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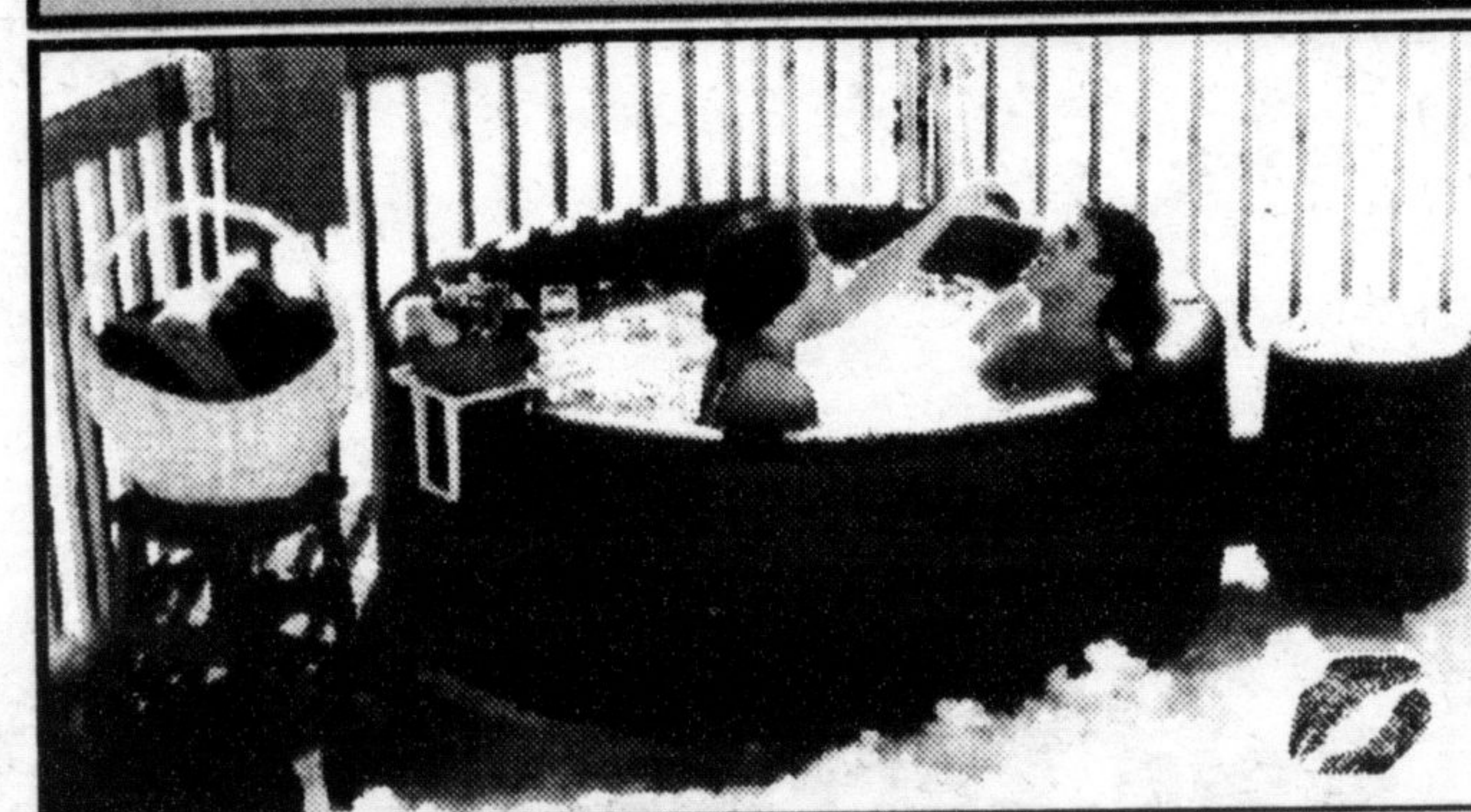
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# It's Valentine's Day ... Be Good to Yourself

Valentine's Day is about love, as we all know. Adoring, amorous, devoted, head-over-heels love. Chocolates and flowers abound, jewelry glitters and tables for two dominate the restaurants.

But, what about those who aren't paired up with a special someone? When the hoopla of Valentine's Day gets under way, it can be easy for single people to feel a bit left out. What do you do when it seems like you're completely surrounded by snuggling couples, cupids and cherubs?

Well, the notion of self-love is somewhat familiar in our pop psychology culture — "You can't love anybody unless you love yourself first" is a popular mantra — but the truism of its deeper meaning is rarely explored. Taking the idea of self-love one step farther means to go beyond the basic implication of just being comfortable with who you are and liking yourself.

The understanding of self-love as a necessary ritual, the time a person takes to pamper himself or herself, is a rather foreign one. As Debrena Jackson Gandy states in her book, "Sacred Pampering Principles" (William Morrow), self-love and pampering is not about cramming more things to do in your already full life.

"Simply put, pampering is orienting your life around what brings you joy," she says. "Pampering helps you relate to yourself in a new and different way — a way in which care of self is a top priority. And a priority that doesn't arise out of selfishness but arises out of a place of healthy self-love and self-support."

So, as this Valentine's Day zooms closer, grab a box of chocolates and use these tips from Jackson Gandy to embark on a

relationship with yourself like you've never known.

- Learning to love yourself — Ask yourself, "What kind of things would I do if I were in love with the most wonderful person in the world?" Would the possibilities include candlelight dinners, reading poetry, taking long afternoon Sunday drives or walks on the beach?

Then ask yourself, "Am I doing all those wonderful things with and for myself, right now? And, if not, why not?" You have to look within yourself for whatever it is you are looking for someone else to give you emotionally and spiritually. In turn, we attract others into our lives who are whole and self-loving.

- Quiet time — Quiet time, or Q.T., is time set aside with no talking or distracting noises. It gives your mind and body a break. We all need breaks. It is solitary refinement. Our limiting personal myths and negative programming lead us to believe that Q.T. results in decreased productivity. But silence can be sacred, meaning "worthy of respect and honor." Balanced living necessitates silence in order to counter the effects of sensory overload that contemporary living gives us.

- Creating sacred places — To counter the effects of contemporary living, we need special spaces to take our bodies to where we can relax, nurture and love them. We need these places so we can seek refuge from the onslaught of modern living. Seek out at least two places or spaces you can designate as your sanctuary. It may be under a tree, on your patio, in a favorite lounge chair or a corner in the garden.

- Creating rituals — Rituals are spiritual processes created to

achieve specific outcomes, and the process is as valuable and significant as the outcome itself. Rituals actually invoke emotions that foster bonding and intimacy.

When you perform a ritual, you should use a ritual object, which serves as a symbol that can help evoke meaning, feeling and emotions. It also can help us connect with the spiritual realm and invoke personal change at a far greater pace than through language and words alone.

- Pampering tools — Some of the suggested basics are candles, incense, an incense burner, scented bubble bath and Epsom salts. Some other tools you might want to use include a body loofah, clay heel buffer, natural body sponge and essential oils.

- Personal pampering: reflections of you — When, what, how and where you choose to pamper yourself is as distinct and unique as you are. Compile a "What Brings Me Joy" list — it might include out-of-doors experiences like hiking, watching the sun rise or set, or bike riding; cozy, cuddly, stay-at-home experiences like snuggling on the couch with a blanket and a good book, or sipping champagne or hot tea, or wearing silk or satin loungewear; creative, artistic experiences like finger painting or coloring, making cookies, or forming clay figures; carefree, self-expressed experiences like hosting a gourmet dinner, a nature hike under the stars or review of a favorite author.

The possibilities are endless for making healthy, self-supporting choices every day. Practice makes perfect for attaining wellness, wholeness and balance through being good to yourself.

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## About Valentine's Day

One thing is nearly certain: Valentine's Day has nothing to do with either of the two third-century martyrs who share the name Valentine and share February 14 as their day of feast.

This date is heavy with the scent of coupling. A medieval folk belief held that wild birds choose February 14 to begin their spring mating. Enacted every year at February 15's Lupercalia, the ancient Roman custom of "lovers' lots" — drawing partners' names at random from a box — enjoyed enduring popularity through the ages. In mid-16th-century France, St. Francis de Sales struggled to abolish the custom. As a contemporary described it, Francis

tried to interest his flock, instead, in the practice of giving boys billets with the names of certain (female) saints for them to honor. One can imagine how well that went over.

Another old tradition held that the first person seen on the morning of the 14th (except blood relatives) would be that day's "valentine." So Shakespeare has Ophelia chirruping to Hamlet:

Good morrow, 'tis Saint Valentine's Day,  
All in the morn betime,  
And I a maid at your window,  
To be your Valentine.

— From "The World Holiday Book" (HarperCollins)