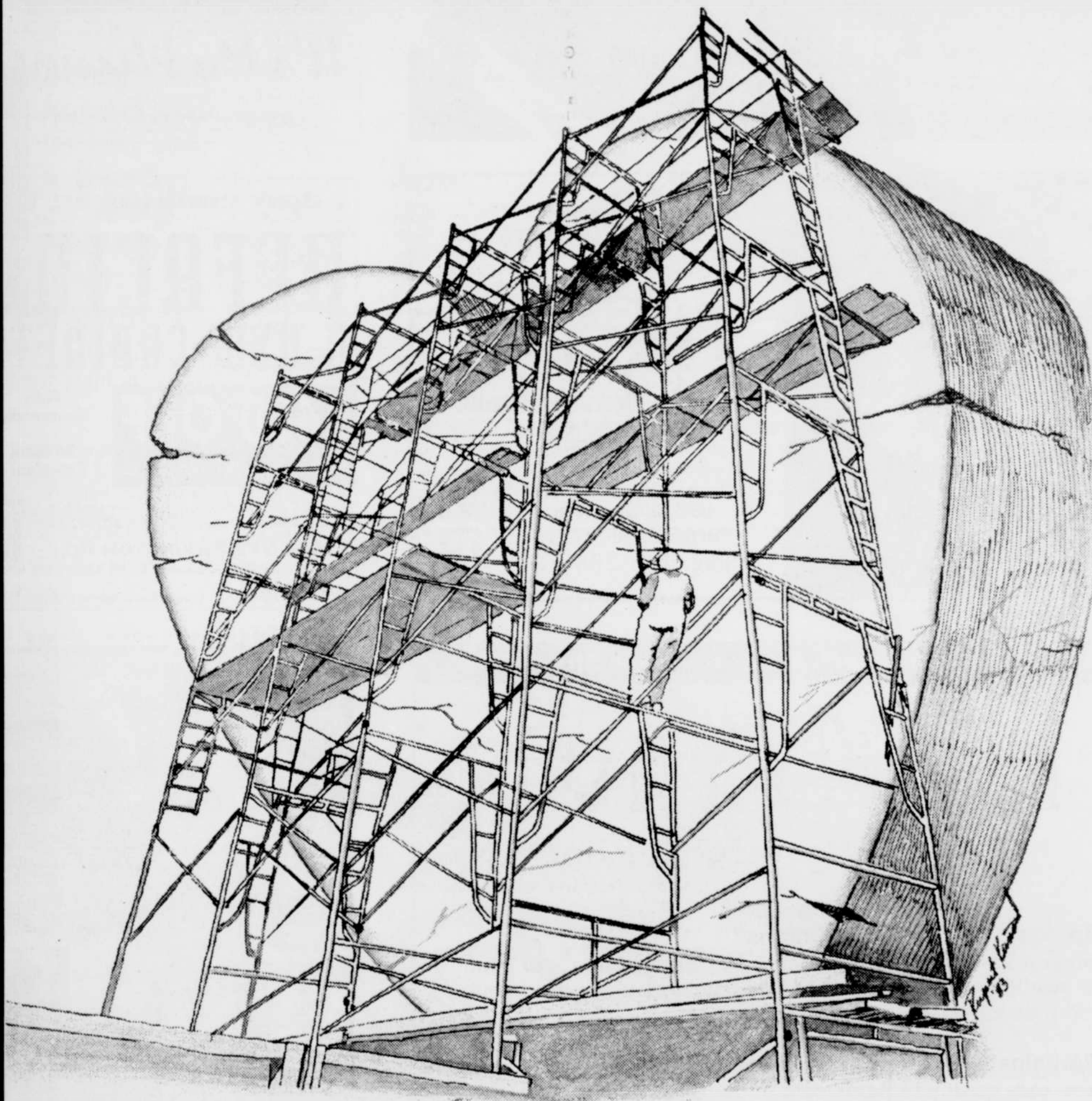


SINGULARLY SATISFIED

HOW TO ENJOY FEB. 14, WHETHER OR NOT YOU HAVE YOUR OWN FUNNY VALENTINE

There is no reason to be unhappy without a partner just because coupledness is the American Gold Standard. With that belief firmly in mind, Just Out asked four Portland therapists to share some insights into the subject, to get at the root of feeling good about our singular selves.



FINDING LOVE IN ALL THE RIGHT PLACES

BY MARIAH UREEL

It's that day again. Just when we thought the stress and pressure of the holidays were over, raucous pink and red valentines point large red arrows at the state of our love lives. If you're partnered, there's the pressure to make this event the most memorable ever. And if you're single, the sight of romantic advertising may nauseate you. I speak from experience.

There was a time in my life when I was dragged kicking and screaming into the single life. Without quite realizing it, I had pretty much always managed to be in some relationship or another. This time around, I had done

my full measure of grieving for the failed relationship, I thought, and therefore was ready for dating and romance. Wrong. Life had other plans.

I couldn't seem to spark a love interest anywhere. Well, there were a few offers from addicts, the mentally ill and the-not-quite-out-of-relationship set, but by that time I had grown up enough to say "no thanks." I joined groups, put the word out to friends and even made a friendly pass in the supermarket. Nada. Needless to say, I felt kicked in the gut of my self-esteem. Was I losing my charm? Did I look

so feminine that no one could guess I was a lesbian? Did I have a big sign over my head that said "failure at relationships"? And worst of all, was my desperation showing?

For months I whined to friends and listened to the standard advice—"when you least expect it..." and "the right one is getting ready for you," plus "have you thought of a personal ad?" and come to think of it, "just wait till you're in a relationship, you'll wish you'd had more fun with this."

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