

Ubuntu: I first met the word in Africa—Botswana, South Africa... I don't remember which—and have been trying to live it since. Related to connection, empathy and humanity, it's impossible to translate into another language, but easier to put into action. It's all about love.

When most of us think “love,” especially around Valentine’s Day, we think of romance. We think of diamonds and chocolate, flowers and cards, gift after beautifully packaged gift, presented alongside a glass of wine during a flawless meal.

But I'd like to petition for hospitality as one of love's greatest gifts. Often, it comes from people we would judge to be poor.

We're quicker to lock doors than to open them to strangers. In country after African country, people told me, “The next time you come here, you don't stay in a hotel. You stay with me.” Contact details were pressed into my hands, invitations repeated, visits

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urged. In a township near Cape Town—a township where access to shelter and clean water were anything but guaranteed—a woman named Anne didn't only give me fresh fried bread; she also taught me to make it. Her recipe, scrawled in the back of a notebook, is still with me. Honoring her gift, I share it whenever I can (check out *KC Magazine's* Facebook page (in Notes) for Anne's special fried bread recipe).

Teresa Brown, who works for Tour d'Afrique (tourdafrique.com), a bicycle-tour group, knows Africa better than most. “Ubuntu—umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu,” she says, “roughly translated from the Zulu, means ‘a person is only a person because of other people.’”

Odds are, we're not going to take up offering bed and board to chance encounters, but we can choose Valentine's gifts that offer as much to the world as to the people we love. Fortunately, Kansas City makes that easy.

Gift your caffeine addict with a pound of coffee from Broadway Roasting (4106 Broadway St.; 4012 Washington St.). Brian Miller and

Jonathan Cates buy organic beans, and Miller honors the farmers by roasting the beans so as to bring out the best in that crop. Or take a day trip Patric Chocolate (6601 Stephens Station Road #109, Columbia, Missouri; patric-chocolate.com) for ethical sweets. Use Patric's chocolate discs to make hot chocolate as a midnight treat. Have dinner at Julian (6227 Brookside Plaza), Bluebird Bistro (1700 Summit St.) or Room 39 (1719 W. 39th St.; 10561 Mission Road, Leawood); all support small, local farms. Or dine at Jasper's (1201 W. 103rd St.), where Chef Jasper Mirabile actively gives back to the community.

Treat your beloved to breakfast. You Say Tomato (2801 Holmes St.) offers the ultimate in country comfort. “Ethically sourced” is high on the menu—and on the gift-shop shelves. Buy Barclay Martin Ensemble's new CD, “Pools That Swell With The Rain” (barclaymartin.com), and give music to your loved ones and water to countries where clean, safe water is anything but assured. Attend Medical Mission's 15th annual Art for the Children Gala on February 12 (mmfworld.org) and bid on art to help provide medical care and art supplies for children globally. Give a gift card saying that you've made a donation in the recipient's name to a local charity that spreads the good: Alliance Against Human Trafficking (kcaaht.org) or Veronica's Voice (veronicasvoice.org). Do laundry for the poor (Laundry Love Just4One.org); it's amazing how a task stops being a chore when it's all about love.

And it just doesn't get more ubuntu than that. ■

