

Pretzelsonndeg

One pretzel plus one egg equals one love story? It's true in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, where lovers celebrate romance on "Bretzelsonndeg" or Pretzel Sunday. On the fourth Sunday of Lent, March 14 this year, a man gives his beloved a pretzel.

The larger the pretzel, the more he loves her. The woman shows her feelings by giving him either an egg (sometimes a boiled egg, sometimes a chocolate one) or an empty basket. If she gives him an egg, it means she returns his feelings. If she gives him an empty basket, he has been dumped, or in Luxembourgish, "de Kuerf kreien," (given the basket).

Luxembourg City celebrates Bretzelsonndeg by holding a parade in which the Pretzel Queen processes through the streets, followed by a group of bakers and pastry chefs handing out free pretzels to onlookers. The Jhangeli Tourist Train, a lime-green engine trailed by a blue passenger car and decorated with pretzels, accompanies the Pretzel Queen, while a small band plays in the background. Due to the covid pandemic, this year's parade has been cancelled.

Pretzel Sunday has been observed on the fourth Sunday of Lent since the 18th century. In the 1700s, large bonfires were built on the first Sunday of Lent to celebrate the approach of spring. While watching the fire, young women called out names of men they were interested in. If the man heard the call and was attracted to the woman, he would then take a pretzel to her on Bretzelsonndeg.

Lent, the 40 days before Easter, is observed as a time of eating lightly and avoiding meat and other animal products to prepare for the grand feast of Easter. Pretzels were customarily made from flour, water, and salt, with no eggs, fat, milk or other animal products.

Therefore, they were a perfect gift for a loved one during Lent. It is thought that the twisted shape of a pretzel symbolizes interlacing lovers' arms. Because they are popular during Lent, they may also indicate prayerful arms crossing a person's chest.

Today, department stores and bakeries in Luxembourg sell huge, decorated pretzels covered with fondant frosting and sprinkled with almonds. In addition to young lovers, married couples and the elderly celebrate love by exchanging pretzels.