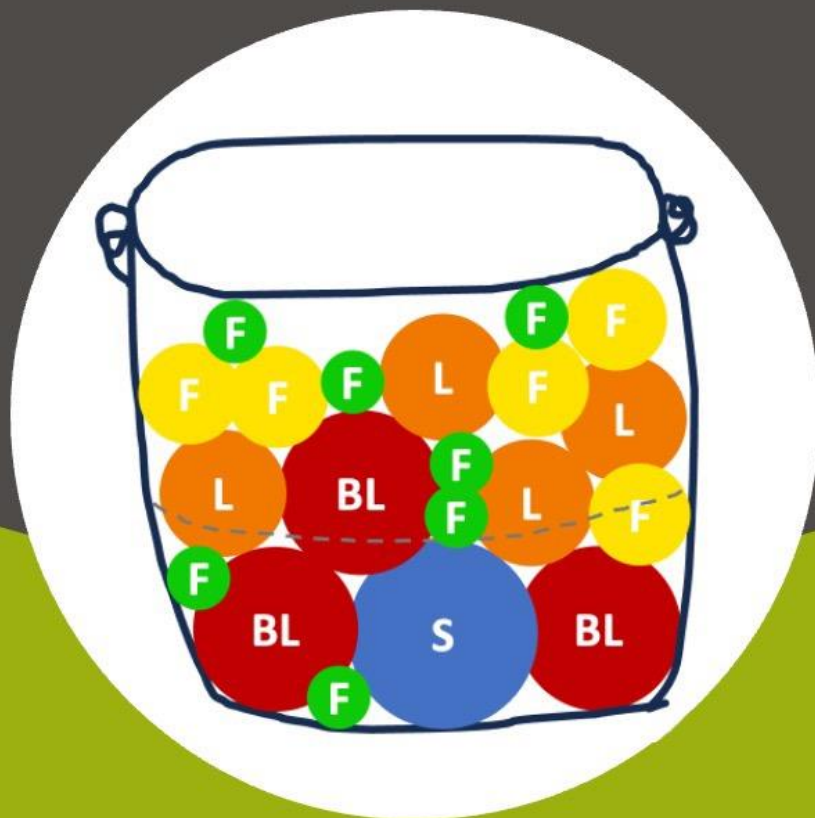


How's your
Love
Bucket?



J U L E K U C E R A

How this started...

When Trent, my husband, died suddenly and unexpectedly at age 46, I fell deep into grief. As I came out of that dark pit, I realized that not only had I lost the man I loved, I lost more than just him.

This loss prompted thinking about the sources of love in my life and helped me bring in more love. No, I didn't fall in love with someone new, but I brought up the level of my 'love waterline.'

Let me explain.

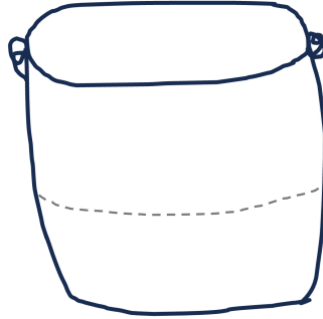
The Love Bucket

I thought of my need for love and affection as a vessel needing to be filled. I named it the 'Vessel of Affection.' That name went over like a brick, so it's now called the 'Love Bucket.'

Let's start with the bucket. We'll make it glass so we can see through it, not because it's fragile. It most definitely is not fragile. The Love Bucket endures.



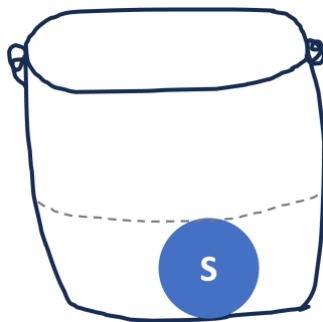
The bucket has a 'love waterline' of minimum need. There is a minimum level of affection humans require to survive. I'm not sure exactly where on the bucket to draw the line, but you get the point.



When babies aren't touched and held, failure to thrive can set in, and they can die. I learned this when I worked as a dental hygienist in a county hospital. We were taught that if an eight-month pregnant woman couldn't tell you where the baby was going to sleep, you had to call social services.

We must meet our love waterline minimum, but life is better when the waterline is above the minimum. The Love Bucket is a situation where more is better. Much better.

The first source of love in our bucket is our Self.



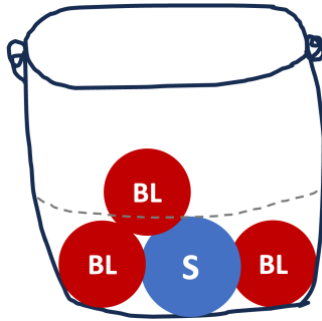
This is the most important source, the largest marble.

But doesn't the Self look lonely? If Self is the only source of affection, the love waterline doesn't meet the minimum. I've never been in solitary confinement, but I bet people who have would know.

After the Self, the next largest source of affection is from those we love and spend a lot of time with. This typically would be a spouse, a partner, kids, maybe a dog or cats.

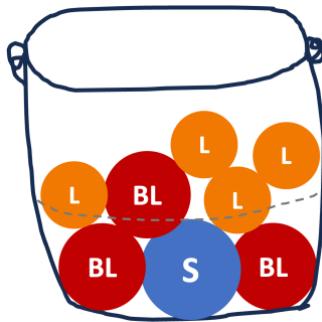
Yes, animals can be sources of affection and frequently are the best source of unconditional love.

Let's label these sources Big Love.



After Big Love, the next largest source of affection is those we love but don't see as often. This includes people like grandparents, brothers and sisters, and others with whom we have a deep and abiding relationship.

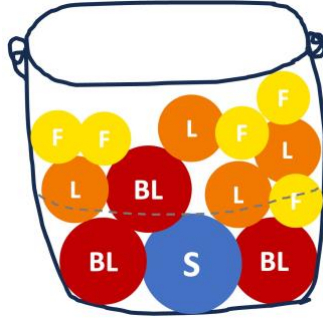
We'll call these sources Love.



See how full the Love Bucket is getting? But wait, there's more!

There are Friends.

These are the proverbial people you can call at 3:00 a.m.



And Friendlies.

Friendlies are not exactly friends, but are more than mere acquaintances. This could include the barista you see every day, the 'cafeteria lady,' the neighbor who always says hello when he gets his mail at the same time you do.



This is a lovely (and love-filled!) Love Bucket.

But this image is a snapshot only. A moment in time.

When life changes, Love Bucket waterlines respond to those changes, immutable as the tide.

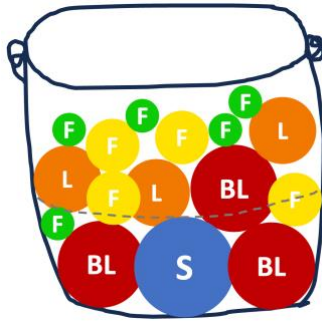
Going back to the example from my life, when I was 46, I fell in love with a man named Trent. I sold my house in Chicago and he sold his in Battle Creek, Michigan.

To be together, and within two hours of his daughter, we moved to Newaygo, Michigan (population 1,400).

We got a puppy and named him Nemo.

His daughter moved in with us, and she and I called each other 'E.P.' which was short for 'Extra Present.'

My Love Bucket was full.



The big blue marble is **Self-Love**.

The three red **Big Love** marbles are Trent, his daughter (E.P.), and our dog, Nemo.

The smaller orange **Love** marbles are my mom, my brother, and someone else (a secret!).

The smaller yellow **Friends** marbles will go unnamed to avoid awkwardness.

The smallest green **Friendlies** marbles include the woman who owned the restaurant down the street, the librarian, and a teller at the bank.

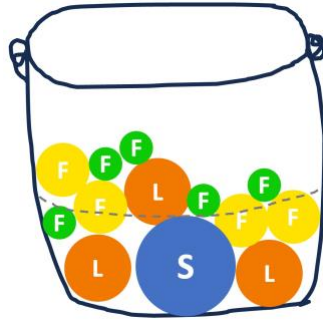
This Love Bucket, with love from Self, Big Loves, Loves, Friends, and Friendlies, was splendidly full. It felt good.

But things changed:

- Trent's daughter moved out and went back to live with her mother.
- As you already know, Trent died.
- I gave our dog Nemo away because two weeks before Trent died, I promised him I would never take Nemo with me to live in Chicago.

That's the Cliff Notes version. If you want more detail, I wrote [a whole book](#) about it.

After those changes, my Love Bucket looked like this:

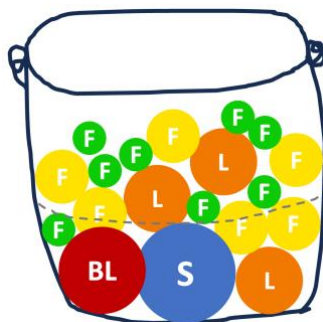


Trent was dead, Jenna was gone, and I had given Nemo to the niece of a good friend. You can see that my bucket isn't as full as it was, and all the Big Loves are gone. The love waterline came close to the danger zone.

I was still mourning Trent and not in a place to look for another Big Love, but I needed to refill my bucket. It would look different from how it looked before, but the level of love would be well above the danger line, and that would be a good thing.

What did I do to refill my bucket?

I got another dog, a greyhound named Leda. I increased my connections with my Friends and made some new ones. And I focused more on interacting with the Friendlies in my life. My replenished Love Bucket looked like this:



Notice that the level of love is much higher, but the marbles that fill the bucket are different—smaller, and more of them.

Understanding my Love Bucket is a good thing because it helps me be analytical rather than emotional in addressing my needs for love.

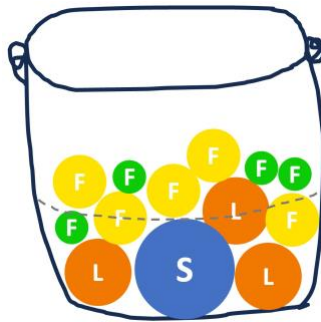
PS: Leda died in December 2020. In June 2023, I got Roxie. Everybody needs a Big Love.

Morphing Marbles

So far, we've looked at marbles exiting and entering a Love Bucket. But marbles can also morph. The Love Bucket helps us understand what's happening and to not take the change personally.

For example, imagine a group of five college sophomores who experienced huge love waterline drops when they left home and went to college. But then they made friends with each other.

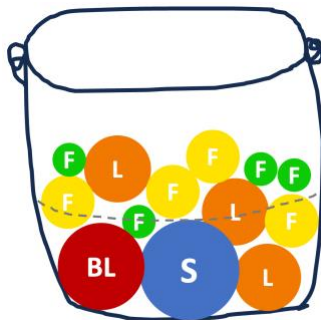
New friends helped replenish their Love Buckets.



Now imagine that there is a change... two of the friends fall in love. In each other's Love Bucket, one Friend marble has morphed and gotten bigger.

The new Big Loves spend less time with their other friends and more time together. Their waterlines have risen, and they want to keep it that way.

Morphing from a Friend to a Big Love.



But the love waterlines of the other friends have fallen.

These friends who suffered a drop in their waterlines pledge to each other, “We won’t do that. When we fall in love with someone, we won’t abandon the group. We’ll still hang out like we do now.”

No, they won’t.

They won’t because their love waterlines will be higher thanks to their new Big Love, and they will want to maintain those higher levels because it feels better. A full Love Bucket feels good.

The needs of a Big Love will almost always supersede those of Friends. Rationale: if there is a break in the relationship with a Big Love, the love waterline drop will be greater than the drop from a break with a Friend. In managing risk, it is less risky to hurt the feelings of a Friend than those of a Big Love.

Therefore, when placed in a position where a person must choose between a Friend or a Big Love, Big Love almost always wins.

Once, I stood in a buffet line next to a colleague I didn’t know well. She was bemoaning the fact that her son wasn’t coming home for the holidays. I said it must be difficult not to see her son for Thanksgiving or Christmas. She replied, “Oh no, he’s coming home—with his girlfriend—for Christmas. I just want him for both holidays.”

I made the case that a 50/50 split was fair, but the mother rejected it. “If she wants to see her mother, she can go there.”

I instantly, mentally, harshly judged this mother. How could she not see that keeping her son (with or without his girlfriend) for both holidays was greedy? How could she not understand the impact on the girlfriend’s mother?

At least I kept my tongue.

Now I realize the mother was simply experiencing a drop in her Love Bucket. It didn’t matter that her thinking was illogical. In her son’s Love Bucket, his girlfriend’s marble was growing and his mother’s was shrinking.

His mother felt that, and it hurt.

Moral of the story: A love waterline drop doesn’t feel good. Don’t take it personally. It’s simply the result of someone else managing their own Love Bucket.

Special Note for Soloists

I spent two years in dental hygiene school, and it was not a waste of time.

I took Microbiology, Embryology & Histology, Anatomy & Physiology, and Head & Neck Anatomy. Those courses taught me a lot about the human body, information I still use, decades later.

Microbiology taught me about interstitial cells, which are smaller cells that lie in the spaces between larger cells.

This is a helpful concept for those who find themselves suddenly alone.

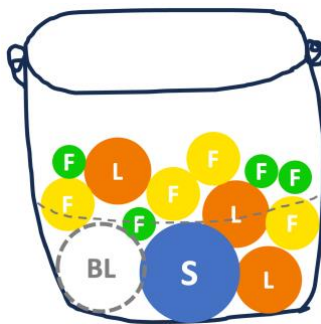
When I had a partner, Saturday night was our Big Night Out.

Not anymore.

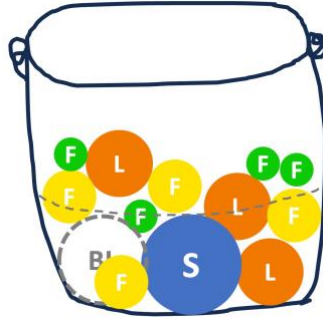
Now, Saturday is my Big Night In because my Friends spend Saturday nights with their Big Loves.

The soloist needs to slide into the spaces in between.

For example, I have a friend (one of my new Cincinnati friends!) whose husband travels once a month. He leaves on Sunday mornings, creating a window of opportunity in her Love Bucket:



When her husband gets on an airplane, she and I go to a Sunday afternoon matinee. I slip into the interstitial space in her Love Bucket



We go to the two o'clock show and get a 'kid's box'—popcorn, a drink, and a little packet of Gummi Care Bears. The first person to arrive gets the box for the other. I love going to the movies with my friend.

Sometimes, I might want to go out on a Saturday night, but that is a night that belongs to Big Loves. Early in my soloist life, I tried to ask friends out for the times I was used to going out. It took me a long time to realize it would be difficult for them to say yes.

Yes, they could (and did) help me if I had an emergency because an emergency is something you can explain to a Big Love. But if you tell a Big Love that you went out with a Friend on Saturday night instead of spending it with them, it tends not to go over so well.

Those of us who live alone must manage our calendars as a reverse image of what they were when we were partnered.

We see friends on weeknights and weekday coffees and the odd parts of weekends. We claim the interstitial spaces.

When our lives change from living with a Big Love to living as a soloist, if we're not careful, weekends can loom large and lonely. Soloists need to give as much thought to how we spend our time with our Self on a Saturday night as we gave to how we spent it with our Big Love previously.

I wrote this on a Saturday, and I was going out that night. There was a benefit for The Mercantile Library, with a guest speaker. It was a good plan. Solid.

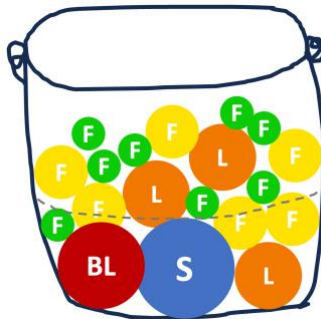
My more typical Saturday night plan is to make myself a nice dinner and read a good book, and this time of year, light candles because it gets dark early and I like them. That's a good plan, too.

As long as I keep my promise to my Self, it's solid.

Conclusion

We are all vulnerable to changes in our Love Bucket.

When life brings a change that lowers our love waterline, the Love Bucket helps us understand the impact of the change. From there, we can figure out how we might refill, so we once again have a marvelously full bucket.



I hope you enjoyed *How's Your Love Bucket?* and that it was helpful. Share this with anyone you wish.

If you'd like to read more of my work, I write weekly reflections on life. They're available for your reading pleasure on my [website or sign up](#) to get them in your inbox.

You can find me on Instagram [@jule.kucera](#). I'd love to connect with you there.

Jule