

THE UNION

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Other Voices

Tracy Deliman: Enjoy valentine's day, even without a sweetie

It's here, the day of hearts, flowers and romance!

For many people, it's a joyous day spent with one's sweetheart giving and receiving gestures of love. On this day, sales of chocolates, red roses and greeting cards skyrocket. All different kinds of businesses find creative ways to capitalize on our hunger for love — beauty shops, bakeries, clothiers, jewelers, florists, travel agencies and many others. More marriage proposals take place on Valentine's Day than any other day.

For some people, particularly those without a significant other, Valentine's Day can be rather gloomy, one of loneliness and sad memories of lost loves. Our culture puts great emphasis on romantic love — so much that a person can be made to feel inadequate if they're not romantically involved with someone.

It doesn't have to be that way. Sure, romance can be wonderful, but let's expand our view of love. There are many different forms of love, and these are usually more deep and enduring than romance. We can — and should — celebrate these, too, on Valentine's Day.

There is the love that we feel for our children — so precious that we would risk our lives for them. Even looking into the eyes of someone else's little child can evoke those feelings of love. Many people feel love for one or both parents, a love that is imbued with deep gratitude for all they have done for us.

We can make Valentine's Day simply a day for love. Think of all the types of love in your life and celebrate those, whether or not you have a romantic partner. And do something loving for yourself as well.

There is the love we feel for a best friend who has been with us through thick and thin, who has endured our joys and pains and hung in there with us despite any ups and downs in the friendship. There's the love some of us feel toward a brother or sister who share that deep sense of camaraderie that comes from having gone through all the challenges of childhood.

Some of us may feel love for certain co-workers who diligently share the workload and make our workplace more pleasant.

Then there is the relaxed, unconditional love an elderly couple feel toward one another after 50 years of walking side by side through the natural phases of life. And, let's not forget the love

many of us feel for our furry feline and canine companions, who can make even the crustiest folks smile.

Quite possibly the most important kind of love is what we feel for ourselves. It's not conceit or arrogance — it's just wholesome self acceptance. Every single one of us is born with an instinct that tells us we should be loved. Take a look the next time you see an infant or toddler — you'll see that sweet innocence in their eyes that readily draws love to them, even from perfect strangers. That was us once, and it's still there down deep. Let it shine and grow.

When we reconnect with that basic state of love for ourselves, it becomes clear that it's not necessary to have a sweetheart in order to be a whole human being. It's nice when it happens, but think of it as a bonus rather than a necessity.

One of the more effective ways to begin reconnecting with loving oneself is to go for a slow walk in nature. While walking, feel the texture of the ground you're walking on, hear the particular sound it makes as you step on it, and see the ground around your feet. Gradually coordinate your breath with the rhythm of your steps. Be open to letting yourself feel nurtured by the earth.

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