

DIRTY FINGERNAILS AND ALL

Some kind of unconditional love

BY SIOUX ROGERS

I must say that life has finally gotten so overly ridiculous that even licking Valium won't help. The only things that help are a hysterical belly laugh and a freshly picked bouquet of flowers. Here's what consumed me over one recent 24-hour period:

The "food train" for a dear dying friend is overflowing with an abundance of kindness. This is the way our community is. As long as I, the delivery person, don't forget a pickup along the way, the food train rolls on.

Last night when I went to put the chicks and ducks away, they had all gone into the vegetable garden via the garden gate, which blew partially inward from a faulty latch. I normally can get them all out with the normal, "Here chick, chick, chick," but

the wood chips by the gate were too high, and the gate would not push all the way open. So what happened? The

chickens and ducks ran toward the open gate and went behind it, then got tangled in the roses bushes growing through the fence. Don't even bother to ask how I remedied this.

Then one of our workers cut himself rather severely on his other job, a few hours prior to coming to our house. He had not gone to the repair hospital and, because it kept bleeding, he could not work here. He said I could "fix" him. So the surgical table came out (aka kitchen sink) and we did a major rescrub and sterilizing, short of sticking his hand in the fire. Then I had to suture it and dress it for more protection. I was putting hubby's size large disposable gloves on the worker's pudgy hand, covered with all kinds of drapery and, duh, too small. So we went to protection plan B, which seemed to get him through the day.

In the middle of all this, a friend, presently living in Florida, calls and goes ballistic at lordy knows what, but I was the target. I bite. This is VERY unusual for me as I am usually quiet Teflon with her, but I guess she was the proverbial straw-of-the-day. She did not know she created a fire in my gut, and the drool from my mouth was a serious symptom, like when your dog starts to drool in the car. The "fire hose" shot across the Internet and flames were put out. I was left with a subdued friend and my own personal migraine. Oh, mylanta.

That morning (6 am, to be precise) a very dear friend from Klamath Falls, called wanting me to "hide and drive" her blue truck in our wide open driveway. I suggested we paint her blue truck with flowers and leaves and it would blend right into our garden. We finally made a joint decision to just cover the truck with branches and leave it camouflaged in her yard. Anyhow, the drive back to Klamath Falls was not worth the new paint job.

Then another friend calls me from New York very hysterical, and is crying so hard I could barely understand her. She has a six-day-old grandson she finally saw "unwrapped." My dear, wonderful friend said she is scared to death the infant is going to die because he is the skinniest child she ever saw. I had to remind her

that we are not in Africa where the words "dying skinny baby" have real meaning. I also took the time to lecture on "Mom's Milk 101." The summary lecture goes like this: Mom has so much milk they are pumping; there is a lactation nurse on duty; pumping milk and feeding it to the child in a bottle while you hold the infant close is an A+. Good grief.

What does this all have to do with a garden column? Well heck, poop happens and I am so late writing this, I thought an explanation close to "My dog ate my homework" would do.

Unconditional love... hummmmm. We often talk about our animals giving us unconditional love. Heck, I once had a guinea pig, Ruby-Doo, who I thought gave me unconditional

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love. Actually, she did have some conditions based around my remembering to feed her but, aside from that, never a

complaint. All the dogs and cats I have ever owned, or who have owned me, did give me unconditional love, even if I skimmed on food or forgot to feed them. This past month, I lost a very dear pet. She was only three years old. She walked around the garden with me singing sweet songs. Even my dog, McGee, was her buddy. She gave us all, in her own heirloom-turkey way, unconditional love. Her name was Arizona, a beautiful female Bourbon Red Turkey. I dedicate this column to her.

Parents often like to think they have unconditional love for their children, but as I grow into a "zipper-lipped" mother of adult children, I realize this is actually something a child has to teach a parent. If the parents do not receive the lesson, unconditional love does not happen. Maybe one might re-name unconditional love as "love with some borders."

On the other hand, a garden—well, mine for sure—does NOT give me unconditional love. In fact, she is downright judgmental, demanding and sometimes unforgiving. Wait up, maybe I am talking about myself, not the garden. On the other side of the moon, what my garden has taught me in the realm of "unconditional love" is that smothering, overgrooming and fussing don't work, either. That is not love. For example, every year I like to clip off the tips of the spent peonies and oak-leaf hydrangeas. This year I did not have the time or the energy. Guess what? We all survived. The girls look beautiful,



Sioux Rogers—And the beet goes on.

despite their lack of preening and pruning.

Then again my roses halfway forgave me for not giving them their annual beauty pruning. Once again, lack of time proceeded the garden formalities. So what happened? I had a most magnificent show of the English rose Abraham Darby. However, in two days Mr. Darby had worn himself out and all the huge, magnificent rose flower heads were plum tucked out, drooped to the finished. Now I need to really prune him, but I was rewarded with unconditional love, even with my creative poor timing.

The more I write and think about my garden, the more I feel I need to do a one-eighty reverse and tell you that my garden really does give me a very broad and forgiving type of love. For example, last year, for the umpteenth time, I was determined to have blueberries and decided to really douse them in white vinegar as everyone knows blueberries need an acid soil. So what happened? All the blueberry bushes fainted. Nurse Dirty Fingernails to the rescue as I

stood diluting or near drowning the newly planted baby bushes. I was also doing a plant dance around them and praying loudly and hard to the plant gods to please forgive my ignorant overindulgence. The next pm, after a morning's repeat performance of watering to dilute the vinegar, I was forgiven. Plants perked up and I had a vague idea that too much of a good thing is not always a good thing. So that is kind of unconditional love, well, sorta.

But not all works out so well. I planted one beloved hydrangea bush in sunlight and was never forgiven. I was in too much of a hurry to lie next to her in the heat of the afternoon and see how she would feel. The answer was fatal, third-degree burns (not me, her). I was not forgiven. Then there are the snow peas, planted in the middle of our slimy slug wet spring. Well, they certainly did not forgive me, they just surrendered to being eaten up alive. All the

plants transplanted as long, stringy legged specimens from a poorly lit hothouse did not love me or survive. Long, long legs without a root to stand on is unforgivable.

Good question to ponder is when do you receive unconditional love? Even in "real life" you may not get back what you give or vice versa, even when you believe you are "right." So, once again, I go to the soul of my garden to "zen" my spirit, and often—if I am able to sit long enough—I get an answer.

Both overindulgence and underindulgence may be unforgivable. Two nights ago I moved a volunteer tomato that had come up in my compost pile. I, not the tomato, decided she would be happier a few feet over. This was like a feng shui move, on my part, so my compost pile would look "better balanced." Really, who wants a tomato growing on the edge? Well, I guess the tomato did and the decision was not mine to make, at least for my reason. She is still on the fainting couch. How often are my life and my garden reflections of each other? Moving a happy tomato was not a good thing. Trying to re-root grown children or grown children re-rooting their parents for whatever reason is not usually good.

It never occurred to me that the most beautiful of all my peonies loves living under the shelter of a raggedy gray bush. Would she ever have forgiven me if I had forced her to move into another neighborhood? Well, either through neglect, oversight or perhaps insight, my amazing peony *did* forgive me—what I perceive as unconditional love. Her blooms were magnificent, fragrant and long-lasting. Doesn't get better than that. Who am I to say where she prefers to reside.

Now my tomato plants, not the one in the compost pile, do have a "but" attached to their unconditional love. I can forget to water them until they wilt

but not until they wilt to a crisp. All they request is a good, long, deep drink and they are fully refreshed. What pals. If I could just give my friends a nice, cool tall one when I have offended them and have them just perk right up, well life would sure be easier.

Unconditional love, whether in my garden or my heart, means taking a deep breath and letting my tomato plant grow off center in the compost pile, as it wishes; the peony gets to live happily with the scrubby bush; and all the people you love, well, just love them without your own ego judging.

Dirty fingernails and all,
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