



WHAT'S IN STORE

BY TRISH RILEY



Self-Help Relationship Roundup

Several Valentine's Days ago, in an unceremonious disposal of failed attempts and foul memories, I tossed away a bagful of books that hadn't been a bit of help to me. Such titles as *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (Deborah Tannen, William Morrow, 1990), *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* (John Gray, HarperCollins, 1993), and *Getting the Love You Want* (Harville Hendrix) were about the differences between the genders and the inherent problems in getting along. Without delving too deeply into unprofessional territory, let it suffice that I disclose that I am the anti-expert on love.

But one thing I did learn is that sometimes we accept what we get just because we haven't had the experience to know there's anything better.

Recognizing that I might be at a disadvantage when it came time to impart useful dating skills to my 17-year-old daughter, I turned to more books for advice. I bought her *He's Just Not That Into You* by *Sex in the City* experts Greg Behrendt and Liz Tuccillo. Though a bit racy for mother/daughter discussions, I decided it was more important to try to arm my child with apt advice than to huddle in a closet of embarrassment. I want to do whatever I can to help her find real loving relationships many of us only dream of...unlike the ones I grew up on, reading the bodice rippers my mother traded with her bride partners. Man, have I rued the ideas those silly books planted in my head! White knights, unrequited love and unending passion are the stuff of dreams, it seems, but not of real love lives.

Behrendt and Tuccillo provide markers I wish I'd known that may seem obvious to the experienced or the subjective observer of a love relationship. But when young and new at the game of love, and especially when blinded by those rose-colored shades, it's easy to twist reality and deny defeat. The authors make it clear: If he's not calling, he doesn't want to talk. It's natural to make excuses for disinterested behavior, but it doesn't change the interest level bottom line. Another habit that's easy to fall into that the authors seek to break is the tendency to view flaws as needs for which we have the cure. If he's broken (or broke), we probably *can't* fix him, no matter how many years of effort we expend (i.e. *waste*).

Psychologist John Gottman has created a valuable service for couples and a healthy degree of fame for himself and The Gottman Institute, which he runs with his wife Julie, by establishing, through surveys of marital couples, a reliable set of indicators revealing the happiness quotient and success rates for marriage.

The Institute has published several books, including *The Seven Principles for Making Marriages Work*, and offers a home video course (\$175) for couples who don't have time to read. Among his tips for successful relationships: Turn toward one another for support, focus on the bright side, and edit yourself to avoid causing communication problems.

Self-help author Susan Jeffers, who earned her Ph.D. at Columbia, started her own publishing company to sell her books, which number 17, with millions of copies sold in 35 countries and at all of our favorite mainstream book chains (remember, that's 90 percent in her pocket, not just ten percent!). Her latest, *The Feel the Fear Guide to*



Lasting Love (Jeffers Press, 2005), is built on the premise that we must look to ourselves to find the perfect love life. Jeffers suggests we learn to practice "Higher Self Love" by "picking up the mirror instead of the magnifying glass." In other words, focus on our own flaws instead of someone else's. If you learn to give love, you'll get love, give warmth to get warmth; romance and generosity beget romance and generosity. Stop focusing on the shortcomings of your partner and look for positive aspects of relationships and how changing your own perceptions can really improve the flaws. Sort of the "What the Bleep" approach to love: Choose your own reality. Nutty as it sounds, there's a lot of wisdom in this approach. We really are the architects of our own lives and our thoughts are the building blocks of reality. When we try, we may find it's not so hard to look past a forgotten birthday to see the anniversary surprise. "Your goal," she says, is "maximum caring and minimum need." She advises us to analyze expectations and become unstuck to old habits of thinking. Instead of problem finding and fixing, she's all about a solution orientation from the start.

But as Behrendt and Tuccillo remind us, there is a limit to acceptable negative behavior, and protecting ourselves from ill-fated unions is just good policy. As Jeffers says, "We constantly need to ask ourselves ... why be miserable when we can be happy?"

Peter Post, author of *Essential Manners for Couples: From Snoring and Sex to Finances and Fighting* (Collins 2005), points out that, especially in this out-of-my-way SUV world, the smallest niceties are well worth remembering—including anniversaries, birthdays and anything that incites a smile in your loved ones.

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TRISH RILEY firmly believes that Love is the Answer ... and she loves being an independent journalist. Trish serves as co-chair of the ASJA conference in 2006 and 2007. She'd love to receive your help and input: Trish@TrishRiley.com.

Post's book is a gem of gentlemanly treasures, valuable advice that everyone can benefit from—elements of behavior that we should already know, but many seem to have forgotten.

Should all your good intentions fail, turn to our own Russ Wild and his ex-wife Susan Ellis Wild, an attorney, who share their experiences and savvy advice in *The Unofficial Guide to Getting a Divorce* (Wiley, second edition, 2005). The ex-couple now refer to themselves as co-parents, which perfectly turns the spotlight from their shared troubles to their shared responsibilities. The advice in the book focuses on divorcing with damage control when it comes to kids, and the result is that parents benefit, too, from losing the hostility and taking a practical approach to getting on with our lives instead of letting a failed relationship destroy us or our children.

MEMBER BOOK SIGNINGS & EVENTS

Barbara DeMarco-Barrett 3.25 Panelist, AAUW Literary Luncheon, Laguna Beach "Writers on Writing" interviews, 5 p.m. KUCI-FM: **2.2** Karen Quinn, *The Ivy Chronicles* **3.9** T. Jefferson Parker, *The Fallen* **3.16** Martin Smith, *Los Angeles Times* senior editor www.pennonfire.com

Joan Detz 3.27 The Basics of Writing & Giving A Speech, Embassy Suites, Philadelphia, PA 9:15 a.m. www.joandetz.com

Robin Gorman Newman 2.15 Talk and signing, *How to Marry a Mensch*, Manhasset Public Library, Manhasset, NY 7:30 p.m. **2.18** Talk and signing, Barnes & Noble, Bayside, NY 1:00 p.m.

Members: Send your upcoming appearances and events to newsletter@asja.org

Once you've navigated the thorny path of dissolution, I wouldn't suggest consulting Judith Rossner's *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* (Simon and Schuster, 1975) or Maureen Dowd's current hit *Are Men Necessary?* (Putnam, 2005) as unofficial guides to love. I'd look instead to Tina Tessina's *Unofficial Guide to Dating Again* (Wiley, 2002) for tips on entering back into the realm of discernment and dating decisions.

Jeffers' advice is applicable to finding new love and to polishing existing unions. "Make moving yourself into the arena of the Higher Self, the best of who you are, one of your top priorities. There is no question in my mind that creating a lasting love... a real love... depends on it. By focusing on the bad, we starve... By focusing on the good, we thrive. I suggest you do one little thing in the relationship every day that will make your partner feel good. Moments of love add up to a lifetime of love."

And have a Happy Valentine's Day! [asja](http://asja.org)

Editor's Note: We always review books about writing or for writers. We deviated this month because this was going to be a February, not March, issue, and these books revolved around a St. Valentine's Day theme. Now that the issue is a March issue, it makes less sense—but the review was already written. Confused yet?

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