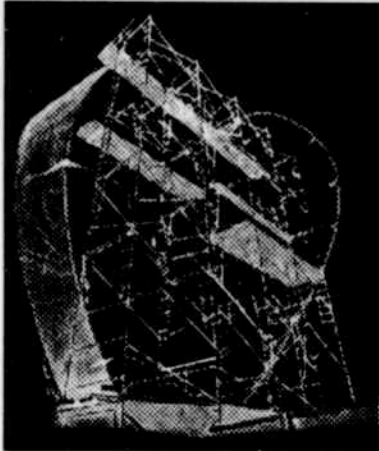


FINDING LOVE

Continued from Page 23

While the latter wasn't the greatest advertisement for partnership, it did occur to me that I could be having more fun. I began to realize that I had placed a lot of fun things on hold until I could share them with a significant other. In fact, I realized with a shock, I was even not buying a new sofa for my apartment, looking ahead to sharing a place with a new love. I was living my life like a temp! This was going to change.

At that time I was pursuing a master's degree in California, where I had enrolled in a class taught by a New Age feminist called "The Heroine's Journey." We were exploring the use of ritual and ceremony to empower ourselves. After being inspired by a Gilda Radner skit on *Saturday Night Live*, a hilarious parody of self-help jargon in which she takes herself on a date, I knew what I wanted—no, needed—to do with my ceremony. I needed to invest in myself,



Learning to live for myself means that being alone no longer feels like standing in an empty schoolyard, waiting for the ride that never comes. I know now that home is right here, right in the core of me.

make a commitment to my own life. In short, I needed to get married to me.

Interestingly, everything started to flow. A newspaper ran an ad with a large photo of an Irish Claddagh ring, a design that consists of two hands holding out a heart. To me this symbolized the essence of what I wanted my life to be, a presence for love in the world. I concocted a gown out of black and white gauzy material to symbolize the embracing of the light and dark within myself. I gathered up some witnesses who would also play the role of a Greek chorus.

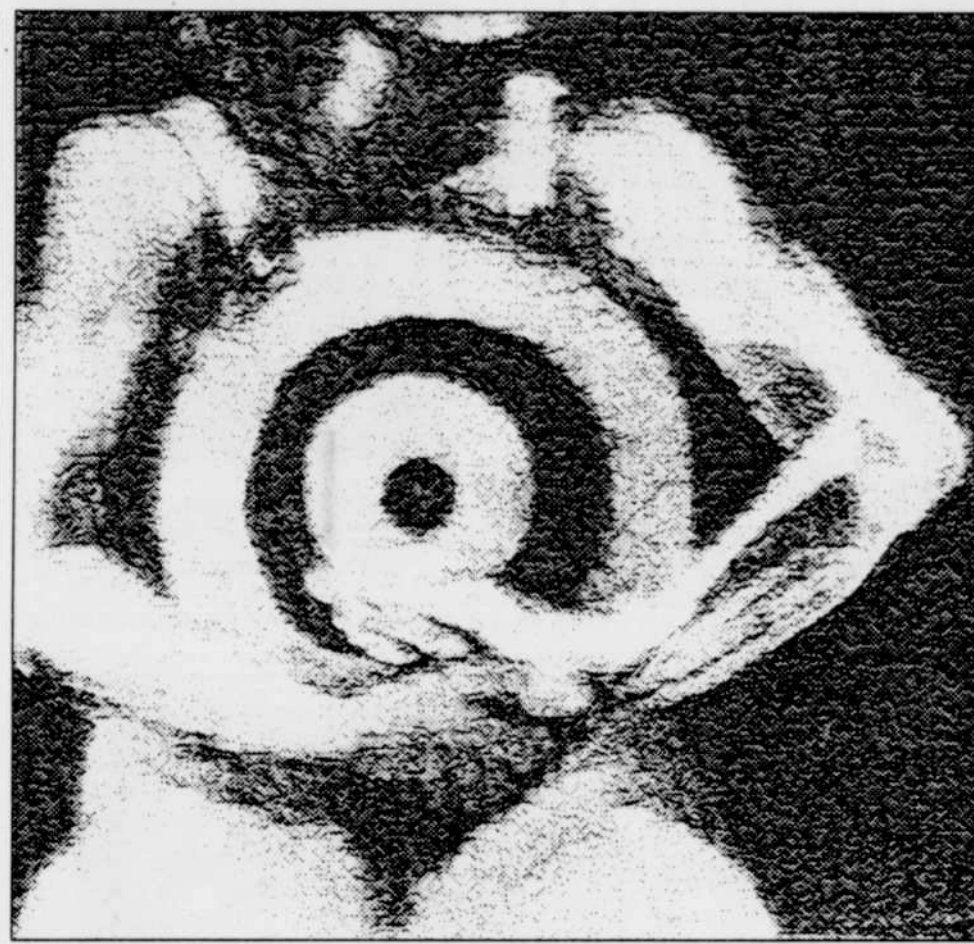
Learning to live for myself means that being alone no longer feels like standing in an empty schoolyard, waiting for the

ride that never comes. I know now that home is right here, right in the core of me.

ing forces at work in me, I yelled a big "no!" I was then free to place the ring on my finger.

I've now worn that ring for 15 years. The marriage has not been easy, but then no marriage of substance really is. There is a world of

When the ceremony unfolded in a profound, yet tongue-in-cheek way, the question "Does anyone present know of any reason why this marriage should not take place?" was asked, and the Greek chorus responded with a cacophony of negative childhood messages. After letting myself really hear the limit-



difference between what I know now about self-responsibility and what I knew then. I have encountered the challenge of honoring the commitment to myself and to another person, keeping them in balance. Looking back at my single years and the "wedding," I smile, knowing I could not be as I am today without it. Learning to live for myself means that being alone no longer feels like standing in an empty

a life lived authentically. This Valentine's Day, buy yourself a ring. Make the commitment.

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GROWING THE LOVE IN YOUR HEART

BY SANDRA LEA LEBEL

In our modern culture, Valentine's Day is a holiday dedicated to honoring love, and we are challenged to prove our love for those we deem lovable. It also carries a strong message that one must be in an intimate, erotic relationship with another in order to be fulfilled and whole. That being single or alone is not the desired configuration also gurgles to the surface.

To satisfy my belief that single and alone are OK, I consulted the Random House Dictionary.

Single: adj. one only; unique; sole; separate; individual.

Nothing looks wrong with that state of being.

Alone: adj. apart or isolated from another or others; to the exclusion of all others or all else.

This seems to imply being without fellowship or companionship, which I certainly am not. And I dare say, most everyone has at least one friend or companion animal with whom they interact.

Amid the rampant commercialism of love as a commodity, I struggle to understand how this all came about. How did one day a year get set aside to show love? What about the other 364 days?

I have a plan to remedy this situation. My goal is not to take anything away from Valentine's Day—celebrate it any way your heart desires. My goal is to create a way for love to be a presence each and every day of the year.

Reflecting on my past love relationships, I see the need for me to take love into my own hands and heart. One means of doing that is to create a page of validating ideas, affirmations or quotes and put this list in a prominent place for daily review, perhaps near a mirror.

The following quotes could work well on such a list; they are from

a favorite book, *The Art of Loving* by Erich Fromm:

"Love is not primarily a relationship to a specific person; it is an attitude, an orientation of character, which determines the relatedness of a person to the world as a whole, not toward one 'object' of love."

"My own self must be as much an object of my love as another person. The affirmation of one's own life, happiness, growth, freedom is rooted in one's capacity to love,

i.e., in care, respect, responsibility and knowledge. If an individual is able to love productively, she loves herself too; if she can love only others, she cannot love at all."

Each time you review the list, look at your reflection



and construct a scenario that assists you to understand how the passage relates to your life. For example, try visualizing a time when you loved someone very deeply and recall the love you sent to them, then put yourself in his or her place, become the receiver of your own love.

Difficult as this may seem, the practice brings rewards each time you do it. Creating sacred space for this exercise not only makes it easier but deepens the experience. As you ponder these ideas and begin to know and love yourself ever more, the scenes you construct may change and you may also notice a change in your reflection. Perhaps it will become a lifelong endeavor.

We all deserve the best life has to offer, and I believe love is at the top of the list. Remember: Love is what we came here for. Give yourself a big, warm hug and go out and show the world all the love in your heart.

■ SANDRA LEA LEBEL is new to Portland. After many years of study, she is opening her transformatonal healing practice, *Life Exploration*, guided by Reiki, neurolinguistic programming, hypnotherapy and reflexology. You can reach her at Slealebel@hotmail.com.

UNCOUPLED ON VALENTINE'S DAY

BY MARILYN J. SORESENSEN

constantly criticized, neglected, abused or told she doesn't do things right, the child likely begins to form low self-esteem. From then on, until she recovers from LSE, she inaccurately views herself in a negative light, doubts her abilities, and on some level wonders if she is lovable. She lives with fear of doing the wrong thing, saying the wrong thing, anxious about the future, fearful other do not like or respect her.

Hypersensitive, those with LSE look for signs that confirm their negative view of self, and Valentine's Day presents the perfect opportunity to do so. They may feel humiliated that they have no significant other and perceive it as proof that they are truly inadequate and unwanted. They know they won't be receiving flowers at work or an invitation to a romantic dinner, and they might be embarrassed to tell their co-workers they have no plans.

Things to remember:

1. It's better to be alone than in an unhealthy relationship.
2. Being in a relationship does not necessarily equal happiness or contentment, which actually come from within us.
3. Being alone doesn't mean you are unloved or unlovable.
4. Being alone means you have more time to focus on your own goals, your own personal growth. Take advantage of the opportunities around you.

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