

A Secret to Lasting Love

By Deborah Kevin

When I was in fifth grade, my class performed songs from "Fiddler on the Roof" in our school's spring concert. "*Matchmaker, matchmaker/Make me a match/Find me a find/Catch me a catch.*" Looking back, perhaps consulting a matchmaker might not have been a bad idea considering I have been in relationships with a narcissist, a psychopath and someone emotionally unavailable.

Let's not ignore the common denominator in all three relationships: me. They may have chosen me, but I also chose them. To be fair, I had my reasons at the time. For example, after been with a narcissist it was quite appealing to find a charming, glib psychopath who lavished affection upon me.

In order to recover from those two relationships, I worked with a therapist. That's how I first came up with what I call "The List," an inventory of attributes I wanted in a potential partner. My reasoning? Successful matchmakers work from lists. As a result, they're more logical than emotional - and more likely to match a match!

I intentionally made my list brief - focusing on a few key attributes - figuring the rest would fall into place. I wanted someone who didn't cheat, was debt-free, met me where I was financially, had kids, and liked to travel.

Happily, The List worked! A few weeks after my fortieth birthday, I met a man who met all the attributes on my list. We dated for five years. Then we got married.

The problem? Our relationship wasn't easy or enjoyable, except when we traveled. We had opposite values. We differed on our views about family and the importance of growth. Plus, all laughing and silliness came to a screeching halt.

I wondered why our marriage didn't work - and began reading books. One of them was Karen Salmansohn's "Prince Harming Syndrome." In this book, she explained how a relationship needs to be both a den of pleasure and a laboratory for growth. Meaning? In order for relationships to survive and thrive, foundational elements like safety, respect, laughter and growth must be

in place. Karen shared a "Humongous Warning" about a partner not willing to grow likely not being around for the inevitable yucky stuff. These words hit me hard. In my marriage, I'd had to rely on friends to be there for surgeries, support while raising a son on the autism spectrum and when, two states away, my father had a stroke and spent two months in a coma. My husband wasn't showing up when things got difficult.

These disappointments brought out my worst self, and I became overly critical. Our relationship began the downward spiral John Gottman would have predicted.

As we unwind our seven-year marriage, I go forward with a grateful heart for what I've learned and continue to learn. Rather than looking at him and saying, "He let me down," I'm asking questions like, "Why do I allow people to treat me the way I do?" and "What can I learn from this relationship?" and "How can I handle conflict better?"

At the end of the day, the work I do now, asking and answering tough questions, will lead me to becoming my best self. I feel as though my better days are ahead. *"Matchmaker, Matchmaker/Plan me no plans/I'm in no rush/Maybe I've learned/Playing with matches/A girl can get burned."*

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