

WHY AM

Real stories about lost love and

I STILL

improving your own chances in love

SINGLE

Part One

Written By **DEON CHAN**

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FOREWORD

I started my dating entrepreneur journey purely out of a desire to help single friends and colleagues around me. My closest childhood friend had asked me to fast and pray every day for her so that she could meet her desired partner sooner. I did pray for her occasionally. However, I also thought about the underlying issues which make it difficult for her to get hitched.

The desire in me to help more people find their life partner bugged me persistently for several years and finally drove me to really doing something in the year 2007. At that time, I was doing rather well in a nine-to-five job in a premier airline.

One afternoon, I was sipping tea with my husband at a cafe, and as I looked out to the street and saw many singles hanging out with their friends, this desire just suddenly overwhelmed me. Finally, I said to Matthew that I will set up a dating event company that provides fun and value-for-money activities for people to get to know more new people. That day on 1st May, I

went ahead to register the company, with only a rough business plan at the back of my mind.

That was about ten years ago. Now I co-own three dating agencies, each with a different focus of dating services. For these past ten years, since I started from nothing with no experience, I was faced with many challenges and learnt a lot from trial and error. I am glad that I have met many selfless allies, friends and mentors whom have given me tremendous encouragement and help.

I also have met and helped many singles. The work of a dating event organizer and matchmaker has brought to me an immense sense of pride and satisfaction and I felt that this work has been one of my life key callings.

As I reflect on my experience in the past ten years, I felt this deep desire to write about my own experiences with the singles and the difficulties they go through. This is so that others out there would not feel that they are alone in their own predicaments. The purpose of this book is for all singles so they might find comfort and strength in their struggles and dilemmas.

Finally, I hope that the stories would strike a chord with you. And if you have any comments or feedback or would like to share with me your feelings and perspectives, I would love to hear from you. You can email to deonchan@loveexpress.com.sg.

DEDICATION

To my devoted husband and caring dad.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Finding Love After a Broken Marriage

Page 8

A Father's Long Shadow on a Daughter's Life

Page 17

Analysis to Paralysis by Fear

Page 25

FINDING LOVE AFTER A BROKEN MARRIAGE

In my work as a dating expert, clients, friends and family members often ask me for advice on that guy that they just met, or the uncertainty they have about that long term girlfriend, or on how there seem to be no good fish in the sea.

Finding relationships are never easy. Making them work are even worse. The problem often lies with the person him or herself where inherent personality traits or negative life experiences act as the biggest barrier to successful relationships.

Take my junior college classmate Amy for example. She thought she had found the love of her life in her neighbor and schoolmate, Carl. They were extremely compatible. Same kind of humor. Same interests. They dated for

seven years, got through university together, started their first jobs together and got married soon after.

The perfect love story right? High school sweethearts getting married and embarking on their life together. They seemed to have done everything right. But when it comes down to it, a relationship has to be built on more than love. It is a highly practical commitment. The superficial compatibility they shared was not enough to sustain their marriage.

Fundamentally, they were toxic for each other. Amy is sweet, caring and helpful. Carl was lazy, unmotivated and relied on her too much. She is a primary school teacher and loves her job. He hops from job to job, selling cooking oil and IT products among other things. His unstable income placed the burden of the couple's finances on her shoulders.

Between her job, paying bills and the upkeep of their house, she was kept busy, upholding her marriage on her own as her husband lazed around the house. Even though she was putting in all the effort, she never once resented

him for his lack of contribution. She saw it as her duty as a wife to support her husband and to provide for them where he did not.

Five years into her marriage, she came across lewd messages in mandarin on Carl's email as he was away from his laptop. Upon confrontation, he matter-of-factly revealed that he had met and slept with a woman from China. Being her usual calm and non-confrontational self, she brushed it off as a one-off mistake, convincing herself that he still loved her and it meant nothing.

Slowly, a meal together became a rare thing. Their conversations consisted of her asking what he needed, his gruff replies and her helping him anyway with no thanks. Carl increasingly spent nights away from home, escaping what he felt was a mundane marriage. She knew what was happening, but held on to their five years of marriage and history together. She thought after doing so much for him, he would remember why they got married together to begin with and changed his mind to get back to her again.

Three years into this mess, Amy came home from work to an empty home, not that that was very surprising. She now knew to expect to spend the night alone on her bed. However, this time, the bed was not as she left it after making it in the morning. There was a brown eagle envelope placed on it. It contained divorce document already signed by Carl. There was no note explaining why; no “I’m sorry”, and no phone messages. She was shell-shocked.

After being depressed for a month, she finally signed it, reasoning with herself that he must have thought it through and deliberated for a long time. She thought it best to bring it to Carl herself. She wanted to see him. Instead of him answering the door, she was greeted by a slender lady who asked her who she was and how she could help in disjointed sentences, her English thick with an accent from China. A dumbstruck Amy simply handed her the envelope and said she had a package for Carl. Without a trace of recognition of who she was, the lady took the envelope and thanked Amy.

Once the door was shut behind her, Amy awoke from her trance and was suddenly filled with rage. Three years, she spent putting up with Carl's infidelity. Three years, she took care of him regardless. Three years, she hoped and prayed that he would return to her. Yet, he turned his back on her without so much as an explanation or apology. Instead, he ran into the arms of his lover who could not so much as piece a coherent sentence together in English. Her husband's betrayal sparked a deep burning anger towards him, which she has been harboured through the years, but refused to acknowledge.

I recently met up with Amy over coffee. As usual, she arrived early and was waiting at the table she reserved long before the day we arranged to meet. Dressed in an emerald silk blouse that flowed off her svelte frame, she was checking her makeup in her compact and tucking away any loose hairs. Not that she needed much preening, she is pretty enough as is and plenty of men at my dating agencies would be more than happy to be set up on a date with her, not that she would believe me if I ever told her this.

As I neared our table, she stood up eagerly to greet me and gave me a warm hug. Before I could even sit down, she rambled on about how she had done online research on the café beforehand and had a list of recommendations that she was sure she would suit my palate. I did not meet her often, but was always amazed at how much time she would spend researching for our meet-up venue.

The whole afternoon, it felt like she was at my service rather than a friend I was meeting with. She helped me get sugar for my tea when the waiters were too busy. When my food came, she consistently checked if I liked it. Towards the end of the meal she even wiped down the table and picked up any crumbs we might have left behind. Amy was always eager to help and to make sure she was not inconveniencing anyone.

During the meal, we spoke about work. I was glad to hear that she was enjoying teaching still, and highlighted to her that I could not imagine wrangling a group of rowdy children on a daily basis. My kid already posed enough of a challenge. Laughing heartily at my comment, she said

she could not imagine anything she would rather to do for work, and wished she had children of her own to care for after.

It had been five years after the divorce, but she had not dated anyone since. Children of her own was increasingly out of the question as she aged. I probed slightly at this. She said no one would be interested in her, and either way, with her new promotion, she had less time to date. I recommended that she come for one of my events. There was no harm in doing so anyway. She giggled at the thought of it and agreed patronizingly, as she has done when I asked her before.

Amy's predicament is common to many, though to varying degrees. She thought she had found love, but was deserted and could not find a way to transcend the hurt and betrayal she endured. Although she appears strong and successful, I know she is still hurt by what happened and is in denial that someone who was not outstanding in any way took away her husband, best friend and college sweetheart. What made this woman better than her?

She often tells me that she has gotten over her painful divorce and disappointment with her ex-husband. However, I could always see the lingering sadness in her eyes, and sense her insecurity with going out with male friends and colleagues. She numbs herself with work and thinks that the way to move forward is to keep helping and loving others. She forgets the most important thing, to help and love herself, to confront what happened and really move on.

Achieving her dream of having a house filled with children running about and the man she loves, seems to her very far-fetched now. I know that for her to recover completely from the previous marriage, she needs to come to terms with her agony and realise that it was not her fault. She needed to accept that she had done all she could to help salvage her marriage. However, marriage is a partnership, and if her husband wants to walk out, she would have to forgive him and move on in her life.

Towards the end of the meal, I once again extended the invitation to join me at one of my singles events to simply meet more people. This time, Amy kept silent for a while,

as if giving it actual thought. She then agreed that it would be good for her to see more than her mother and the little rascals she had to take care of at work for once.

A FATHER'S LONG SHADOW ON A DAUGHTER'S LIFE

Once during an event, my phone began to ring and I was surprised to see who was calling. It was my old friend from junior college, Shu Yi, who did not reach out often. I was greeted with muffled voice. Beneath a sad but calm voice, she informed me that her father had passed on in his sleep and invited me to his wake.

As I made my way to the wake, I remembered she told me that her father was an odd job labourer that spent his free time indulging in gambling. He did not contribute to the family's day to day funds and was very much a negligent father. This resulted in her mother having to work a few jobs to support the family. She remembered that her father always asked her mother for money and would quarrel incessantly with her mum whenever he

came home, finding fault with her mum all the time. She felt there was no love from her father.

As she grew up, her mother was her only actual parent. She spent birthday after birthday blowing out candles and cutting cakes without him. “Family Time” was essentially mother-daughter time. With age, she increasingly looked upon her father with disdain and sorrow and deemed him as being an unloving father, irresponsible husband, and good-for-nothing man.

She went to university funded by a government bursary, earning from teaching multiple tuition assignments and saving every penny she could. By the time she was in university, there was no father-daughter relationship to speak of, just a chill lingering at home whenever he came home. She would ignore her father even when he initiated conversation with her. She resented him not being around and for putting the brunt of responsibilities on her mother.

Only her mother attended her university graduation ceremony. On that special day, she spent her time on

stage, scouring the audience for familiar faces, only finding her beaming mother with an empty chair beside her. Not that she expected her father to be there. They had not spoken for three years, but she hoped that he would at least attend the celebration of this major milestone in her life.

Her impressive results placed her in a big local bank where she climbed the ranks with hard work and grit. As she got promotion after promotion, she grew in confidence and reveled in her self-made success. She became one of the youngest staff to reach the rank of Senior Vice President in the bank. Her success was due to her conscientiousness and the long hours she clocked every day. Out of workplace, she devoted her time to networking and was often seen rubbing shoulders with other bankers at the trendiest of restaurants and rooftop lounges in the swankiest hotels.

Able to indulge in anything she wanted, she took great pride in not being beholden to anyone and being able to provide her mother anything she wanted. Soon, she amassed enough to move out of her mother's house and

buy her own condominium nestled in the heart of the city, and spent thousands on luxurious renovations. It represented her hard work, her competency, and most of all her independence.

At her housewarming, I remember her glowing as friends and colleagues fawned over her new home, impressed with the location, size and design of the apartment. However, as the night passed and people streamed out of the house, her eyes grew more vacant. Ushering the last of those in attendance out, she looked small as she stood apart from her guests, juxtaposed against her large empty apartment. As they bid her goodbye, her expression grew sad, as if she did not want to be left alone.

When I arrived at the wake, Shu Yi was meandering through the crowd with that same plastic smile, accepting other people's niceties and condolences, and moving quickly on to the next group. Looking as well kempt as usual, not a hair was out of place and she looked neat in a well fitted shirt.

Upon spotting me, she approached me and took me aside. I expressed my condolences and she resignedly whispered, “Once my mother goes, I don’t think I’ll have anyone else. I might just kill myself if that happens.” At forty-two and without a boyfriend or any past relationships to speak of, she meant every word she said. Maybe her father’s death and her somber realization that she would be alone would prompt her to try to develop her social life and planning to have a life with someone.

Shu Yi is attractive and dresses well. There was no lack of men interested in her and some were already married. However, my only memory of one of her only interaction with men was with a guy from college. He spent his entire college career chasing her. But she turned him down, unsure of whether to get together with him.

Upon graduating, she decided that she would take a shot at a relationship with him, but he accepted a job in Hong Kong. With much back and forth with calls and e-mails, she went to find him there for one and a half week. She stayed in his house and tried to spend time with him, but

he did not once make a move. She came back, alone, heartbroken and feeling the weight of her failure.

She never did accept any suitors or pursue anyone else after that. She drowned herself in work, finding value in the success of her career and avoiding all other potential failures, be it in friendship or relationships with the opposite gender. During the past few years since then, I did tell her that she should get back out there and take the failures as they come, but to no avail.

After the wake, we met up a few times to catch up. Whenever I broached the topic of her prospects of finding a potential life partner, although she was interested in finding someone, Shu Yi maintained that all the viable men around her were either gay or married. She simply did not have any good options. I proposed a more proactive approach and suggested she enlist my help to find a potential man. Begrudgingly, she agreed.

Taking my advice, she came to a few dating events and took up a matchmaking package a few months later. At

the events she attended, she would sit at her seat, arms crossed in front of her, and lips pursed in disdain. Her preconceived notion that dating was not worth her effort or time was clear. Other attendees often felt that she was cold and disinterested in spite of their best efforts to try to get to know her.

I diligently searched for a handful of good potential matches for her, thinking that maybe she would be more comfortable one-on-one. Her requirements on paper are very simple: polite, non-smoker and a university graduate.

After my initial introduction, they called her out for dinner and movie dates, but she never responded to their advances. Frustrated at her lack of effort, I asked why she agreed to my help in the first place. She brushed off my question with excuses that she was too old to date, too busy with work, or simply found that those prospects were boring as a date. Regardless of how many events or introductions she attended, there were no second dates

Although I was seething with exasperation that she was not taking the matches seriously, I knew that, deep inside,

she had a strong negative feeling towards men. Her preconceived notion that dating is not worth her effort or time since she will only be let down caused her to build up impenetrable walls before any man.

Jumping to conclusions easily, she quickly labels guys she meets as inadequate and untrustworthy without first trying to get to know their character and finding common interests. Lacking confidence in them, she finds fault with them easily, viewing them as she did her father - a useless bum that she cannot depend on.

With such a mindset to the opposite gender and dating in general, she really needs to take stock of her perceptions and attitude towards this. Her prejudice against men as unreliable and irresponsible is deep and affects her interaction with the opposite gender. She needs to heal from the hurt that her father caused before she can build a new fruitful relationship. Her being alone is just a self-fulfilling prophecy that only she can break out of.

ANALYSIS TO PARALYSIS BY FEAR

Unlike Amy and Shu Yi, there are some whose difficulty of finding a partner did not come from deep seeded hurt from their childhood, or the pain of a failed relationship that lingers. In my line of work I have met countless singles with their other reasons for being so.

Some who simply have the wrong mindset to dating from the get go. Whether it is from having standards that are too high, the excuse of a lack of time, or low confidence, I have met most of them. Their reasons are unique to their character and runs deeper than just a fear of failed relationships.

Within my own social circle, I have several single friends as well. Whatever their reasons may be, I always encourage them to meet new people whether it is through friends or dating events, and that was how I met Philip. Philip

attended a dinner event to support Kelvin, a mutual friend of ours who was trying out dating again after a bad breakup. Kelvin introduced us to each other and the dinner began.

As I do for every event, I walked around to make sure that everyone was having a good time. Sometimes pairs have trouble striking up or sustaining a conversation between rotations and I would help facilitate it until they felt comfortable enough to be left alone. That was when I noticed Philip sitting alone by the bar. Worried that something was wrong, I walked up to him.

It turned out that his dinner partner had to leave early for a work emergency and so he excused himself from the rest of the dinner since the numbers were evened out. Besides, he had signed up for the event just so that Kelvin would go for the dinner event, something he had been wanting to do for a while but had never mustered the courage to do so. What a good friend he is, I thought to myself, and asked if I could sit with him for a while since everything else was going smoothly.

Philip turned out to be a very pleasant person, asking me questions about what kind of dating events were run and how I got myself in this line of work. Naturally, I asked him about his dating life and he just simply stated that he wasn't looking to date. He smiled and explained that he didn't feel the need to get into a relationship.

“What for, when everything else is going well?” he laughed. As a compliance officer, he worked closely with his team and had but a small, tight-knitted group of friends he hung out with outside the office. With most of his friends already married, they tried setting him up with some blind dates but he was never really interested.

He was charming, witty and interesting with a passion for travel – surely he must have had girls who were interested in him? Thinking hard about it, he eventually said that with everything else going on in his life, he would rather spend the time with his mother. Even though she kept prodding him to find a nice girl, he just kept evading the subject with her altogether.

Between rotations, I found out more about Philip. It turned out that because his father had passed away from an illness when he was younger, he felt the need to stay with his mother who had single-handedly raised him. Since his youth, he had never really known a world where his mother wasn't involved in any aspect of his life. She knew all his friends and was there for every milestone. Having up his mother on a pedestal, he confessed he didn't think that he could find a woman who could live up to that.

I was curious to find out more but the event eventually came to an end and we said our goodbyes, promising to meet again sometime soon with Kelvin. And we did, a few weeks later, at a celebration dinner of sorts for Kelvin who had successfully gone on two dates with someone he met at another event. Kelvin lifted his glass and tipped it in Philip's direction, jokingly saying that I had to help him.

Even though he might be picky, I was genuinely surprised to find out that he had never dated anyone in his 33 years. Between his work, mother and his social life, Philip said that dating someone would mean a significant amount of

time invested that he would rather spend elsewhere. Plus, he was cautious of dating just anybody having heard stories of terrible break-ups from his friends. He playfully gave Kelvin the side eye.

The more we talked, the more Philip's story became clearer. His is not one that is all too unfamiliar. Successful and intelligent, Philip is one to weigh his circumstances thoughtfully. That meant careful consideration before deciding to invest his emotions and time on someone. With his mother as the benchmark, dating anyone less than that was just taken out of the equation altogether. To top it off, he loved the way things in his life were going and the last thing he wanted was to ruin the balance by dating someone for the sole possibility of meeting his life partner. No, why mess with the status quo?

The thing about dating is it is often a series of trial and error, hits and misses. Sure, they can get messy eventually but without even taking a chance, there is no possibility of meeting *the* one at all. In Philip's case, he had not been hurt before but he would rather not run the risk of getting hurt at all. That meant knowing everything about the

person he was going to date. With a single flaw found, no matter how small, she would be struck off the list immediately. The compliance officer in him understood the need to analyse every aspect that could lead to failure.

This apprehension towards incompatibility was fueled by another fear: rejection. If he ever decided that a woman met all his expectations and he wanted to date her, her rejection would be a big blow to his ego. Having devoted a great amount of time and feelings, that ‘no’ from her would have rendered his efforts null and void. Philip did not know if he would be able to handle it. “Better to not know than to have ventured and lost.”, he said.

One thing he knew for sure was that his mother would never let him down. I knew it was a sensitive topic, but I gently reminded him that it was unhealthy for him to have his relationship with his mother as a substitute for relationships with other females. That said, he simply could not go by rejecting every woman just to avoid the impending rejection he assumed would come.

Finding a life partner can be like finding a diamond in the rough, but the search will help everyone discover more about themselves. With personal development being something of a lifelong journey, it is important to be open to all sorts of experiences, even the bad ones. Take Kelvin for instance, I said to Philip. Even though his last relationship ended badly, he emerged smarter in knowing what he really needed in a partner and what his own shortcomings were.

We talked through the evening that day, the three of us. It seemed like Philip understood what we had to say and was actually considering it. It warmed me to know that he would be re-evaluating his approach to dating and getting to know people before making quick judgments. I bid my friends good night as it got darker and left with a happy heart.

A few days later, I received a message from Philip himself telling me that he had thought it through and he had given into Kelvin's persuasion to try out one of my dating events, another dinner. I smiled, knowing that even though Philip couldn't be expected to change just after

one event, he would at least be sitting through the entire dinner this time.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Deon is the founder and Managing Director of Love Express, an accredited dating agency set up in 2007, which organizes over 100 events per year and has reached out to more than 200,000 singles in Singapore. She is also the co-founder and Managing Director of Divine Connect, a date coaching and personalized matching company, and I-MeetYou.com, a secured online dating company. She has helped many singles find love over the past ten years.

She is a SDN-accredited Dating Practitioner. She also co-hosts “Ask Dr. Love” - a SDN online forum for singles to ask questions relating to marriage, relationship and dating. She has been interviewed and quoted by major news media: Straits Times, Business Times, MyPaper, Today et cetera as well as leading magazines. She has also been invited to Radio and TV programmes to share about her experience and insights about helping singles to date successfully.