

full tilt living newsletter

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My local newspaper, The San Francisco Chronicle, recently ran an article featuring the mural painted on the wall behind the altar facade of our humble but sturdy mission church. It's a Sacred Heart motif painted by local Ohlone artists shortly after the mission was built. The Ohlones' interpretation of that European concept is a large, anatomically correct heart pierced through with a Spanish-looking sword. While I'm not stunned by its beauty, I can say that an unmistakable message comes through that image. I leave the interpretation up to you. And I wonder if the concept the Spanish missionaries were going for came out the way they expected. They did cover up the wall with an elaborately carved and gilded altarpiece shortly after the mural was completed. So now if you

want to see the Sacred Heart, you have to be lowered down a trap door above the altar on a sling. And bring a flashlight.

But maybe that's the story with matters of the heart--subject to interpretation, not always elegantly executed.

And often we get tangled up in our attempts to present gestures of our deepest feelings.

If we're on the receiving end, we might find ourselves wondering what exactly it is that we are being given.

For example, I once knew a cat who brought daily love gifts to his person and dropped them at her feet, embellished with a terse, self-congratulatory meow. Field mice. Often still operable. Now if anyone else had brought her half-dead vermin, it wouldn't be adored she'd be feeling.

If you're thinking that I'm heading towards (in *my* mind) that most damning of all statements, "It's the thought that counts," we are finding ourselves right in the middle of one of those danged tangles. Because what I'm meaning to say is, "It's the heart that counts."

Remember this when Valentine's Day rolls around and the obligation to express ourselves is heavy in the air. We can't all come up with the Taj Mahal. We *can* be our deepest and truest. And we can be the best receivers. Counting on our hearts to get us through.

And maybe one of these days, my ex-husband will forgive me for embroidering that strategically placed heart... Oh, never mind.

