

When God Closes a Door He Opens a Window — For Love

After another solo Valentine's Day, Donna Lynn Rhodes reflects on how for her—and a lot of us—life doesn't always turn out the way we once imagined.

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Thank God that's over with.

A colonoscopy? My taxes? Another root canal?

No.

Valentine's Day.

Most of you woke up on Monday with a kiss and cuddle from your true love. You probably got a card and what says love more than a dozen red roses – especially when they're delivered to your office.

But, to me, it was just a Monday.

In a million zillion years it never occurred to me that I'd be alone on Valentine's Day. Never. I was born to be a wife. Yet here I am at 55 and still single.

Last spring I was having coffee with a business acquaintance and she asked if I was married. I told her no. Divorced? No. Living with someone? No. Gay? No. She tilted her head and with an expression somewhere between shock and confusion and asked, "How is that even possible?"

Well, hell if I know.

But I do know that what she said had a profound affect on me. I am smart, cute, and hilariously funny. My work has always been in the public eye and you'd think with the law of averages I would have met someone by now.

So I, too, have to ask, "How is that even possible?"

I grew up in Chicago and was raised by loving parents who to this day are still holding hands. Our family was a cross between *The Wonder Years* and *Seinfeld*. I got my first copy of *How to Be a Jewish Mother* on my Sweet 16 and knew I'd be going away to college mainly to earn my MRS degree. I would have a traditional Jewish wedding in a downtown hotel and our first dance would be in front of 250 people and a seven-piece orchestra playing "Close to You" by the Carpenters. I'd be a stay-at home-mom and we'd live happily ever after.

Well, a funny thing happened along that yellow brick road.

I did go away to college and I did meet a nice Jewish boy. But one day while I was coming out of a junior year speech class I pulled a flyer off the bulletin board announcing something new. It was called the Study Abroad program. Frat parties and smoking pot gave way to foreign affairs and thatched cottages. I discovered more than just Europe, I discovered myself. I found out I was a talented writer, a social planner and a confident confidante all rolled into one. But most of all, I knew that my life would take me in another direction.

My senior year at college I moved from my apartment back to campus so I could live in the International House with all the foreign exchange students. And while most of my friends (and yes, that included my college boyfriend) were planning their right-after-graduation weddings, I was planning how and when I could go back to England. I saved every penny I earned from my first newspaper job and, at the ripe old age of 24, I moved to England. My yearlong romance with a handsome man I met on British Rail was right out of a Danielle Steele novel. But when push came to shove and the clock and the visa started ticking, it just wasn't meant to be. I went back to Chicago and a year later, I picked up and moved to Walnut Creek.

That was April 1982, and I'm still single.

Just before my 30th birthday, I thought I was having a nervous breakdown. I couldn't stop crying and my friend Karen rushed over and drove me to the hospital. The doctor on duty talked to me for about 20 minutes and diagnosed me with acute disappointment. He said I was suffering from a bad case of turning 30 and not yet being married. He was right. I had pictured my life a certain way and it just wasn't going according to plan. I stopped crying and we went out for Chinese food on our way home.

Next thing I know, I was turning 40. Ten years went by and there had been plenty of men and lots more weddings – just none of them mine. Thankfully I had a 'plus-one' most of the time so I was spared the shame of being the ninth at a table for eight. I never felt jealous witnessing other people's declaration of love--in fact just the opposite. I delighted in celebrating and was honored to be included.

I do remember feeling quite maudlin after one euphoric wedding. The Sonoma vineyard setting was magical and all the guests sat at one very large table under the moonlight. Vintage candelabras lined the table as we savored nine courses of food, wine and congratulatory toasts. Everyone there meant something special to the couple and I went home alone – more determined than ever to have the same love story.

Two days later was September 11 and the fairy tale was over for all of us.

Then I hit the Big 5-0. I was still single but had an incredible aha moment. I realized that society defines us by our age and marital status and that it's up to me as to whether or not I want to buy into it. Really. Think about it.

Most women get married when they are in their 20s. If they aren't married by the time they're 30, they're labeled picky. Forty and not married means there has got to be something seriously wrong with them.

But turn 50 and everyone – especially married people – think this has got to be one of the coolest things in the whole entire world. Really. She's single, has a fabulous home, a great career and can take a month's vacation -- or a soothing bubble bath -- whenever and wherever she wants. And they are right.

But I'm still alone on Valentine's Day.

The truth is, I still want to be married. And not because Carly Simon sang that that's the way she always heard it should be, but because I want to share my life with someone for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish; until death do us part.

And I know that if I had married when I was in my 20s or 30s I would probably be divorced. I'm not the same character I was back then.

I also know my story will have a happy ending. Yes, I truly believe that my *besher* is out there and he's waiting for me too.

Maybe I'll meet him next time I go for a colonoscopy.