

# *Romance Stew*

*The Way  
to a Woman's Heart*



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*Becky Ruff*



**A Dandelion Books Publication**

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**Tempe, Arizona**

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## *Preface*

My personal search for meaningful relationships began with the quest for romance. Romance implied closeness or sharing, as well as intimacy. This closeness as in “true friendship” seemed to have priority over all other values when seeking the right romantic short- or long-term encounters.

In the right climate and under the right circumstances, we humans seem to have an instinctive generosity of spirit and willingness to share ourselves with others. It is a well-known spiritual and natural truth that when we reach out to others, we expand our own horizons and start living on a much grander scale.

My own family is an example of such loving and sharing. I feel blessed to have two daughters who are strong, independent, generous, compassionate, and intelligent. My brother is another example of a person who demonstrates integrity and honor in his interaction with others. My parents, now deceased, added to my personal growth by teaching me about making responsible choices – perhaps as much from the downward spiral of violent alcoholism as from their intrinsic values exhibited in sober times. They also imparted their wisdom concerning loyalty, faith and other virtues aligned with what I like to call universal or spiritual laws. These laws are the basis for world religions yet transcend any particular doctrine or creed.

Like almost all families, we have seen the best and the worst of times. It seems to be part of our life

journey; how else could we learn except by inviting experiences into our lives that require choices? Trial and error is our best teacher! When success is measured not by the dollar sign but by personal achievements that include overcoming obstacles, our family could certainly stand tall. By the same token, we've also made grave errors in judgment that led to temporary chaos and despair. Yet through it all, we managed to stay focused on positive, clearly defined goals. Also inherent in the fabric of our family spirit was a sense of optimism.

Although self-help and inspirational material on relationships are readily available in every possible media format – books, CDs, DVDs, seminars, etc., and there's no shortage of life coaches and seminar trainers, for the most part I've discovered these programs disconcerting. I suspect their popularity is the ease with which they give us the illusion that we have already achieved those lofty goals ourselves, when in fact we are only vicariously experiencing the success of others. We Americans are all too willing to let someone else do the work for us.

That is why I decided to write this book. It has been my personal experience – and what better teacher can there be but the bruises and scratches from our own life's catwalk – that whatever our needs, whatever our desires – regardless of how much wisdom we've culled from others – **ultimately we have to do that work ourselves, our way!**

Each of us is unique; our lives are unique. We can read and listen to and attend seminars all our lives and



still never make those important changes unless we customize the program for ourselves, and then *act on our intentions*. We also need to find a path of service that suits our own calling and connection to the God Source.

In the large variety of life experiences, it is a given fact that happiness comes from focusing on answers and outcomes; as they say, we are part of the solution. Added to this piece of wisdom is humor, lots of it — and I wish to share a bit of it with you here.

Recently, I have required dentures. It's amazing how this alters your idea of being attractive! Learning how to eat and speak all over again is enough to have to deal with, so I certainly wouldn't have a clue about the logistics of a passionate kiss! Maybe that will come in the future. Replacing one loss with another, recently I have started to add girth to what was once a svelte and shapely form. But do you know what? That's just fine, too! Who am I looking for? A 24-year-old Adonis with every hair and tooth still intact? Let's be realistic!

In fact, everything's just fine as long we stay true to who we are with the optimism of a romantic, and we're always cooking up another Stew . . .



## Chapter One

# Do You Really Need to Use a Measuring Cup?



*I am my own special creation . . . I don't want praise, I don't want pity . . . I bang my own drum, some think it's noise, I think it's pretty . . . Why not try to see things from a different angle . . . What I am needs no excuses . . . Your life is a sham until you can stand up and shout, "I am what I am!"*

— La Cage aux Follies

**J** have always felt that we are in direct communication with the author when we curl up with their book, or these days, when we connect with them through CD or PC. It is my hope that in sharing with you some of my feelings and thoughts on the subject of romance, I establish such rapport with you. May these ponderings make it easier for you to find answers to your own quest for romance, and also let you know that you are not alone.

It will be enjoyable to mentally sit together like two old friends and chat about our relationships. In my family we used the kitchen table as a place for brainstorm-

ing, sharing aspirations and enjoying meals created by our Southern mother. Whether the times were affluent or strained, Mom could always take a hodge-podge of ingredients and magically whip up a savory stew. The pungent aroma of that simmering pot would literally fill the house. It seemed natural that Mom's stews would become our symbol of sharing, and mealtime and the kitchen table as our safety zone for venting as well as expressing new ideas.

Even during those "down times" – the negativity and enabling behaviors that inevitably accompany alcoholism – we still managed to keep our balance. Then in later years during their recovery process, Mom continued this family tradition of the kitchen "round table" and we had a chance to partake in another type of growth experience. Just as in the myth of Camelot, we strove to start with ourselves to make a difference. Our topics had no boundaries and by the end of one of those talks, although we felt we may not have solved all the world's problems, we had surely rediscovered a little bit more about ourselves.

### *Be Open and Willing*

Openness was a primary ingredient in these kitchen table discussions. Therefore, in this exchange, I want to follow that tradition as I expose my own personality, to support the belief that it's okay to freely discuss personal matters with others . . . especially when we are looking for self-fulfillment and self-discipline. Be free; be open!

Like many others, my desire to find the right partner has elicited many of my idiosyncrasies. On several

occasions, the ensuing experiences have pointed to the need for my own growth and maturity. Does that sound like something that has happened to you as well? Perhaps it is “American” or democratic to let it all hang out, as they say; and in the process, look for romantic partners who are just as fearless.

America seems to be a culture ripe for interaction as well as candor. Even with all the hardships and global concern, one still feels a spirit of freedom or liberation as well as hope and a faith in a greater tomorrow. Emmet Fox writes that hope is the weaker sister to faith because faith demands certainty in our connection to a grander source of love and power.

My own personal goal is to “be the best self I can be,” and that includes a built-in sense of goodness and empathy for others. I am grateful for the existence of a large number of counselors, healers and other professionals who can show us how to have a healthy and productive lifestyle, but as I pointed out earlier, ultimately it is up to us to determine how we want to fashion our lives and which choices we want to make.

External preoccupations or distractions as well as machines, devices, books, manuals, seminars etc. often present the illusion of doing that Inner Work, when we really aren’t. If we stop for a moment to ask ourselves where we’re going with all these activities, we may even be able to have a good laugh about the games of dodge ball and hide-and-seek that we play with ourselves.

Another virtue or characteristic of being American is that feeling or perception of being free to make our own choices when in truth we too readily allow thera-

pists and other practitioners to “cure” or “heal” us, or improve our lots in life. It seems to go with a fast-food, fast-paced lifestyle.

### *Be a Risk-Taker*

The ability to take risks without expecting every encounter to work out is the most important ingredient for preparing any romantic stew. We must also be candid enough to accept ourselves in the eyes of others, warts and all. Obviously this requires a sense of humor as well as the ability to recognize that we are all perfect in the eyes of God . . . that no person is more perfect than another. Each of us is a work in progress, and romance has very little to do with statistics: Number 10 body, IQ, credit rating, suntan, material possessions (home/car/boat, computers and electronics), etc., etc. One can easily be swayed by the media and marketplace of athletic heroes and movie stars.

In her book, *The Men Who Drive Strong Women Crazy* . . . *DRAMA KINGS*, Dalma Heyn writes about the 21<sup>st</sup> century American woman’s lifestyle and subsequent relationship changes. Today, for example, the “drama king” male (unavailable, controlling and unable to connect) is not nearly as acceptable to independent, strong-willed women.

Today’s women are hardly passive stay-at-home creatures willing to close their ears and eyes and let their husbands have a few on the side – without doing the same themselves! Today most women perform multiple roles in almost every type of coupling relationship. This has

created a dichotomy to the point where time management can be a major challenge. Job, home, family, health maintenance, social life and extracurricular activities integrally linked to one's profession can push even the gentlest of women to the edge – physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Add to this mix sleep deprivation and a house full of sick kids, and romance seems like something that exists on another planet.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century multi-tiered and –taxed lifestyle has spawned a need to create a new paradigm for happiness and self-fulfillment – and perhaps a new format for romance. That seems like a big assignment and perhaps an impossible one.

Yet nothing else in our lives has stood still, so why should we romantics be frozen in time? What used to be traditional romantic protocol has disappeared along with Marcel perms, girdles, hats, and gloves. In this Global Information Age we may know the names of a whole batch of friends in Taiwan, Johannesburg, Brisbane and Madrid and be clueless about who lives next door. Our houses have no front porches and the corner grocery is now a franchised shopping mall. SUVs and RVs are the symbol of a society constantly on the move. Instead of marrying the boy or girl next door or our high school sweetheart, we jet across the Atlantic or Pacific for yet another experience with a new and different specimen.

And that's exactly where I headed. Like a true modern-day pioneer, I ventured out beyond the back yard and went West, East, South and North . . . Wherever I pitched my tents turned out to be fertile territory. In

the Southeast/ Deep South, I found courtesy and gentile traditions; in the Northern Midwest, I encountered the more stoic descendants of miners, many of Norwegian heritage. In the Southwest, I dipped into the emotional heat of the Latino/Hispanics . . . With much gusto, I celebrated the ethnicity of America's great melting pot.

### *Use the Internet – That's What It's There For!*

Like many others seeking romance, the Internet turned out to be a virtual gold mine of untapped potential. Risk was everywhere, and so was adventure. Automatic “pick and choose” lottery games turned out to be the most fun of all, but of course delivered the highest risk. Behind the veil of copious emails one can voice hopes and dreams that might never be shared should we meet in person – especially if we perceive the “stakes are high” and we don't want to disappoint or be disappointed. We can also choose to be as romantic as we wish, without destroying the essence of ambiguity and evasiveness – two important ingredients for any introductory experience on the Internet. We can be free with compassion, kindness, tenderness and even hint at forthcoming passion, knowing the recipient doesn't need to be Mr. or Ms. Right. But just in case, we've got our bases covered.

It seems interesting that women enjoy emails more than men, who appear to communicate more easily by phone. My mother's large Southern farm family met regularly, bringing spouses and children to enjoy the hospitality, food, and conversation, and I remember the humor among the men gathered on the front porch. At a certain point my grandfather would gesture toward the



kitchen where the women and girls were chatting jovially: “Is anybody doing the listening in there?”

Both emails and phone contact allow for the privacy of unwashed face, unbrushed teeth, curlers, nightgown or none.

Posted profiles on the Internet match sites can be fascinating and of course deliberately misleading – which is part of the gamesmanship. I tend to go for profiles that stray from mere multiple choice “yeses and no’s” or lists of adjectives. I like narratives with a flare that deliver personal experiences flavored with humor, pathos or deeds of derring-do. This indicates there’s a pulse and blood actually circulating. Sometimes you just jump, and learn to fly on the way down.

Yet even then, the profile information is scant and leaves much to be desired. Each of us is so complex; how could we expect to really “know” a person from just a questionnaire? We have our marvelous days and then those other times when we question everything – even who we are to ourselves! Perhaps that’s the true value of family and friends we’ve grown up with; they’ve hung out with us long enough to know how to go with the ebb and flow of our moods and metamorphoses. At least, however, these Internet handshakes give us an idea of shared values and social styles of interaction. That’s a healthy start.

### *Do You Really Want to Meet Another Photocopy of Yourself?*

One cannot possibly expect another human being to fill every one of our needs or respond to *all* of our desires.

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