

Preface

I was thumbing through *The Good Life*, a magazine about living an active and engaged life filled with enthusiasm, when I learned of the opportunity to write a monthly column about love, sex and romantic relationships. Years earlier, a literary agent had tried to coax me into writing autobiographically about being young, single and in the publishing world of New York City. At the time, long before *Sex in the City* was a television hit, I couldn't imagine doing anything so revealing about my personal life and feelings. I had dated scores of men and slept with a great number of them. Some of these relationships were deeply passionate, erotically compelling and unforgettably romantic. Too many, however, had been with men who on some level were unavailable, and my heart had been broken repeatedly.

Yet, after living in Austin, Texas, and being happily married for a decade, I knew in my heart that I could now write about how to be in a successful relationship and the intimate experiences of love.

I had writing samples from my earlier life as a magazine writer and editor, before I moved from working in print to early online media. My interview with editor Ken Martin went

well and he selected me to take over the ongoing “Intimacies” column that had been published for more than four years.

Actually, I got more than I bargained for. When I applied, I hadn’t realized that the job entailed more than taking over the column. It also required hosting an ongoing monthly public meeting that the magazine sponsored at BookPeople, the state’s leading independent bookstore (named by *Publisher’s Weekly* as Bookstore of the Year in 2005). The purpose of the group was to build community by bringing readers together to talk about “Intimacies” face-to-face. The Intimacies Conversation Group, which was promoted by both the magazine and the bookstore, usually attracted between twenty and forty people, singles and couples, first-timers and returnees, with a fairly even mix of men and women, ages eighteen to eighty. For each meeting, I would plan a topic and invite a special guest—such as a psychologist, marriage counselor or certified sex therapist—to lend expertise.

People came to ask questions, share advice and stories, and exchange laughter. For many of us, it provided a rare opportunity to talk honestly and openly with our peers about adult topics that are important.

Attendance was and still is free; audience members are asked only to come with an open mind and a sense of humor. While these meetings continue to occur in Austin, Texas, with the publication of this book and advances in Internet technology, you can now participate from wherever you are in similar discussions of love, sex and romance. Go online to www.TrueIntimacies.com and learn how.

What intrigued me about writing the column and hosting

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the group was having a platform and an excuse to address private behavior directly and openly. The keys I had been given opened doors to experiences I never would have imagined as hundreds, if not thousands, of people have shared their intimate secrets in these meetings and interviews for my columns.

Our romantic lives are normally kept so discreet that we rarely have a chance to talk about them with anyone besides our lovers—and some don't even do that. Instead, we operate in a vacuum.

There are many reasons for keeping our private lives private. It's not wise to kiss and tell. And extra-marital affairs or romantic liaisons in the workplace only invite trouble. Even within the context of a monogamous relationship, societal taboos and a sense of propriety about sexuality may prevent us from talking openly. Somehow, we assume we should have all our romantic affairs under control. Our ego wants us to give the impression that we know everything we need to about love.

Everyone wants love, yet it is challenging to be in a loving relationship, and people ought to be able to learn from one another about what works for some and what doesn't. That's the wisdom we share in the Intimacies Conversation Group meetings and that's what I'm sharing with you in this book.

Understanding emotions and managing feelings are the great challenges in life. I sought congruence between my inner world and the world in which I lived. I recall many family conversations in which I felt short-changed by superficiality. Rather than gabbing about inconsequential material matters, I longed for meaningful conversation about personal concerns.

I have become an advocate for giving voice to what needs to be said, even if it breaks a taboo or two. Talking and writing

about the secrets of love, sex and romance is good for everyone. Sexuality is about expression and connection. Every facet of our lives is affected by our intimate behavior. Reducing stress, increasing vitality, being open to spirituality and having a positive outlook on life are benefits that come from sharing romance and enjoying sex, love's physical manifestation. Sex and romance are essential to our well-being and when these elements are missing our lives feel incomplete, wounded. At such times, we may want to pull back and avoid touching our particularly tender spots. But I believe that, with the right attitude, exploring those vulnerable spots is how we can best experience tenderness and enjoy our sensitivity.

Having this beat to cover gave me the unique opportunity to ask a lot of people, "So, how's your love life going?"

I am grateful to everyone who opened their lives and shared their experiences in relationship and the lessons they learned.

This book includes dozens of selected columns that I wrote between 2002 and 2007. These include personal essays, how-to advice, reports on trends, explorations of human behavior, and the accounts of many people who shared their real stories of love, sex and romance.

Each article is categorized by the subject matter it contains (love and romance, sex and sexuality, commitment, and money) and for whom it may be relevant (singles and couples).

It is my hope that men and women who are in special relationships with their lovers, as well as everyone else who wishes they had love in their lives, will use these stories as catalysts to spark conversation and experimentation. Take them to bed with you. Have fun.