knowledge. When Anna was three years old, Hess started mailing weekly, colorful and visually interesting postcards, addressed directly to Anna, and then discussed the cards in weekly follow-up long-distance phone calls.

Initially, Hess purchased individual cards at museum shops, and greeting-card stores, a task that became more difficult when pursuing a specific theme, such as the alphabet, colors or counting.

This eventually led to the creation of smART postcardsTM—a portfolio of her own graphic images to share with others.

Hess has created three series of 4-by-6-inch picture postcards designed for preschoolers that illustrate the Alphabet, Colors and Counting. She offers a total of 51 colorful photographic images on postcards which place familiar subjects in lively and artful graphic compositions.

The postcards illustrate 26 letters from A to Z, a dozen colors, from hot red to cool blue, and numbers to help young children learn to count from 1 to 10.

To add to the stimulating experience, the word for each number or color is printed on the back of the card in five languages—English, French, Spanish, Chinese and Japanese text.

The photography was done mostly in Chicago-area locations, including the Lincoln Park Zoo, the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum and at Brookfield Zoo.

Her mission statement outlines the company's goal: "smART postcardsTM is dedicated to making good design accessible to preschool children, by seeking the visual essence in the familiar—and when feasible, by relating the images to an implied verbal alliteration."

Utilizing the U.S. Mail as a delivery system for the smART postcardsTM is a key part of the preschooler's experience. "Children enjoy receiving mail in their own name, as a regular event," Hess said. "This can foster self-identity and self-worth."

The mailing of a postcard to a preschooler usually provides a common conversation topic and may contribute to cultivating a bond between the sender and the recipient, she said. "The cards should be mailed with interesting postage stamps."

The U.S. Post Office currently is selling stamps with an image of the hapless Charlie Brown cartoon character peering into an empty rural mailbox. My favorite stamp is the Batman Forever image, which debuted in 2014.

"Lastly, an unexpected graphic image, when coupled with verbal descriptions in multiple languages, introduces children to a global outlook, which nurtures literacy, comprehension and reasoning," noted Hess, who outlined details of the three series of postcards:

- "Alphabet" series. This set consists of 26 photographic-image postcards illustrating the letters "A" through "Z". Each of the cards offers a delightful visual experience that places familiar subjects in lively and artful graphic compositions.

A photo of three red apples—one with a bite out of it—is on the front of the "A" postcard, with a block letter "A" and the word "apples" printed on the back of the card in English text.

- "Colors" series. Twelve photographic-image postcards illustrated by familiar subjects represent the following colors—red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, pink, brown, beige, gray, white and black. A photo of three blue balloons is on the front of the "Blue" postcard, and the word "blue" is printed on the back of the card in English, French, Spanish, Chinese and Japanese text.

- "Counting" series. Ten photographic-image postcards illustrated by familiar subjects grouped into a set that represent numbers from 1 to 10. The photo of the hand in the familiar thumbs-up position is on the front of the "No. 1" postcard, and the word "one" is printed on the back of the card again, in the five languages of the Colors series.

The 26-card Alphabet series is priced at \$15.95. The 12-card Colors series sells for \$8.95. A 10-card Counting series costs \$7.95. A set of all three postcard series retails for \$27.95. All internet sales include free shipping. Visit [www.smARTpostcards.com](http://www.smARTpostcards.com).