

Crow's Caws: On Being Single

When Euan told me the theme of this month's paper was love and sex, I groaned (not the orgasmic variety). Damn! Now I have to publicly come to terms with my singleness. Frankly, I don't always negotiate my singletude all that well inside. By now I have enough of a support system so that my outsides look pretty good, but it doesn't take much for me to slip into nobody-loves-me-because-I-don't-have-a-girl-friend syndrome, especially on holidays and Saturday nights.

God help me if I don't have plans for Saturday night. Primitive, I know. A holdover from my 1950s coming of age where one had to be "popular" or die as opposed to the '60s where it was more fashionable to die defiant than fit into the dominant culture.

What I've concluded over the years is that feeling lonely, empty or unloved doesn't have a damn thing to do with whether I'm hooked up or not. That's the hardest lesson for me

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to learn. It's so easy to fall into delusional fantasies that any couple I see is automatically having a better day than I am. That's what's known as self-pity, folks.

I'm lucky enough to have several intimate conversations a week with friends who are coupled and on any given day are feeling anxious, sad, scared or pissed the same as me. It's great to have that kind of reality check in my life. It helps me to feel less isolated.

I've always wanted to do a spot check survey on Church St. some day. I'd walk around with a little clipboard

and say, "Excuse me Ma'am or Sir. You look terrific, but could you tell me how you *really* feel right this moment? I know looks can be deceiving. I'm interested in what you're saying to yourself. Are you furious at your kids? Worried about your cash flow? Anxious that you don't have a date for Saturday night? Trying to shop away the blues because your marriage is falling apart? Or are you genuinely in love and buying into the insanity that this euphoria will last forever? By any slim chance are you spiritually fit and living in the moment?"

I want to make it abundantly clear that I believe finding a soul mate is one of humanity's greatest gifts. I used to believe in non-monogamy as a politic - "Down with the patriarchal institution of ownership of women, up with free love!" and all that. But partly multiple relationships for me were an unconscious defense. I figured it was better not put all my romantic eggs in one basket because I was afraid to really trust anyone in our fickle community. Underneath, I didn't trust myself. Of course, clinging to non-monogamy for salvation didn't help in the trust department so I created a vicious circle for myself.

Several years ago I decided to switch back to monogamy when I realized I was ripping myself off from some of my deepest needs for intimacy and commitment. Believe it or not, I have a positive model in my own family for that kind of devotion which is both a curse and a blessing. I get jealous of their good fortune (which I hate about myself) but their relationship gives me hope that some day my ship can come chugging into port. A few years ago I actually did get a taste of

the kind of partnership I had been searching for, but alas! It was not meant to be. Broke my heart, but that's the risk you take, isn't it? Luckily, the experience didn't embitter me. If anything, it proved to me that "marriage" works for me, and I don't regret having had the opportunity to love someone deeply the best I knew how at the time.

And then there's the freedom aspect of being single which is often a luxury. I can eat, sleep, vacation, spend my money or decorate my house anyway I want. When my head is in the right place, life is full of possibility. Most significantly, when I'm single I have the opportunity to develop an intimate relationship with my spirituality, because generally there are fewer distractions. I'm not tempted to demand that another human being fulfill my every desire. There's a tremendous amount of responsibility that comes with all that freedom. I have to structure my free time and avoid self-destructive behavior without someone nagging me. I also have to convince myself that I'm good enough without relying on an automatic fan club who lives under the same roof.

I've noticed that two of the most valued byproducts of being single are the realizations that friends are sacred and that solitude is precious. Without deep connections with friends, I would shrivel up for sure. And without those intimate moments out in the woods alone where I allow myself to be embraced by the natural world, I would lose touch with the source of my being.

What works for me these days is simply to accept what is. I am single at 59 because I have something I need to learn about being responsible

for my own happiness and not always getting what I want or even think I need. I, for one, am not willing to deliberately search for a partner. At this point it feels saner for me to continue to cultivate my friendships, pursue my interests, and generally learn to be grateful for what I have rather than what I lack.

That doesn't mean that on some days I'm not plagued by wondering if whoever happens to be crossing my path is the BIG ONE at last. All I can do when I'm in that headset is notice that I'm in touch with my deep longing for a partner, and that's OK. Then I pray for patience and do my level best not to act impulsively because frankly, I'm not willing to risk losing my serenity over some toss in the hay.

My most effective antidote to the demon of loneliness is to trust that I have no idea what the universe has in store for me and to be openhearted enough to recognize a gift when it (or she) is presented to me. Meanwhile, my job is to love my life exactly as it is. At least I'm able to write this article, which is a good sign. I probably couldn't pull it off if I weren't at peace about being single ... today. ▼

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