

WHEN DATING AGAIN FEELS SCARY

From Fearful to Courageous

A guidebook from one who has been there.



MARLYS JOHNSON LAWRY
SMART LIVING IN SMALL BITES

To read more, the entire book is available on Amazon.

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Address: P. O. Box 247

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Email: info@thegritandgraceproject.org

Web Address: www.gritandgracelife.com

Author: Marlys Johnson Lawry

Editor: Ashley Johnson

Special Projects Manager: Allison McCormick

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DEAR READER

Perhaps you were once a brave girl, but too much time has passed. And now, retreating to the couch as a single woman has become quite comfortable—whether you’re widowed, divorced, or never married. Because here on the couch, you’re safe from men who might be waving red flags. And you can’t be rejected because you’re not putting yourself out there.

I’ve been in that comfortable, nonthreatening place. But I took a risk and got up. And got out. Which was scary at first. And here’s what I discovered: You can open your heart to find new adventures and new possibilities and new love.

If you sense a desire in your soul to connect with a good man in mutual love and service, then you’re not too old and you haven’t missed your window of opportunity. As you read about the path I took, I hope it gives you courage to face down your fears and find your own path. I have confidence that you can be that brave girl again.

Marlys



MY STORY

It's not that I was shopping for a man. But I had a list. There was a time when I was sure I'd never remarry. But three years into widowhood, a desire for male companionship sprouted up—someone to hike with and share conversation with over Chai lattes. Someone to cook for. Someone who would fly a kite with me. I can do this, I thought. If the right man—you know, the one riding the white horse—gallops across my path, I can do this.

My adult children gave their blessing to the idea of dating and remarrying, with this one stipulation from my son: “As long as he has a yacht.”

Being an obsessive drafter of lists, I recorded several qualities that were important to me in someone I dated. “Owning a yacht” was not on my list.

This man must be a follower of Jesus Christ. Someone who was going about the business of making life better for others. A good listener and communicator. A family man. Someone who enjoyed outdoor activities as much as I did—camping, hiking, snowshoeing, kayaking.

The last item on my list was “cancer widower.” This wasn’t a deal-breaker. But how valuable would it be, I thought, to connect with

someone who had walked my path as a cancer caregiver to a spouse, having watched his beloved slip away a little more with each passing day?

Although I wasn't actively shopping, I was open to having a good man find me. I wanted to keep company with someone making a difference in the world. "You shouldn't limit God with a list," a close friend cautioned. "You might miss some really great opportunities." Because I valued her input, I filed the list.

In time, a roller coaster came to a stop in front of me. With a great deal of trepidation, I boarded the car marked "Dating Again." That terrifying carnival ride took me up and down and all around in loop de loops of fun, frustration, and deep disappointment.

One man ghosted me after a handful of enjoyable, outdoorsy dates. We first met over coffee, and then did a bit of hiking, nature sight seeing, and poking around on Jeep trails. He seemed like a very kind man, and he enjoyed his kids and grandkids. Two things in his favor, right there.

I saw him last at a family-friendly party where he said he'd like to see me again soon. I texted him the next morning to let him know that I'd be leaving town in a week and a half. "It would be fun to connect with you before I go."

And then I heard nothing for ten days. Ghosted. *Seriously?! Are we still in high school?* I thought, exasperated.

On the day I was scheduled to leave, I got a text message from this man—the kind you would send to your great-aunt: “So sorry we weren’t able to get together. God bless you.”

I know a rejection message when I see one. And rejection is always painful.

The incident caused me to draw in a little bit. And so, I laid a foundation around my heart for a possible future brick wall. I didn’t start bricklaying just yet because ... you know ... the dude on the white horse might gallop by.

Another man waved multiple red flags that I excused because, after all, I can change him, right?

“What do you do to your hair?” he asked. My red hair had faded to a nice shade of strawberry blonde through the years and now a strip of white framed my face. “I know that women in this outdoorsy community like to let their hair go white, but I hope you won’t,” said the man with the white hair.

That same day he asked, “Do you like to dress up or wear makeup?” *Um, you just took me to a movie and not Carnegie Hall.* I’m wearing a cute sweater, my favorite jeans, dressy boots, and makeup, thank you.

Apparently, this man wanted me to change my outward appearance. It was a red flag. But I didn’t recognize it as such.

The rest of the author's story has been intentionally removed. To read more, the entire book is available on Amazon.

YOUR STORY

There are so many scary possibilities that come with opening our hearts to new love. Some risks can lead to a meaningful life, and some can end up rather badly. There are no guarantees. In her book, *Be the Gift*, author Ann Voskamp wrote, “Everything never made, never dreamed, never risked, never tried was because of a fear of brokenness. If there was too high a chance that the dream, the hope, the plan might break, maybe it was just a failure I couldn’t risk.”

Do you have a dream, a hope, a plan when it comes to dating and remarrying? Where are you on the journey of opening your heart? What's your story?

PROBLEMS TO FACE

It can be frightening to bare your heart to new love and new purpose later in life. If you're like me, you may have become comfortable with single life where you can pick up and go on a whim, stay in your pajamas all day if you so choose, and have popcorn for dinner as many nights in a row as you want.

But worthwhile things in life require taking a risk, which requires courage. Jim McMahon, a former NFL quarterback, said, "Yes, risk-taking is inherently failure prone. Otherwise, it would be called 'sure-thing-taking.'" New possibilities are never a sure thing.

Over the next few pages are struggles I faced on my way toward a new and unexpected chapter in my story. After each problem I examine, there will be space for you to record any personal reflections you have that feel similar or different. In addition, feel free to explore any emotions, reactions, questions, or circumstances you are facing that I did not address.

Self-Preservation

“My heart is bruised,” I wrote in my journal. A man had just called to break off our growing relationship. “My heart isn’t broken, because I wasn’t in love with him,” I continued writing. “But it’s bruised. And so, I’ve wrapped caution a little tighter around me.”

Then and there, I decided to never date again. It was a self-preservation stance that I didn’t recognize at the time. I thought I was simply taking a step back from the potential of being hurt. I mean, that’s smart, right?

Maybe you went on that one date ... you know, the one where your friend said, “It’s just coffee. Go out with him.” And it was fun—coffee and conversation with a nice guy. But then you didn’t hear from him again. Which pained your heart. And now you’ve decided the pain isn’t worth it.

It’s human nature to want to protect ourselves from hurt and failure. And so, we slather on more mortar and lay more bricks, taking our walls higher. Because it’s what we do, this brick-stacking thing that we think will protect us from further pain.

What is your first response to the hurt of being snubbed? Do you step into self-preservation mode by building walls and shutting down your heart? Why or why not?

The rest of the problems faced and the steps taken have been intentionally removed. To read more, [the entire book is available on Amazon.](#)

ARE YOU TERRIFIED TO SAY “YES” AGAIN TO DATING?

Are you terrified of hopping back onto the emotional roller coaster called dating? Perhaps the thought of creating a dating app profile or saying yes to that blind date has you frozen in place. Do you wish you could talk to someone who’s been there and can offer wisdom that moves you from a place of fear to courage?

In this book, you will find that woman.

- *Read her story—a story like yours.*
- *Discover the problems she faced and the steps she took.*
- *Find courage through her confidence and hope.*
- *Pen your own story and struggles on the pages provided.*
- *Take comfort in realizing you don’t have to walk alone.*

Dating can feel like a battle zone, replete with red-flag men and potential rejection that send us retreating to safety—or avoiding romantic encounters altogether. If you find yourself toeing the line of dating again due to the passage of time, divorce, or a fractured relationship, the prospect can feel especially intimidating.

In *When Dating Again Feels Scary*, author Marlys Jonhson Lawry details her own foray into dating three years after the loss of her husband. Desiring male companionship, Marlys had to confront the same challenges that may be holding you back from dating: self-preservation, rejection, and anxiety. In this book, you’ll learn how to reinforce your self-worth to push your fears aside and confidently step back into the world of dating—and the exhilarating possibility of a lifetime love.



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Another guidebook in the Smart Living in Small Bites Series.