

THE BOCA RATON observer

THE ESSENTIAL LIFESTYLE



THE
LOVE &
ROMANCE
ISSUE

**THE
MARRIAGE
REFS**
COUPLES GET
ADVICE FOR
SOME COMMON
PROBLEMS

**PARTY LIKE
A FILM STAR**
THE OSCAR
FOR BEST BASH
GOES TO... YOU!

**ISN'T-IT
UNROMANTIC?**
A SINGLES'
VALENTINE'S DAY
SURVIVAL GUIDE

**THEY'RE
SO BUSTED!**
CHEATING IS
NO LONGER A
PRIVATE AFFAIR

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COUPLE SENDS RATINGS—
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Isn't It { A Survival Guide For Singles This Valentine's Day } (Un)romantic

By Linda Haas

**Sappy Hallmark commercials.
Heart-shaped boxes.
Happy couples at every turn.**

With all the Valentine's Day hoopla (cards appeared on store shelves before the ball even dropped in Times Square), it's no wonder people feel a mandate has been issued: "Thou shalt have a magical time with a significant other."

But what if you're single? Where does that leave you?

"I'm human. I get lonely. Would I like to spend the holiday in the company of a woman? Of course, but I don't want to rush into anything and end up being mismatched," laments 43-year-old Mike Donnenberg, a Boca Raton barista who got divorced last Oc-

tober after more than two years of marriage.

"I think the worst part of being single on Valentine's Day is that I feel left out of the romance of it all," says Linda DeMastry, 48, a marketing manager in West Palm Beach. Though, she adds, being single isn't necessarily a bad thing. "I have many friends who are in dysfunctional relationships and they are miserable," she says. "I'm not miserable."

She's not alone, either. There are nearly 316,000 single people ages 20 to 60 in Palm Beach County, according to the 2010 U.S. Census (the latest information available).

Yippee—misery loves company, you say.

Do we detect a bit of sarcasm?

That's understandable. After all, statistics won't rub your shoulders after a long work day or keep you warm at night.

Consequently, as a resource for our single readers, we present our Val-

entine's Day Survival Guide, with inspiration, advice and tips from therapists and local eligibles. Singles *just like you*.

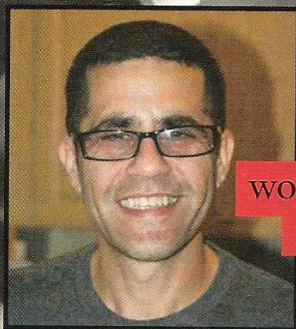
HEART OF THE MATTER

Before tackling *how* to get through—and even enjoy—the romantic day of the year, let's see why it's even an issue for single

"Valentine's Day is one of the challenging holidays as it's specifically on 'love—meaning love-partnerships,'" explains Boca Raton licensed psychotherapist Lisheyne Hurvitz. "It highlights singles as not being able to participate in the holiday as Madison Avenue created it."



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- Mike Donnenberg, a Boca Raton barista

In other words, it feels like there's this humongous party going on all across the country—and you're the only one not invited.

This odd-person-out feeling is typically more intense for women than men, Hurvitz notes. "Women are more romantic and idealistic, and tend to identify their success in life partly connected to their success in their personal relationships. Men tend to identify their success more toward their career and/or their ability to earn a good income."

A big problem, says Dr. Jacqueline Del Rosario, a certified marriage counselor in Miami, is that "most single people worry about finding someone instead of getting themselves fit for a relationship." Turn that around and you may not be single next Valentine's Day. "There's an Eastern saying," Dr. Del Rosario says. "'When the student is ready, the teacher appears.' I take that and say, when you are ready, love appears."

But how does one begin that journey? The first step, she explains, is to learn to enjoy your own company. "Most women make poor decisions because they're afraid of being alone. Learn to love yourself, and then figure out what you really want in a mate."

And, adds Hurvitz, take solace in the "grass isn't always greener" premise. "The recently divorced can be grateful they're no longer in a loveless relationship. Others can be grateful they're not in a dead, unfeeling relationship. You're free to be with whomever you choose and do whatever you want."

Boca Raton resident Heidi Klier learned to appreciate that freedom. "My worst Valentine's Day was the first one as a single mother," recalls the 50-something graphic artist. "It was new to not have a significant other, but soon it became a day I celebrated (for) having a fantastic daughter and no annoying ex in the picture. Now the day comes and goes without much notice. Sometimes I



Linda DeMastry



Dr. Jacqueline Del Rosario

"I think the worst part of being single on Valentine's Day is that I feel left out of the romance of it all."

— Linda DeMastry, a marketing manager in West Palm Beach



Arielle Schechtman



Diane DeFranco



buy myself chocolate on sale the day after because I have a sweet tooth."

Dr. Del Rosario applauds such initiative. "I tell single women to send themselves flowers, that they will feel special. I did that when I was single and I felt very content."

So go ahead—splurge on a box of chocolates or your favorite perfume. Send yourself roses (and not just to avoid embarrassment at the office or to impress co-workers). Just because you're single doesn't mean you can't enjoy the holiday. Sometimes it's just a matter of changing your attitude, or, as therapists like to say, "reframing" how you think.

CANCEL THE PITY PARTY

To begin, stop feeling sorry for yourself and start appreciating the positive things in your life, experts say.

Need a bit of perspective? It's not about you," explains Dr. David Boltson, a Boynton Beach psychologist. "And think about this: the worst day in America is better than the best day in Afghanistan."

Adopt an attitude of gratitude about the holiday's commercialism. Don't let it trick you into feeling bad about being single, explains Hurvitz. "You appreciate the things and relationships in your life that are working, you naturally feel happier."

And broaden your definition of love, she adds. "The truth is, love is in the air. You do have someone you love in your heart. It can be a mother, brother, child, friend or special someone. This holiday is much broader than just associating it with a significant other."

And another thing: just because

being single doesn't mean you have to stay home on February 14th.

With your single girlfriends, get together and hit the town looking for romance. A good time with friends is often easier for women, as Robinson admits. "In general, men don't talk to anyone about their problems. Women tend to have more support during the holidays."

Robinson cosmetologist Diane Robinson, 53, embodies this attitude. "Live your life and enjoy," she says. "If you don't have a significant other, why not enjoy the wonderful things that God puts in your life?"

Or perhaps you prefer to stay home. Call a friend anyway. Although companionship is often easier for women, Robinson admits. "In general, men don't talk to anyone about their problems. Women tend to have more support during the holidays."

Robinson doesn't yet have plans for Valentine's Day, but there's one thing that won't happen: "I won't be depressed if I am alone," he says. "That doesn't get you anywhere."

Levin, 47, a registered nurse, splits his time between Deerfield Beach and Chicago, concurs. "I'm not the type who says I have to have a man in my life. I have a passion, but if a gentleman comes into my life that complements it, that's great."

Del Rosario suggests starting your own Valentine's Day tradition. Send a card to someone who's single, deliver flowers to patients in a hospital cancer ward. "Express your love in other ways. It's about love isn't it?" she says.

Ortiz thinks so. "It's a day to express gratitude to those that make a difference in our lives. 'Send a card to your child thanking them for their love. Send flowers to your

auto mechanic for keeping you and your family safe all year. Send cards to family members across the country that you rarely see..."

She adds, "Singles can shift the focus from 'poor me' to making a difference in someone else's life. When you help someone else, it always makes you feel good about yourself."

That's what divorcee Tanya Cross does. The 40-something Boca Raton hairstylist is the founder of Locks of Inspiration, a nonprofit group that provides educations to impoverished young girls wanting to enter the cosmetology industry. Cross spent last Valentine's Day organizing a party at an orphanage in Romania. She also hopes to spend next Christmas there, brightening the lives of those less fortunate.



Rich Levin

"Now that my kids are older and I'm single, I have the freedom to do something like this," she says. "I'm not the type who says I have to have a man in my life. I have a passion, but if a gentleman comes into my life that complements it, that's great."

GOOD INTENTIONS, BAD OUTCOMES

Most agree there's one upside to being single on Valentine's Day: Avoiding disappointing gifts or worse, a really awkward, sad (or, insert your own adjective here) date.

"One year my (ex) husband sent my nephew to buy my card and box of candy. He came home with cream-

filled chocolates and I hate creams. And the card was lame," recalls DeFranco, who divorced in 2003 after 20 years of marriage. "Now do you see why I say the holiday is a non-issue for me?"

A few years ago, DeMastry of West Palm Beach celebrated Valentine's Day with her significant other in a romantic restaurant. But there was no sweet ending. "A couple of days before Valentine's Day, I told him I didn't think it was going to work out between us," she recalls. "We'd already made plans to go out to dinner and he still wanted to go... There was little conversation, and certainly no romance. When we got home, that's when we really called it quits. I wouldn't want to stay with someone just because it's Valentine's Day."



Tanya Cross

Divorced Fort Lauderdale businessman Uri Ortiz will be spending Valentine's Day with someone special for the first time in nearly three years. Still, he doesn't place much significance on the holiday. "I really don't need a special day to show my affection and appreciation for my partner," says Ortiz, who plans to either prepare a romantic dinner or take his date out for a nice meal. "I make an effort throughout the year to do special things for her."

Perhaps Ortiz is onto something. Putting too much significance on any one day can doom a relationship, cautions Dr. Del Rosario. "Couples better live Valentine's Day, every day. You will be on your way to divorce court if you wait for one day a year to show your love. We need to think of loving one another from the soul daily, weekly, monthly." ○



Uri Ortiz

