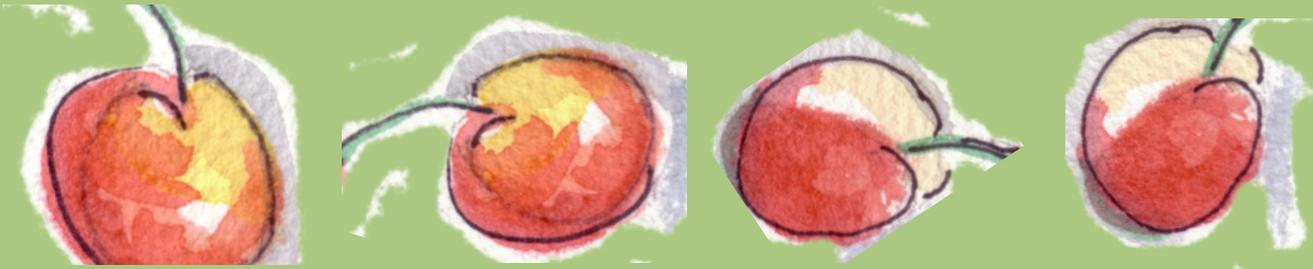


Thoughts from Beyond



Essays on the quirks of everyday living • by Paule Sheya Hewlett • www.beyondher.com •

Love's Labor

Valentine's Day always gives me a little case of heartburn. Don't get me wrong: I LOVE love. I just don't want anybody to be disappointed.

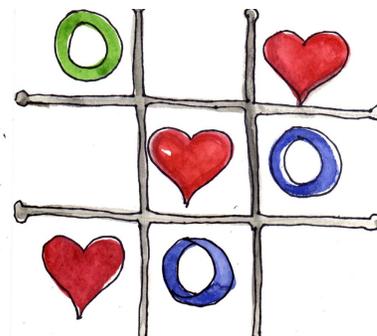
I think it's unrealistic to expect one person to solve your problems, make your dreams come true, or even load the dishwasher correctly. But, then, I come from a ranching background -- I'm pretty down to earth.

To some peoples' horror, I have set about single-handedly debunking the Prince Charming myth. I told my daughters that a spouse is, once you get past the la-de-dah phase, a business partner. (Yes, I said it.) I was proud when one young daughter wondered why so many people trilled "I love you!" to end their conversations with their family. "Isn't that inferred?" my wise 14-year-old queried.

I happen to think it is. But then, I exist in an old-fashioned relationship, the kind where we often spend time together. Which is something, from my observation, many couples don't. Here in Texas, the

men usually go hunting and to college games while the women go to spas and on shopping junkets. In reality, separate activities make sense: I just don't know how our neighbors produced three children - since I've never seen them in their house together.

Because of my status as one of the "couples that time forgot," people sometimes ask for relationship advice. This Valentine's Day I've assembled a list of things my practical nature considers signs of true



love. In my estimation, you must:

Share a brain.

My husband and I have an

alarming ability to guess what the other person is thinking and/or pathetically trying to

communicate almost instantly. This has resulted in a lifetime ban from playing on the same charades team -- but is coming in very handy as senility renders us unable to finish our own sentences.

Survive at least 25 years of endurance events. To qualify, challenges must include cross country moves, 30-year mortgages, visiting in-laws, colicky babies, bad bosses, lost jobs, insolent teenagers, financial transgressions, remodeling projects and at least two natural disasters. (Survivors should, in my mind, qualify for a full tax refund.)

Be able to argue with looks alone. Good couples know how to push each other's buttons, but they also know the futility of trying to actually clear the air. We experienced partners are able to go the whole nine rounds with a few glares and some well-timed drawer slamming. And, honestly, it has the same effect.

Be totally accepting, or as we call it, resigned. We all start off expecting to raise our spouses to our superior levels of intellect, talent and fashion, but -- take it from me -- some things never change. I have somehow learned to live with a drawer full of Home Depot receipts and year-old movie tickets in my bureau. My husband automatically and continuously utters those two little words I love to hear: "Yes dear."



Oh, I know I'm fast forwarding through the chemistry and love-bugs, the giddiness and blushing

of romance and sweet amour. That's because it lasts about three seconds, followed by years and years of hacking and thrashing. These years are not terrible; they're just real. (Not that I've ever turned down any chocolate.)

And as for things I love, how about that song from "Fiddler on the Roof" where Tevye stuns Golde by questioning her devotion on the eve of their daughter's engagement? She responds:

*For twenty-five years I've lived with him
Fought him, starved with him
Twenty-five years my bed is his
If that's not love, what is?*

This Valentine's Day, I wish all of you not only the kind of love that skips up the walk, but the kind that sits quietly on the steps and takes in the evening -- warm, gentle, kind and long.

As for the love I send to all of my well-wishers - it's the kind I am known for and the kind I like best: inferred.

XOXOXO,



Paule Sheya Hewlett is a freelance writer and artist living in Houston.

***Thoughts from Beyond* is published at irregular intervals -- whenever life's absurdity reaches a certain level.**

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