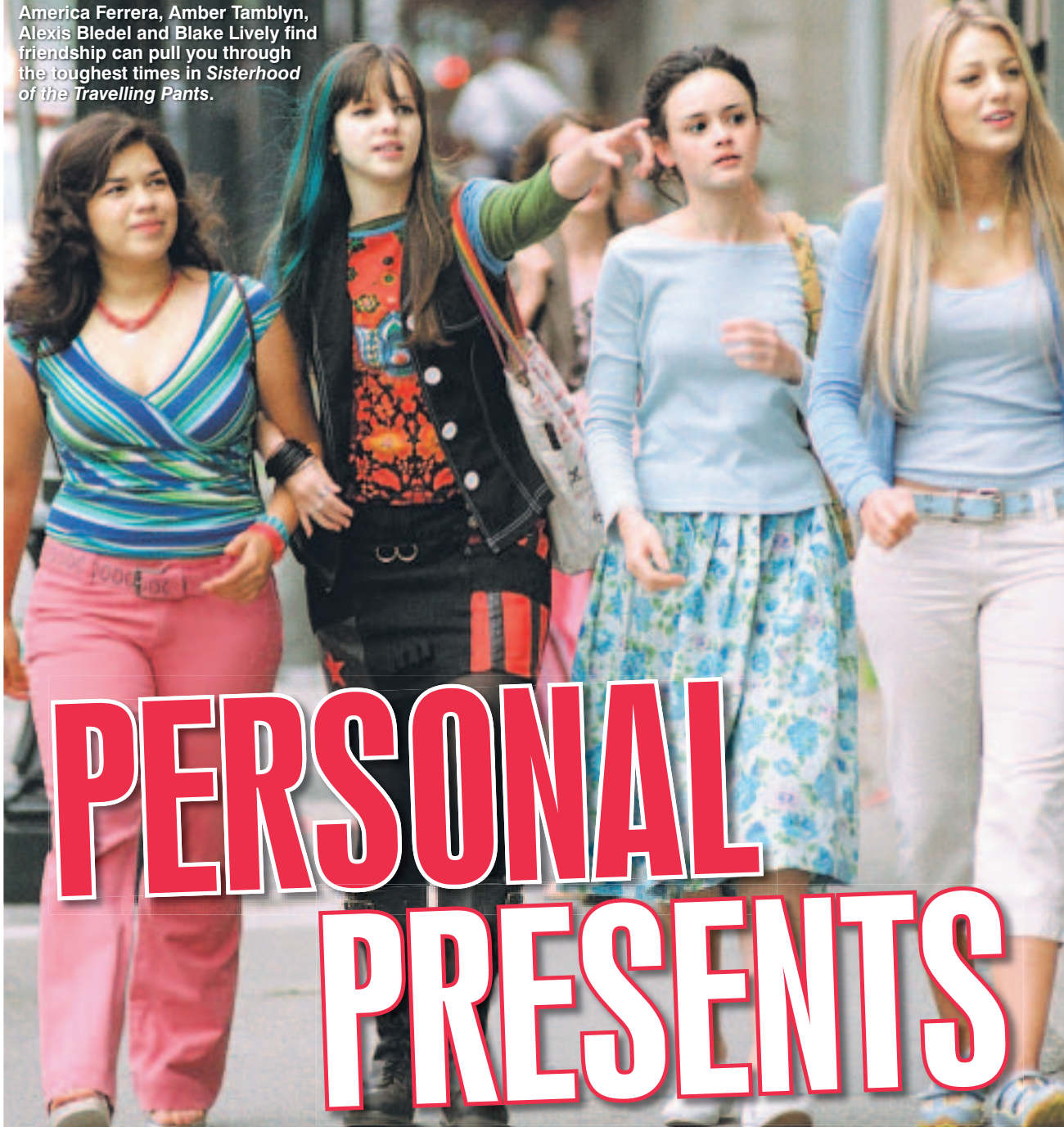


mxFlirt



America Ferrera, Amber Tamblyn, Alexis Bledel and Blake Lively find friendship can pull you through the toughest times in *Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants*.



PERSONAL PRESENTS

Instead of spending every cent on inadequate gifts, **JEFF HERRING** looks at giving more in our relationships this year.

Here we are in the middle of another gift giving season. Instead of giving gifts we think someone wants, or acting thrilled to receive a gift that we loathe, wouldn't it be better to give gifts of more lasting value this year?

THE GIFT OF GRATITUDE

Want a simple, free, surefire way to improve your life? Once a day, slow down long enough to name at least three things for which you are grateful. Gratitude lifts your spirits. Now, more and more research backs that up. As author Andy Andrews says in his book, *The Traveler's Gift* – "The seeds of depression cannot take root in a grateful heart."

THE GIFT OF RECONCILIATION

Life is messy. We are not always right. Add those two ingredients together and you get conflict. Mix in a little pride and you've got a grudge.

Poet Hugh Prather once said, "Friends usually forgive and come back together because people need friends more than pride." Who could you "come back together" with this holiday season?

THE GIFT OF APPRECIATION

Do you know of anyone who does not like to be appreciated? Me neither. Appreciation has a long shelf life, and a little bit can go a long way. At the same time, a lack of appreciation can suck the joy from a person. While both men and women enjoy being appreciated, in my work as a relationship coach I have found that appreciation is a deep emotional need for many.

THE GIFT OF CONNECTION

Do you have friends you do not see or speak with on a regular basis and yet when you do get together, you just

pick up right where you left off? That's the power of connection. We are social creatures and need to feel connected to others. Who do you know who is feeling disconnected and would love to be included?

THE GIFT OF DREAM FULFILLMENT

Billy Joel sings "Everybody has a dream ..." and it is true. What is your dream(s)? Are you living them out? Have you left them behind somewhere? What would you dare to do if you could eliminate fear? What old dreams could you pick up and what new dreams could you begin in the coming year?

THE GIFT OF REST

We live in a culture that no longer values rest. Instead, we value getting more done in less time, and admire people that get little sleep in order to do more. Yet more and more research proves what we have always known – bad things happen when you do not get enough rest. The truth of the matter is you will get your rest one way or another: either you will get

it by choice or you will get it unintentionally – when your body gets sick, therefore making you rest.

THE GIFT OF PRESENCE

When I asked a friend once, "How do you know what to say when you visit someone sick or injured in the hospital?" His answer has stayed with me for years: "It's not so much what you say. Often it is just you being there." Who needs the gift of your presence?

THE GIFT OF THANKING SOMEONE

All of us have had special people touch our lives in a way that has made an impact on us. It is fun to thank someone who has helped us along the way, because the delight in their eyes gives such a kick. Who could go on your gratitude list this year?

THE CHRISTMAS CHALLENGE?

Thank them. Call them, email them, write them, go see them. Make those who matter to you, smile.

■ SOURCE: KRT

HOW WAS IT FOR YOU?

DR BELLA



"Remember the last time someone you really, really liked, came over for the first time."

OK. Champers poured. Fingers to keyboard. Column deadline, imminent.

I have had a rough week. My family disappointed me. My friends, who really are my surrogate family, disappointed me. The party I threw was a disaster of epic proportions and left me with no alcohol in the house. And the men in my life? Don't even get me started. How could he... Anyway. And here I am stuck in my most unflattering state: known as the poor-me-how-could-they-all-be-so-horrid-at-the-same-time syndrome.

Instead of indulging in more public self-pity (you know where to send flowers to), I will write of happier times. I will embrace frivolity.

I ask you dear readers to remember the last time someone you really, really liked, came over for the first time.

Do you remember the anticipation, the knowledge of coming thrill? A sense of internal soaring?

Be warned. Your house reveals a treasure trove of information about you. The books in your shelf. The contents of your fridge. The things hidden in your cupboard. Clues, mate, to the inside of your soul. And so I offer you now advice about presenting the best self you can. Because the beginning stages of courtship, the realm of pre-bootay, is all about seduction and artifice.

And so, she's coming over. Or he's coming over.

What should a man hide?

Some suggestions. Insatiable lust. Athlete foot/cold sore/balding remedy type medicines. Dirty magazines, obviously. Smelly-disgusting man-socks. Pictures of ex-girlfriends. Pizza boxes. *Deep Throat* collection. Overdue bills. Antidepressants. Viagra. Steroids. Skid marks on the toilet. Warrants for your arrest. PlayStation. Condoms. The three dozen

bourbon and cokes in your fridge. Your flat-mate.

Alternatively, what should a woman shrug under the rug before Mr Divine rings the doorbell?

Expectations. *The Rules*, *Women Who Love Too Much*, etc. Moustache bleach, cellulite creams, thrush medication and so on. Ex-boyfriend's T-shirt you still sleep in. Trashy celeb magazines. Vibrator. Valium. Birth control. Psychiatrist appointment card. Collection of diaries.

Now, both boys and girls expecting company should pay attention to:

- Personal hygiene (clean your sheets, your nether regions and the dunny)
- Charm (be interested versus interesting, smell delicious)
- Lighting (avoid 7-Eleven ambience)
- Music (do not play opposite sex bashing songs, e.g. Ben Folds Five: "Give me my money back, you bitch, and don't forget to give me back my black T-shirt" and girls steer clear of Miss Morissette)
- Red flags (any evidence they are a drunk, drug fiend, liar, stalker, gold digger or general psycho)
- Secure privacy (the flat-mate has to go, as do your mates teetering up to your doorstep in the wee hours)
- Contraception (use some).

A few other miscellaneous tid bits:

- Only have books around that you've read (and understood).
- Gentlemen, pictures of nieces and nephews work a charm versus, for example, a framed picture of your mother staring at us while we slip under the doona.
- So not a turn on. Trust me.
- Remember, fumbles and awkwardness and sexual tension can be absolutely charming.
- Best of luck in love.

BTW

Questions, thoughts, sexual tips?
Email me at dearbella@mxnet.com.au
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