

LOVE, AT LAST!



The good news about

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hen I was growing up there was no more terrible specter than that of being unmarried and "set in your ways." Being young was important if you wanted to get married, it seemed—as much for the suppleness of your mind as your flesh. The idea was that if you didn't couple at an early age, you would turn into some rigid, schoolmarmish spinster, unable to adjust to another's needs and habits. This was not a particularly reassuring image, since in the years right after college I found myself becoming more and more entrenched in my work and my life alone.

Choosing to follow my own pursuits was a choice that made my parents very unhappy, and my grandparents too. It actually made the mother of my best friend so nervous and fearful of my influence on her daughter that she did everything she could to discourage our friendship—something my friend only reported to me fifteen years after the fact.

I was worried too. Did the fact that I

didn't make finding a man my top priority mean that there was something wrong with me? I hoped not. I thought I would probably want to get married someday—not right away certainly, but someday. But by taking my own sweet time about it, might I not be cutting my chances down to zilch? Again, I hoped not, but I wasn't so sure.

I reminded myself that my mother had gotten married when she was only twenty-one, and she had never adjusted—still—to the fact that my father liked the heat turned up to seventy-two. I reminded myself that lots of women—famous, achieving ones, too—had married late in life. For instance, Beatrix Potter, the creator of Peter Rabbit, married at forty-seven. Nancy Kissinger bagged Henry at forty-two. Still, I worried.

As far as I can tell, a lot of other women are worrying as well. Even now, in the multi-option eighties, the specter of ossified spinsterhood persists.

A twenty-six-year-old illustrator, for instance, tells me that on her birthday she received a call from her mother reminding her that, "When I was twenty-six, I'd already had you!" The daughter, an ambitious, highly organized woman, says she can resist this kind of pressure, but "there's still the fear that when somebody does come along, he won't fit into my schedule." She and many of her friends worry that



mating later, rather than sooner

they can't, as they once thought they could, have it all.

Maybe they can't. But if they can't, it won't be because they'll get set in their ways. That's hokey! I've learned that people don't so much get set in their ways, as find them. And once they do that, they have a lot to share with somebody else. I didn't meet my partner until I was a dozen years out of college—so I speak from experience.

Not that it wasn't something of a shock to my system, having lived those years as a self-supporting, very single woman, to suddenly find myself trying to make a go of it with someone as a couple. After all, I had spent a lot of time doing pretty much as I liked. While many of the women I'd gone to school with were getting up at night to feed their infants, I was getting up to read, or to watch a particularly beloved old movie on television. While other women were learning to cook the food their husbands and children liked, I ate chocolate for breakfast if I felt like it. Instead of buying blenders and expensive sets of cookware, I spent the money on dinners out with friends. Instead of buying sofas, I used the one in my therapist's office, in the process of finding out why, among other things, I wasn't ready or willing to admit another person into my life on a full-time basis.

And then I met him. Suddenly,

instead of moving along in the free-wheeling stride that had marked my single years, I had to constantly adjust my gait so that it was more or less in sync with somebody else's—with his. I didn't always make these adjustments without discomfort. Nor did he. But we knew that if we weren't willing to make them, the chances were very good that, whether he'd outdistance me or I'd outdistance him, we'd never keep pace with each other.

I'm not going to say there aren't any problems trying to share one's life with somebody else after years without experience of real intimacy. Successful sharing involves the modification of one's more quirky behavior, which some of us whose behavior falls into the upper echelons of quirky tend to resent. It means having a civilized cup of coffee for breakfast instead of a Nestle's Crunch, and having to tiptoe into the living room at four o'clock in the morning if you want to watch Greta Garbo.

On the next level, suddenly sharing your life after years alone means overcoming the untried fear that there are certain things about you—the shape of your behind, maybe, or the way you unconsciously pick at your feet as you watch television—that only a mother could love, and that a man will find unacceptable. It means facing differences of taste and style and habit when you've pretty much gotten used to having things your own way: He likes a roomful of antiques and you're a minimalist; he goes to sleep during the eleven o'clock news, while you're scanning the late-night-movie listings; he cuts his onions on a cutting board, you cut yours on a paper bag.

It means trying to coordinate all your personal and business relationships

with all of his—unlike couples who start off early enough to build a network of friends and associates together. It means rearranging your daily priorities—schedules that have by this time become second nature—because now there are more plants to water and dinner for two to be planned, bought and fixed—not because it is your duty, but because now there is a reason for doing it. Now you live with someone.

Furthermore, sharing your life with someone means overcoming whatever experiences you've had that may have left you skittish about intimacy—and the more life you've lived, the more experiences you're likely to have had. For me, who had been wounded by love in the past, it meant overcoming a fear of the paralyzing pain that wound had caused me. For my lover, recently separated, about to be divorced when we met, there were two handicaps to intimacy: an unhappy marital experience and a new-found freedom. He was wary about giving up the pleasures of the latter for the dubious fruits of the former.

All these differences and drawbacks, however, are negotiable—more negotiable, I believe, at an advanced age than at a younger one. That's the good news about loving a little later on. Youth may be malleable, but it isn't often very tolerant. When I was twenty-one, there could be no smudges on the armor of my white knights. From a more advanced perspective, I find life's smudges more tolerable, and even interesting.

Even being set in some ways is not necessarily a (Continued on page 317)

by Bette-Jane Raphael

BINGING AND PURGING

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women who have overcome eating problems; they share invaluable insights and offer suggestions stemming from their own experiences. Women who are interested in joining a self-help group—or in forming one—should contact the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, Box 271, Highland Park IL 60035. (TEL. (312) 831-3438). ANAD will provide advice and a listing of aid organizations in various areas of the country.

There are other self-help possibilities: Overeaters Anonymous, women's consciousness-raising groups and assertiveness-training can help if a woman is already motivated to change her eating behavior, although they aren't substitutes for a well-conceived therapy program. Internists, endocrinologists or nutritional counselors can assess current health status, discuss ways of combating physiological damage and offer preventive strategies.

Any woman who seeks therapy should ask questions about the approach and philosophy of the therapist's treatment at an initial exploratory session. Will the therapy focus on the present habits, with strategies for eliminating the binge/purge behavior, or will it concentrate on past, underlying conflicts? Does the therapist advocate long- or short-term treatment? Will the sessions be individual or group? Has the therapist been successful in treating bulimarexia? Once therapy is underway, you should see progress in several weeks. If not, both you and the therapist should re-examine goals in order to establish the most effective strategies or to decide whether you should continue.

We will be happy to help you find a knowledgeable and reputable therapist. Write to us at 67 W. Malloryville Rd., Freeville NY 13068 and enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope. We will answer all inquiries and send a reading list about bulimarexia.

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disadvantage. Being so makes you quite sure of who you are. Living alone, you don't have to give up or ignore any part of yourself in the service of others; you have the time and the energy to define yourself and your priorities. I worked hard at doing that, at finding out not only who I was, but with whom I wanted to share my life. And that enabled me to know what my mother used to call "the real thing" when it came along.

It seems to me that over the years it's taken me a shorter and shorter time to fall in love. When I was twenty, it took an entire fall, winter and spring before I knew I loved a man; when I was twenty-six, it took less than a month; and when I saw my lover across the lawn at a summer cocktail party five years ago, it took only that one glance. As we mature, we store bits and pieces of information in our internal data banks, and those little psychic computers can sort things for us and give us the emotional equivalent of printouts. The more information we feed them on various topics throughout the years, the faster

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and more precise the printouts on any particular subject.

By five summers ago, I had a very full data bank where men were concerned, a lot of information about what I did and didn't want in a lover. (All those losers you go out with over the years do serve a purpose!) My partner, too, was more aware of his needs and preferences than he had been, say, ten years before. And if, like me, he was somewhat set in his ways, he was also set in those needs and preferences.

I think these circumstances have been a plus for us, and even lessened our chances of growing apart. Our careers established and advancing, our habits and the limits of our elasticity fixed, our interests formed but not frozen, we may not surprise each other so much in the future, but we probably won't dismay each other too much either. I knew what I was getting, the good and the bad of it. So did he.

Our expectations of one another were realistic—more realistic, I believe, than those of my contemporaries who married right out of college. By the time we met, my lover and I had been shorn of our haze of overblown, youthful optimism, disabused of the all-encompassing belief that "everything will work out fine." We had, instead, the tools to work it out—tools that had been painfully acquired through experience and real effort—plus the understanding that most of life's worthwhile endeavors require work in order to flourish. It doesn't surprise us now when we find we have to do that work.

Neither does it surprise a long-single friend of mine who got married for the first time last year at the age of thirty-five. "The crises of a relationship don't throw me anymore," she says, "because I've been through them all one way or another before. I'm not surprised when John and I have a tough time of it for some reason. I don't automatically think we're wrong for each other, or that it's the end of the relationship. I realize now that it's bound to happen, and that we just have to work things through."

Another thirty-six-year-old friend, a woman who got married, also for the first time, two years ago, told me: "Having had the time for self-exploration, I feel more able than I did when I was younger to give myself up to our relationship, because now I'm not afraid that I'll drown in it, that I'll lose myself in him."

I share this sense of confidence with my friend, and it's a belief that gives me faith in my and my lover's chance of making a long life together. My confidence is further enhanced by the knowledge that I don't feel shortchanged because of what I inevitably have to give up in order to share my life with someone else: some of the liberty, some of the autonomy, some of the privacy and selfishness. I've lived through the "me generation" and come out the other side with something of a taste for we. I've come to see that life is always a bit of a trade-off, and that often the trick is knowing what you want, and what you're willing to give up in order to get it.

Of course, there are certain difficulties that have particular relevance to a couple's comparatively advanced maturity. For one thirty-four-year-old friend, it's the question of chil-

dren, and the pressure that comes from knowing that she and her lover have less time than most couples to answer it, since biological clocks run even faster than digitals.

For me, it's the problem of sharing, a principle that I confess I'm not always able to grasp without a struggle. Accustomed to owning everything around me—my rugs, my magazines (to cut up as I wish), my Scotch tape (to run out of as I wish)—I am not always sure what "our" means. If something is ours, then is it not *mine*? And if it is part mine, then how much? Half? What good is half a chair? The evening we united our two record collections in strict alphabetical wedlock I ate an entire quart of ice cream.

And, accustomed to being independent for so long, I have a real problem with what I see as the dangers of dependency. I'm afraid of being betrayed by that part of me that wants to be taken care of totally, that fragment of myself that wants to be a child again and say goodbye to responsibility. Although my lover is comfortable with my independence and values the fact that he's not burdened with the maintenance of my life, I worry that his power and competence will combine with my latent willingness to be taken care of, so that someday I will simply slip peacefully back into childhood.

The flip side of this fear, and the good news, is that somewhere at my core I know that I can survive on my own if I have to. This makes me less fearful about my fate should my partner and I not make it into old age (or even our forties) together. I'm more confident now than I was when I lived alone and worried whether something was wrong with me because I didn't want—not just yet—to share my life with another person. I trust myself more now than when I wondered whether I'd ever find anyone to love who would love me back. I trust myself more because I realize I haven't done so badly for myself by following my own dictates.

I think it's important to listen to our own internal clocks when it comes to deciding what we want to do with our lives, and when. It's vital that we respect our own timetables and inner seasons in determining something as consequential as whether or not we're ready for intimacy. We've got to do this even when we're scared of being out of step with the rest of the world, even when we're scared of getting set in our ways. When we respond honestly to the signals that come from the inside out instead of the other way around, the chances are very good that we'll keep growing throughout our lives, and only get set in order to go.

Bette-Jane Raphael writes Glamour's "Can This Be Love" column.

PRIVATE TIME

Afghan Directions, page 48

Fluffy and Aloha Afghan

SIZE: Approx. 44" x 60"

MATERIALS: Unger's Fluffy, 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ oz. ball—15 balls of Camel (A). Unger's Aloha, 1 $\frac{6}{10}$ oz. ball—4 balls Brown/Rust. Size K aluminum afghan hook, OR SIZE TO OBTAIN GIVEN GAUGE. Sizes G and I aluminum crochet hooks.