

When a Black Man Still Loves ...

even though

(Sisters, there are
still some good ones left)

ZACHARY MARCUS CESARE HARRIS



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For all inquiries or to order additional copies of the book, contact:

Zachary M. C. Harris at zach@whenablackmanloves.net

Or visit the web site at www.whenablackmanloves.net

*Sometimes, it is not as important where and how you start your
journey,
but where you end up*

*If you think you find what you are looking for,
And then are forced to re-evaluate yourself in the process
Would you have the courage to do it and try again?*

*If in the end, or while during the journey,
They, in manifesting their own fears and lash out at you
Would you hold them accountable,
Or accept their pain and just wish for the best?*

*We are the sum total of our experiences, and in understanding this,
can then know ourselves, our faults, our assets and analyze our
actions and the effects cause by them*

The first version of this book was written during a silence in my heart that was an emotional or romantic death and mourning. This version was written during a time of understanding, healing, analysis, regrets and responsibility. Sometimes you learn more than anything that the groundwork you lay might be the foundation for the future paved roads that you might again walk upon.

This book is dedicated to every man who has ever been in love and made a mistake, only to try with all the strength in his heart to make amends and have that love back, and to the women that saw past everything and put their feet in unhindered and gave everything to see it through.

This book is also dedicated to everyone who has looked past differences and set out to love, and for those of them who made love work.

To “her,”

So here is my second book; it's really the fourth but I had to put down the other two manuscripts to actually just let all of this out of me.

Sometimes, life gives you second chances, and sometimes people give you more than one or two. While it was you who catapulted our whole time together, it was I who was being blessed by having you in my life.

Only after intensively searching for answers was I able to sit down and start to see many things; I have learned so much in the process.

There is a reason why you gave me a second look, and as of now while I start making a transformation, I just hope that you will look back again once more, or really look forward and see me somewhere in your view.

Not everything was me and not everything was you, but I guess it was quintessentially us not figuring out us and finding the solutions where we needed the answers for us.

Nobody wants to do a lot of work, unless they feel that it is worth it, and in this grand scheme of things, I found something and someone that I am willing to do that for.

No matter what happens, there will always be a love, respect, admiration and appreciation for you, and the times and energies that we shared with each other.

Preface

This is the second version of the book, and it is amazing what can happen in one's life. All in all, 2003 was a mother of a year for everyone, especially those people closest to me. I think this year was harder than any other year I have been on this planet. It was a year of tests and tribulations, many of which left me gasping for air and will take months to recuperate from. I figured out why it was so hard for me (besides the planetary movements and what not), and that is because I have so much to lose.

I guess in life also, some things change and some things stay the same. Don't know if you saw the last Matrix, but that was echoed in the last two films.

Probably not much will change between myself and a number of people already in my life, except for the issues surrounding contact and communication. There are things we liked about each other, and there are differences. Probably the biggest issue is that in many cases, they were never spoken about, and even when so, only when things mounted up. I think that those are the worst times for things to come to the surface.

I guess if you sit back and look at it, you always see the things that will push you away from a person more than you will see the things that will draw you to them. I have stood back, sat down and looked at a number of people this year, and just realized how some things will change and how some things will not. For some I get one answer, for others I just give up. In some cases I have to just completely distance myself, and in some cases just stay away and let what I was saying and feeling sink in with the other person. Either it will or it won't. And either I will be there to return in their lives if they call for me, or I won't.

I guess sometimes we lose because we restrict our actions and our communications out of fear. Sometimes it is justified and sometimes it is not.

As this is the second version of this book, I have seen many things come to pass since the first one went to the printer. There are some battles you want to win, and some that you can't. Sometimes, no

matter how much you are willing to walk a road with someone, if they don't want to help steer the course, then all you are doing is wearing out your shoes, and your days.

I received feedback from several close friends, as well as some people who never met me in regard to this book and the one before it. They say this book is better than the first, and I can see why myself. However, you get a better appreciation for what lies within when you go back to where it all started.

It's almost the end of the year and sometimes you just wonder what will happen in your life. Right now, I am in transition in so many ways and so many levels it's ridiculous, scary and somewhat refreshing. When I write, I put it out there, I mean really out there as some friends of mine tell me. Maybe for now, this is one component of my path; to be a warrior with a heart that he wears on his sleeve and is not afraid to open up and even shed a tear. Yes people, this book was written by a man in love. But this is the last book I will write regarding what I live. All future books will not encompass my romantic life from this day forward, though I am tempted and have been urged to write one about all of the romantic near-misses I have had in my life.

What happens when you fall in love and through the process learn so much more about yourself, as well as the whole concept of what it takes to love, and keep loving? This year has been so much for me, or for my heart, I am sometimes even amazed that I have kept going on, or holding someone in my heart for so long. I look around and look at some of the people who have come into my life (after the breakup) and at some of the people who were there before I even met her. I hear the stories that other men, older men, tell me regarding the love of their lives who they unfortunately didn't wed. They tell me stories of running across those people years later. Sometimes, things are fate and destiny, and sometimes it's a matter of what we will to happen, as much as what we allow to happen.

I myself don't have an answer for what the future holds for me. Maybe, the future will have "she" and I together in a successful and positive relationship. And at the same time, I look at the other things that pull my heartstrings. There are the songs I listen to which make me think of the good times and the bad, all of which I am thankful for

because I shared them with her. I joke to friends to either find me Vesta (Williams), or that I will have to hook up with Marsha, the songstress half of Floetry. As I listened to her voice in seeing them in concert, it moved me in a way I hadn't felt since I saw Etta perform years ago. As I fell in love with "It's Getting Late" and "Say Yes" it only pulled me more once I got the live album. I am lost somewhere between the music, the words, and her voice. I do think that she is beautiful as well. Somewhere in between I just want to let the tears flow when I play that cut, and then go into the studio and just run with the music with some people and take it to another level.

Was it fate that had me come across my issue of Jet magazine from 1995 with Vesta on the cover and possibly have someone connect me with her? Am I merely turning other places simply because this isn't working right now?

Love is a very powerful emotion, and when you are feeling it, you are the one who is wrapped up in its control. I guess when you don't have what you want, or who you want, you start to look at whether or not this is supposed to be it, or if they are supposed to be the one for you. You start to wonder if the person for you is just a couple states away, or even further, and pray that if the one who has your heart is not the one for you, then for God to send you someone quickly. And if they are not the one, that you can at least have some mind-blowing sex, but not necessarily mind-expanding sex (there are some things that you just might not want to get into).

You begin to look at yourself and what you are, and are not bringing to the table. And for me, you wonder what will happen in this year for you. Am I supposed to win? What will I lose? What will I hold on to? What must I change to make the difference?

Love, just like life, is not destined to be fair all the time. That is just something you have to deal with. There are so many factors that can affect a relationship, and the equations used to analyze the relationship, as well as the other person, at times help and at times take away. The songs you listened to one day are the music that can turn a person against you another. The more one peers, the easier it becomes to not see the light at the end of the tunnel. This book is also about love for love's sake, which is something that I think happens less and less in this chaotic and convoluted world we live in.

Undoubtedly, you will see that I lay myself wide open for not only analysis, because I guess in the end I will expect that there will be loads of debates. In this honesty, I relate how my own interpersonal relationships even within my own family have brought me to be the person that I am. Hey, shit happens and sometimes people just have to accept that. Daddy did what he did, as well as what he didn't do. So did mom. It's interesting when people want to go around on some soapbox from town to town prophesizing and orating on their own belief systems and are holding as much truth from us that would make us think differently of them. I remember one such author was on a morning radio show being interviewed about his book (in which he was slating against sisters somewhat) when one woman who he was previously involved with called in and just dished out the dirt on him. Well, people talked about that for days.

As I just gave some consolation to another author who had pretty much done the same thing (in revealing family and life truths), I guess sometimes people have to realize that anything they say and do can be incorporated. I make pains to use no names, and only incorporate the good things, but there are some things one must be honest about. One good friend went on to say that this book would also be excellent in a fictional form as a novel, and unbeknownst to her, I actually started a rough draft for a screenplay, merging elements of my time with one woman with some dynamics from another short story that I read by another unpublished author. All I can say is, that movie will really be one to move both men and women.

But maybe this is something writers need to start doing, and in this I am talking about being open and honest about what the hell is happening as well as what has happened in their lives. I have seen loads of books on love, dating and relationships, but few in which people are just honest about them, and in that I mean the authors. It's very easy to quote statistics and to start to look at things on an academic level regarding the areas of biology, psychology and sociology, but does that really give you a real-life answer? I remember being in Ms. Miller's 10th grade geometry class in high school and we used to always ask her, "What application does this have in the real world?" A lot of people can prattle on about this and that, and come up with facts and figures summarily manipulating and

skewing the numbers into statistics to back them up. Should we really believe half of that bullshit?

Hey, I am no saint though I try to be a help to many, but not everyone would see that side of me anyway. Remember, people only remember the bad things that happened last, not the good things you did up to that point, unless of course you are dead and it's your funeral. I have no problem in admitting my stupid mistakes and errors in my life and in my relationships. I am a man, and I have done a lot of stupid things out of ignorance; not knowing any better and also assuming that my logic would also be the logic used by another person. You can't begin to imagine what it feels like at times to look back and know this, but then again, maybe you can.

This book is going to come at you open and honest. Maybe that special person will read it and come around, or maybe destiny has me fated for someone else. I am not making any decisions against one or the other, but am embracing the things and people that God places in my path.

I hope that you like this book.

P.S. I am an independent author; don't pass the book, but get someone else to buy a copy.

In every thing that happens there are three basic things:

The lies,

The perceptions,

And the truth

While everything happens for a reason,

*The reason for each thing happening might not be related to a divine
or higher plan*

Some things just happen,

In life there is chaos, order and randomness

*And it seems that the “enlightened” or those searching on a path
forget about the first and the last*

Thanks & Acknowledgements

First of all, I need to do the acceptance speech part... you know what I mean, the first line that we, as Black folk, give when we are accepting an award for something. I would like to first thank God for everything that He has bestowed upon my life: all the blessings delivered, as well as all the lessons that He has provided me with. If it was not for Him, I might not be here to write my words, breathe the air, and just move about as I do today.

Second, sincerest thanks go to those friends who [as usual] listened to my prattlers and provided me emotional support through parts of this journey. I am a talker and am very emotionally open and honest in regards to what I am going through and what I am feeling. Normally, I try to talk to female friends to get their viewpoint of what I could be doing wrong or how to better handle a situation. I will also solicit the advice of trusted male friends who are either those that I hang with, or those who have been married for some stretch of time and therefore have some knowledge that I probably have not developed yet.

Charles McHerron, Tonya (my 'she-ro') Parks, Frank Gihan, Barbara Purnell, Shawncie Freison, Martha Benjamin, Montressa W., Gayelisa N., Raye D.J., and so many others, you know who you are.

Big thanks to my best friend Edwin Pace who not only has shared a good friendship and bond with me over the past six years, but has always been in my corner in helping me with my endeavors. He has contributed his time, talents and performance in helping out with sales, setup and breakdown of displays, photography, travel as well as saying the right thing to make a brother feel better when sales don't turn out like I hope them too. It's good when you have a true friend in your corner.

George C. Fraser, the author of *Success Runs In Our Race*, said something like that if he meets the five closest friends of someone, he can get a handle of who/how they are. Well, I don't know who my five closest friends are, but if you pick any of the people that I share the most time and communication with, I think that not only will you get a good reflection of me, but you will also find that I have some of the most caring people in my life that a person could ask for.

Third, I would like to thank all the women who have shared time and space, and mostly their hearts with me in some context. Even if you loved me for a minute, I thank you.

Fourth, I would like to thank the people who have helped me out when I was on a low, whether financially or otherwise. There were times when your help, as well as your patience with me repaying you, allowed bills to be paid, utilities not to be cut off, food to be purchased, or the continuance of having an [insured] vehicle to get me where I needed to go.

But most of all, I would like to thank my mother. (Through “her” I started to get a better appreciation of my mother; my mother and I haven’t always had the best relationship). One friend once noted about the relationships between mothers and their sons in regards to how mothers will do so much more for their sons than their daughters. I can see that in the world and see that somewhat even in my own life.

My mother has tried to be the best that she could in my life, and I take this time to say thanks for it [and I am sure that it will surprise her in this book].

I would also like to thank S.P. for the lesson learned.

About Me/About the Author

In the first book, you received the chance to understand me not only from my writings, which were an emotional window into who I am, but also by what some of my friends, as well as people I have known for years, thought/think of me. While I won't try to recount that whole piece again, I will try to relate you easily to who I am, in a first-person way. Here goes:

I was that young kid whose father left out when he was very young and grew up with a sister with whom I only shared maternal blood. The kid who was smart but wasn't tall, well off, or too athletically talented. The kid who had the fire in his eyes and his soul; the undiscovered and uncultivated talent in his heart; and no more than scattered family relationships. The kid who was one of the last picked on teams, and one who did not get the attention of the girls he had crushes on (I got attention, just not from the ones that I wanted it from, but isn't that the story of life).

As I grew I got to know more family (my father's side), but with my attitude, ego, and pride, combined with their relationships and views with my father and his mother as well as my mother, you could see the split in the love; I was the last to receive it, if I received it at all¹.

¹ Note: while things started off a certain way, my best relationships are with my aunt Robin (by blood) and her husband Charles. This is followed by my uncle Seymour (blood). We have a lot of catching up to do and really find each other thinking a lot alike in a number of areas.

I am the kid who used his wits and got where he needed on his own. No one handed me anything. I was the kid who was different from his sister, and our rifts are so big and are personalities so different that I do not feel the need to reach out but would rather be left alone. This is not to say that we don't get along but that our lives are not intertwined. I am the kid who did a lot with nothing and no one truly behind me (in the ways that I needed).

I became the young man who looked after others and was denied what he wanted due to some things beyond his control. I wanted a lot and wanted to give a lot. I put myself on the line and passed on opportunities so I could come back and help others. I am not regretful or sorry for those choices, for it was my choice to keep going, or turn my back. I initially thought I would join the service, and I never intended to look back; I never wanted to return, but there was a reason, and people needed help. I gave what I could when I could, and when I started to get a handle on things and advance, I then had to give it up.

Over the years those choices, along with choices that followed, would put me where I am, on the verge of great successes and also behind the eight ball.

I became the man who people looked to for strength and justice, and people were shocked when I needed time to myself to rest my spirit and my soul. I have been given paths open to me to follow, but I don't want them, or should I say that I feel comfortable under the tutelage of those who would guide and bestow knowledge upon me.

I became the lover who gave my heart to the wrong people, if not the right people but at the wrong time, and my emotions to those who didn't deserve it.

Along the way, I became the person people confided in, and who gave them the truth and sometimes compassion. I became the embodiment of my names and my genes.

I became the man who finally found someone, maybe right or wrong for me, but an angel nonetheless.

The flip side of me is that while I am a man brimming with energy and fervor, I am a man who exudes a level of tolerance, patience and

understanding in crisis situations that amaze most people who only see the other sides of me.

If you are my woman, I will not try to attack your character at the most fundamental level, and if you are on the other side and do try to attack me that way, I go into my “Christ-Complex.”

At this point I look at us as all flawed creatures of flesh, which are neither perfect nor free from sin. I do not look at the other person as really trying to attack me, but in a way as only trying to defend them or deal with something else going on in their life. That takes both patience and understanding. We are not all at the same levels of stress-handling capabilities, so there are times when you have to see past the initial emotional state of everything and look at the big picture.

“Her” brother once told me that when she acts up, to just hug her and that would do the trick; maybe I should have done it more often (you’ll get the gist of what I am trying to say as you get into the book).

I am also a Leo, and therefore subject to all of the main characteristics of my sign. However, I don’t seek to be the center of attention, especially in a relationship. I just want to love and be loved, simply put.

When it comes to love, I am a marshmallow. Yes, my heart is my weakness and my biggest weakness. It is what controls me, and what I live for outside of what I believe my purpose in life is. That said, when in love, I am a goner, and stay the resolute and hopeful romantic.

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Introduction

This book is the unintended follow-up to my last book, *When a Black Man Loves*. I say unintended simply because it is just that. The title was given to me by a friend of mine, Tonya Parks (my “shero”), while we were talking about the rough times we were going through in regard to our love lives at the same time.

Over talking about relationships and what not, we have joked about many books to be written. But on this day while lending her my copy of *Hav Plenty* (a very good romantic movie which everyone should watch at least once) and discussing my current state of romantic affairs, she came up with this title. Actually, she came up with the title “When a Black Man Still Loves ... Even Though.” She had those last two words in it, because the reality is that in my last romance I went through a hell of a lot, and a lot of it had nothing to do with me. I think just about any “man” would have gone through those things with “her,” but with me, the reactions and strength of those episodes were more intense.

What’s even more interesting about the “Even Though ...” part is that I was going through old e-mails sent between “she” and me, and some of them even now make me want to cringe.

What is this book about? Well, in one aspect it is the reality of looking back and through all of the good times and bad times through a relationship that started from the first book, and in the end, still wanting to be with “her” even though there were a lot of things I went through.

It's the story of a man who met a woman, and a lot of things that happened in between. It's a tale of discovery, growth, learning, love, heartache, adversity, and coming to grips with the fact that you are in love, though you might not be prepared to truly deal with it. It is the hopes and dreams of a man, and in some cases, the woman [involved] in finding that someone special after years of disappointments (and after emotional scars were left). From my side, it is the story of me falling for someone who put a move on my heart, but who wasn't necessarily prepared for dealing with a man like me. It is a tale of contradictions, moving too fast, and loving too slow. It is a tale of love and pursuit of love against all odds.

Quintessentially, it's really not about me. It's about the resolve a man can have in regard to his romantic visions and pursuing that woman despite the bad times, bad feelings, and old wounds given to her by life before him.

I remember talking to my friend George over dinner one day and telling him about "her." I met George, an executive with PECO/Exelon Energy, through sitting at his table at the 2002 Congressional Black Caucus annual dinner via another friend, Jim Reed. George and I had exchanged cards and talked for a minute and kept in touch. We finally got together for dinner and were sitting in the restaurant carrying on a stunted conversation. Then I started telling him about my book, and about her.

"She" had truly won my heart whether intentionally or unintentionally. We both agreed that, for a man, if he basically deals with a woman straight for a period of one week, he can kind of come to the conclusion of what he can see with her in his life, or I should more aptly say, what role he envisions her playing in his master plan. While we both acknowledged this, he with his wife and me with her, we both admitted that just because you can see it, it doesn't mean it will happen. A lot of things can come between the thought, or should I say wish, and the reality. It is normally through those moments when things hit the fan that the other person's actions and reactions decide and determine the course of where the relationship can head.

For George, it was a trip to New York. For me, there were tons of instances, but one stood out in particular: Christmas 2002. I won't get into details, but in the end, two people realized how much they cared for each other.

I am ultimately reminded of the dynamics between Julia Roberts and Brad Pitt in *The Mexican*. Throughout all the squabbling they did, when asked, "when is enough, enough when two people are truly in love?," the answer always came out to be never. Call me a diehard romantic, but I do kind of feel that way. As long as you are not tearing each other apart, becoming violent or even emotionally abusive, then there is a chance. No one is perfect, and no man is an island. A relationship is a dynamic of two people, both imperfect, who may heal and nurture each other. It's when either, or both parties, believe that their stuff doesn't stink, that the breakdown occurs.

Part of life, or mastering it, is knowing when people are speaking not of their true hearts and minds, but from a place where other emotions and variables are playing in to them. It could be other people (filling them with thoughts of whatever), it could be just emotions of anger, fear, jealousy, or the big one, insecurity. At that point, you have to be wise enough to know when to let something get to you, and when to rise above it all. However, we are all human, and some things can stagger us, even for a minute. What you have to decide is how you handle it. Do you keep going on in spite of it to try and get what you are really looking for? Or do you give up and fold like someone who was all bark and no bite?

At this time, I am at a point where I have loved, lost, won back and lost again. I want her back, and in the process of giving it one last shot might come to the realization that that's not a possibility. I have sent my last letters, made my last phone calls, and stopped sending e-mails. She was sent two birthday cards; one was light, the other was heavy and contained a seven-page letter. It was kind of like Morpheus greeting Neo in *The Matrix*; I gave her two choices like he gave Neo two pills. The first was to just take the quaint birthday card wishing her a happy day; the other was a more in-depth card with the letter. Do I expect anything at this point in time? I can't say I desire something one way or the other. Sometimes, when life can be very

challenging and you feel somewhat like Job in the Old Testament, you really don't have the energy to fight on all fronts as you would like.

At one point I was doing contracting, making a nice penny for myself as well as pushing my book and concentrating on more business pursuits. The next minute, I was scapegoated by my boss (who incidentally asked for me to come work for him because his staff didn't have the know-how to do what was needed), and back to collecting unemployment. All the while I am pushing my book, freelance contracting and whatnot.

Actually, what is more interesting than anything else is the fact that I stayed true to my love for so long, even in the face of words and actions sent my way to hurt me. I am reminded of what a bar buddy told me that DMX said at one point in time, "don't take my life because you are not happy with yours." It's interesting the things that women will do to emotionally hurt someone, man or woman. In the whole scheme of things, she said things to me to hurt me, and for what? I would be the man who would stand by her, for her, beside her, and behind her no matter what happened. I guess I am the opposite of the man expressed in the lyrics to Sade's "You're Not the Man." But then again, we all make judgment calls in choosing whom to deal with.

If my financial base starts to erode, how many women would actually stay the course with me? It seems that the more people have depending upon their lifestyle, they might not be able to deal with someone whose life pursuits, career-wise, is different from theirs. I think it's hard for a person who has always worked a full-time job, or in general worked for other people, to truly appreciate what it is like to do your own thing, nor have the drive (and guts) to do it. You become a person very alone once you start to do for yourself, and in that you find out the people who really are there behind you and those who aren't. However, you really can't judge the lack of support by other people; take what you can get and keep on your path.

For me, I have always had an entrepreneurial spirit. From drying cars off at the automated drive-thru car wash for change when I was less than 12 and selling candy in junior high school, to starting my own company doing web and database development, to independently publishing my book, producing the DVD, the poster and working on a

low-budget independent film. Yes, I have had limited successes and some business failures, but everything is a lesson and you really have to look at the long-term and not the short-term. If you are in business for the quick buck, then you are not in business, you are into the hustle. That which may not be launched today can be refined, reworked, repackaged and sold tomorrow. Hey, I have business ideas from the mid and late 90's, a manuscript that I dusted off from 1997/98, recorded tracks in 1998-2002, a brain, and some God-given talent. As long as you can think, analyze, plan, envision, and act upon, you can succeed. Granted, not everyone will hit it big, but the goal might just be to have your basic needs taken care of comfortably for a long time, and everything beyond that is gravy.

Some people have wondered why would a woman break up with someone who is about to hit it big. Well, I am hoping that it is not a matter of finances, and I won't believe it/myself. Everybody has worries, questions, concerns, and dislikes. It has just always been my compunction to try to work through them and solve whatever problems you might have with a person when you love them.

Granted, just as I look at other people whom I have known for years and not moved any closer to them, she might be looking at me the same way. However, I have never shared so many experiences with them and not made a bigger move away with so much emotion for them.

I would like to express that this book will undoubtedly cause some interesting conversations. It doesn't have one point, one central movement, but many diverse points to look at, from both sides of the male-female relationship dynamic. It will allow you to look critically at yourself and your past relationships indirectly while looking at my thoughts and my ups and downs.

This book will also undoubtedly cause some friction in my life with some of the women I know I have not chosen to be the one² for me, as well as those I spent time with while I was getting to know "her" better. It might cause more drama than I anticipate, but what the hell, you only live once and true friends can respect what your heart desires

² I must state right now, because life is an ever-changing experience, and what you decide today, might not be what you decide tomorrow.

or desired, even if it may hurt their feelings for a moment. Anyone of them has known me for a significant amount of time, and for whatever reasons, let that opportunity get away at that point in time. This is not to say that one of them is not destined to be the one for me, but at that range in time we have already spent together, I guess it wasn't meant for them to be the one just yet, if it is ever meant for them to be the one. There is a reason why things happen the way they do, whether fair or unfair. Everything is a matter of cause and effect.

There is a reason why I have known people for years, and had on-and-off relationships that have spanned that time. There is a reason why two people can deal with each other for a time, split, come back together again and have a wonderful time. There is a reason why people can get married, divorce, and then re-marry each other and get it finally right the second time around.

This book, in some part, is a healing process for myself. Some people have noticed that when I go through some emotional turmoil, I don't turn violent, or get drunk or self-destructive in any way, shape, or form ... I just write. It is looking back and realizing what you had, and sharing it, so that others on either side of the situational dynamic can rescue what they possibly have. It is me accepting what I didn't add to what could have been heaven (if it was meant to be that indeed), as well as what I subtracted from it.

This book is my admission that I believe things can be helter-skelter in the beginning, and that it might take three rounds for things to finally start to gel and click correctly. To me, true love can sometimes be like buying a high-priced model of a new car . It might take driving a couple hundred miles to shake out all the minor problems, and you might even need to get some parts changed or worked on to harness all the horsepower in the engine correctly, as well as get that real comfortable ride. That might take a couple of months and cost you more if you didn't get the warranty. You might even need to drive a loaner vehicle for a minute if you don't have a second car. However, once you get everything in tune with everything else, you won't part with that car for anything. You know what you have, you know what you put into it, and you know what you'll get out of it. You don't want anything new, "improved," or different. You don't need the new model with more cylinders, a redesigned front and interior, a moon

roof, and upgraded digital navigation package. Hell, you've got maps as well as knowledge of where you're going and where you've been, a smoothly purring engine that has been maintained with good oil changes, the moon roof just brings in too much light when you want your privacy, and you like the way it looks just fine. Hell, you've got a classic!

For women, I believe you will enjoy this book from the position of looking at the tale of a man who stuck to pursuing a woman he thought was best for him, even through setbacks and some bad times and experiences. You'll appreciate that there are men out there who will not walk away when things get rough, and consider you a lot more than just a depository for . . .

For the men, especially those who have been in this position, you'll find comfort in the camaraderie that someone else shares your experiences, and told it to the world, so you know you're not the only one doing this.

This book also is a merger with another text I was writing called *The Secret Thoughts of Black Men in Love*. Let's address this part of the equation.

The Other Component of the Book: Its Intro and Forward

You know what is supremely funny and sad at the same time, are the reactions I get from Black women to the title of my first book *When A Black Man Loves*. The questions, which are really venomous comments, usually are one, if not several of the following:

“Can a Black man love?”

“What does a Black man love?”

“When does a Black man love?”

“Does a Black man know what love is?”

Originally, I was going to try to take this flip side of the original book and answer not only those questions and many others, but hopefully try to alleviate them from being asked, if not, assaulted on myself and other Black men, in the future.

However, after a few rounds of additional heart “experiences,” I am changing the premise of this book somewhat to not only look at the what’s, why’s, how’s, and other questions regarding Black Men in love, but to look at us (Black men) and see how we deal with all aspects of love, both with someone and without.

This book is a little different. It’s all about the Black man, one Black man in particular, and his love for the Black woman. Not all Black

men are insensitive; conversely, some are extremely sensitive on the romantic level as well as on an emotional or empathic level of understanding of what women (Black women in particular) go through in life. I myself am the product of a single-parent household, having been raised by my mother and growing up with my sister. Most of my good friends turn out to be women, and we usually find ourselves in conversations about the dynamics of Black male-female relationships, as well as interracial relationships and how we each feel about them.

When I was younger, and my mother worked two or more jobs, I had to hang out with my older sister and her friends. As you can guess, I hated it greatly, but it also gave me a great deal of exposure to sisters and how they reacted to brothers.

For many, but not all stereotypes there exists a shred of truth, for the best lies are based upon a small amount of the truth. For every generalization, there are exceptions to the rule. And so being, for every emotional trend that emerges, there is always the reality that the strongest statements are the ones that are heard and echoed the most, and in many cases, they just might be negative.

I think those are the ones that are most expressed in regard to relationships in general. They become even more convoluted and pervasive among ourselves as African Americans when we are talking about each other. For those who don't know it, we can blame much of our plights and perils not only on slavery, but things that were done to us during that time. More than anything else, we have the Lynch Agenda³, which has done us the most harm.

From all of this, we have suffered the destruction of the Black family unit over the course of the last four generations. Its not that we never had problems with children born out of wedlock and bad marriages, but we pulled together as families and as communities to take up the slack when things just weren't right. Since then we have had changes not just within society as a whole, but changes within our own microcosm of the American experience. As things in this country changed the old dynamics of the roles and men and women in society

³ If you don't know about this, then you need to research it

into new dynamics, we have had to deal with the effects of those things.

An example would be the initial movement of Black men into corporate America in greater numbers, as well as the proliferation of the Black male athlete in professional sports (I say initial simply because while during the 60s and 70s, under the reforms of education and diversity in the workplace, it might have been easier for Black men to gain access to jobs in corporate America, things have definitely shifted). As things changed, these avenues opened up to us. The negative aspects of this were the abandoning of both the community and the Black woman by a number of these brothers who made it to that side of the fence. Some Black men have even shamed themselves and their race by saying things like “there is nothing a Black woman can do for them.”

I once read an interesting editorial in an issue of “Black Male” magazine (I only picked up the issue to see who to send a press kit to for my first book). It dealt with Black men dealing with white women and used the example of Quincy Jones. Jones, for everything he has done, has married three white women in his life, never ever marrying a Black woman. While the author goes on to express her displeasure, and things that we can see about him and his [perceived and exemplified] attitudes toward the Black woman (if he really had self-love, wouldn't he have looked at home first?), she also talks about what could possibly have him go that way. In this she discussed how the women he married possibly were more patient and supportive of him in he pursuing his musical interests, while on the flip side, the Black woman might have been on him to get a “real” job because the rent and other things had to be paid. The author went on to say that the reality is that white and Black women in America are living two different realities, and in that, our women, Black women, have the concern of making sure that we are surviving and advancing...

The corollary, or flip side, to this is that while a number of Black men have made strides in corporate America, the number of Black women have surpassed the men in corporate America as a whole. While the jobs that normally were higher up the totem pole were reserved for men in general, times have changed. The most notable aspect of this really has nothing to do with the positions that are occupied, but the

salary disparities. While the disparities between white men and women doing the same types of jobs have been very wide, those disparities between Black men and women in the same situations have been very slim to nonexistent.

The second aspect is that more strong Black men are not being allowed into corporate America for the simple fact that we are men, and other men are not scared of our women, but of us. How that plays out is that there are numerically more Black women than Black men, and that ratio increases when you apply it to areas such as higher education and corporate America. While our successful and educated women are looking to find, date and marry men like them, the reality is that there are fewer men who fit that profile.

Some of those men may choose to date white women (in some cases because they are feeling too much pressure from Black women, but I am not making any excuses or allowances for their actions; you ask and find out yourselves). Some of them may choose to try to be the biggest players that the reality of the numbers game has allowed. Some may choose to marry outside of their race, to another person of color. And the rest might be just looking around and trying to find a woman that they can have a long and fulfilling relationship with. The first of the preceding examples can be viewed as negative aspects (to Black-on-Black love).

The negative aspect of this is that there are a number of women in those vaunted positions saying that they can't find Black men, but there are a number of Black men in all walks of life who they pass every day and do not even consider as relationship worthy.

This book is written from the point of view of a Black man, and will take strides to always express the other side of things, or to show that there are exceptions to every [mass] belief. It is written from the inner anger and turmoil that Black men harbor from everything that grows within them from all they experience from birth to death.

This book will not be perfect, but it can at least start to open up lines of dialogue between Black men, Black women, and mixed groups of both.

First Point to Ponder: Whom Did You Fall In Love With?

I don't know how much this book wants to bring out in me, or should I say the process of writing this book, but one issue comes to mind: whom did you fall in love with?

In the DVD/film I produced (*When A Black Man Loves: The Men Speak*) one of the first questions posed to the men is what was their ideal woman. Of course, it was answered from the most logical aspect that hits me first, and that is of the physical.

In the last weeks of writing this book, or really re-writing it, I have come to look at the woman who drew this whole process out of me in many different ways. The most important issue was that of the physical. The main thrust of this point is that we fall in love with whomever our heart moves us to, not what our minds try to decide for us. While we might at first look at the physical, when it comes down to our hearts, that is not so much a determining factor as how that person makes us feel, that is unless we are that shallow.

There are many things to consider regarding whomever you fell in love with. The easiest thing to look back and reflect upon is that as the love grows, there are certain things that don't really matter as much as when we actually met the person. For me, I start to admire all of the curves and the lines that a woman has, whether they are crows feet at the corners of her eyes, the stretch-marks gained from aging as well as the ordeals of childbirth and pregnancy, the scars a person gains over

time from injury as well as chores and duties such as gardening, etc. It could be the gradual loss of hair, receding of a hairline or the thinning of the scalp. It could be looking at the changes in the contours of the skin on their hands.

But the question of whom you fell in love with goes even further on a deeper level. Sometimes, we fall in love with the wrong person, or maybe the right person but at the wrong time. Whether it is simply a case of bad timing, or something else, who knows?

What's more interesting is to hear people talk about whom they dated, were involved with, or were married to. It's amazing how after it is over, or when they are upset with each other, how they paint a totally different picture of the person. You would think then, "why the hell are you with them?" And sometimes we besmirch that person so much to the people who know us, that if and when we rectify the scenarios or dynamics with that person, everyone else who was told cannot allow the relationship to proceed in an unencumbered way. Let me say it a different way; those people who heard the emotional distraught will not necessarily be comfortable in the company of you and your lover, and might consciously or subconsciously make situations with them in the presence of the two of you uncomfortable.

"If I am a loser, then why are you with me?" "If you are a loser, then why am I with you?"

I think we see things in others at the beginning, and when things don't work out to how and what we would have expected them to be, we start to lose focus of what we saw there all along. There are some things we ignored, which might have been detrimental to a good relationship occurring, but I think we also (at times of stress and unrest) forget the good things we saw all along in the other person. It doesn't matter if a relationship is to end, or if it is not to work out the way we wanted, but that we honor and respect the person for the things they brought to the table that attracted us to them in the first place and allowed us to stay with them as long as we did.

The Good Foundation to a Relationship?

I had to throw this section in, because it came from several conversations with friends over the course of about a month. It came from different angles and at the same time allowed me to look at past and current relationships, as well as possibly what to look for in future relationships. It gave me a better glimpse of what went wrong in the past and for what reasons. And in that, it actually allowed me to look at every relationship that has ended in a different light. Take note of the fact that I did not say “failed” relationship, but just that they ended. In life, not every relationship is supposed to be around forever, just as it is rare that you go to work for a company when you leave college or high school, and then stay there until you reach the age of retirement. That’s just life.

What I am talking about, and what I think is the basis of a good foundation to a lasting relationship, is that of emotional faith: trust, truth, honesty, support and confidence based upon the acceptance and understanding of each person’s visions and goals.

Okay, I know that is one hell of a whopper for you, but let me slowly start to break it down and piece it all back together. Mind you, that while I am doing this, I am somewhat biased to my own state of affairs; the risk taker who believes in building an empire while starting out with very little. The maverick; the rogue; the mustang. The guy who can’t fit into the normal system not just simply because it doesn’t suit him, but the conventional system will not accept him anyway because of his independence and ability to cross fences, jump hurdles,

sidestep catastrophes and always be the biblical David slaying some encumbered behemoth of a Goliath. Okay, maybe I am building it up a little, but damn it, I am the author. Laugh dammit.

It all started with this: A good friend asked me if I think that women settle for men (beneath them) simply to have a man in their life. My answer was a resounding yes. No one wants to be lonely, and of the two sexes, women definitely dominate the demographics of settling for less. I can still remember my buddy Tyrone saying to never underestimate the generosity of a woman. It's true; we all know cases when we look at women and wonder why the hell are they with the guy they are with. It always isn't an issue of the sex, is it?

But therein lies the problem. I believe that to make it, people don't necessarily need to have exactly the same goals and visions, but at least be accepting and supporting of the goals and visions of their partner. Yes, you do have cases in which the goals and visions are headed in two separate places, but as long as they don't conflict with each other that might not be a problem. Not everyone has big goals either; some people are content with working a "regular" job, having a house or an apartment, a car, and taking the daily happiness that life has to offer. And then, your partner might not be able to help you in all the ways you need to achieve your goals, so what does that leave?

I believe that the answer comes down to the concept of emotional faith. I know I am putting many different components into this term, but I believe it is truly the key.

Sometimes it doesn't matter if a person is the same as you mentally, financially, physically, etc. What matters might be how they make you feel in spirit, and what they bring to the table. How many of you have dealt with a partner who has emotional insecurities? You know how much stress and drama that that can bring to a relationship. We all have baggage, and it is only a person who is "unconscious" (word for the day, which means they lack consciousness in some areas) who believes that they bring none of this to the table.

Emotional faith entails the concepts of truly believing in that person and offering them what you can from the heart and soul, and nothing else. However you manifest it is up to you, but you know when someone is really in your corner and also when they are not. But let

me give you a little corollary to that, or really an exception. We all are not going to understand the visions of others, or even truly see them achieving all of their goals. Everyone has goals and dreams, and not everyone has the talent, the drive, the urge, or the complete package to pull it together. That is life. Just because you can sing your ass off doesn't mean that you are the material to be the next big thing in music. Just because you can play ball like no one else in the NBA doesn't mean you'll be the next Jordan. Life is not filled with simple equations, but many paths that can be traveled with a lot of obstacles along the way.

Additionally, along with the concept of vision is also the issue of goals. Goals and vision are not the same concept, nor are they so far removed from each other. Goals might take the form of steps to achieve a certain vision, or just things a person wants to have attained if not accomplished. Goals might be something on the order of just having visited so many countries, or the desire to go on vacation each year to the same area. A goal can be something like wanting to get a master's degree, or having a room in the house that is totally color-coordinated. The basic array of goals for men and women tend to be split along well-defined areas, and in that it is normally pretty easy to help the other person meet their goals, at least the ones that require no great output of anything more than some cash and maybe some elbow grease.

Now let's throw in vision. Vision is more or less the understanding and imagining of a path that allows for a future that leads to other things. The execution of vision can allow goals to be attained and acquired, but will also allow for continuity and advancement. Very few people have vision, while a lot of people have dreams, wants and desires. A goal might be wanting to purchase a million-dollar home. Vision would look forward and not only seek to attain that home, but also to facilitate the mechanisms to maintain having it for as long as the desire is to occupy it. A goal might be to have a job or a career, but vision might involve wanting to own your own company, if not multiple ones.

If you take a look at entrepreneurs, you'll find that the most successful of them disdain being in a basic corporate environment. You can also easily see the difference between vision and goals in employees and

the types of jobs they seek out. Sales is one of those areas where the most successful people have no umbrella, they work entirely on commission. While they might not be their own entity, they have a vision that takes them so far and allows them to achieve their goals.

Now, this is where we have the breakdown factor. The Bible contains a verse regarding yoking uneven oxen, and somewhere in that passage we can surmise and liken the issue of matching up people who have visions and goals. Take one of vision and one of goals, and depending upon the details of each, we can easily analyze what the end results will be in most cases. Not all relationships last, and some relationships change dynamics as time goes on, or shall I say that the feelings of the people in those relationships change over time. If one person had vision, and another person had goals, and if there was a lack of emotional faith between the two of them, then what they have is a shell, an empty shell at that.

Here is where I look at me ... I have vision, always have, and always will. Some people I dated had it, and most did not, but they all had goals. For some, depending where they were in life, their goals were well defined. To me, they were irrelevant because what I want and was planning was so much more. I have been able to not pay attention to certain areas of cosmetics in my life simply because my mind was focused on steps in the bigger picture. This is not to say that I dress(ed) shabbily, or didn't take care of myself, because that is quite the opposite. For me, it transpired into me not really working about always repainting a room, hanging drapes and/or curtains, or stripping down woodwork to its natural finish. I could not care less about yard work or whether I had grass in my front patch; my answer was to just throw some weed-killer on the whole thing and keep on going. The car is a means to get around, not some baby that needs to be washed and detailed every other week. Besides focusing on business, learning more, and upping my skill sets, the only other focused time was in the gym; not to look good but to be physically effective at whatever I set out to do.

Now, how does this affect my relationships, you ask? Well, being that most of the women I dated were older, depending upon what they have achieved in life, and in regard to their visions and goals, there might creep in enough issues for a relationship to start to develop cracks and

fissures. Some women are looking for a man who is going to walk into their house, and their heart, and start to act like they are their husband and as second nature start attending to the chores around their house. Depending upon where the man's mind is (getting back to goals and visions), some of those things might be the furthest from their mind. For me, I will gladly say that I do not automatically assume that role of "pseudo-hubby" and have dropped the ball more than once in this regard. However, I have said that if one needs some help in this area, just ask.

Their goals might be to plant some flowers out in the front, or in the back, while I might be thinking about programming a web portal that could allow me to not have to work for the better part of a year or two.

Their goal might be to just bring up their property value by making home improvements and also looking at the resale value of their car. My vision might be to facilitate business along several areas that will allow me to purchase the house I want and have all of its bills taken care of for the next three years. And regarding the car, well I will dog this one and then purchase a better one once I have made the first good deal. They might want to dine out every week and go to the movies; I might be comfortable with renting some DVDs and watching things on my home entertainment system in my bedroom. They might want to go on vacation, and I might look at the possibility of losing several thousand dollars worth of billing clients.

This starts reaching the point of emotional confidence and support all over again, but much more on the issue of confidence. That person has to be confident in your vision, and seek to understand what it is you are thinking and accept it for the good points and the bad. And they have to understand that it will take awhile before your life gets to the point where you can easily take time off and just do something "normal." This seems to be the funniest dilemma I get in with women; they are cool when you are spending time with them and money on them, but let them not get to see you because you are working your butt off and that you might have to conserve money for awhile, and the dragon rears its ugly head. I once (officially) started a monogamous committed relationship, only to be able to see the person once a week because I had so much stuff to work on for a client and had bills to be paid. We lived about an hour apart and had two different schedules; if

I spent time with her at her place, then I was losing precious time programming for the client in the commute and acquiescing to her schedule. Not that I didn't mind spending time with her; I loved it. However, I had my own house, car and bills to worry about, which no one but myself was going to take care of.

I think that right here I should state that sometimes the responsibilities and demands that accompany vision can be overlooked and not understood by the other person in the relationship. That is not to say that goals also don't carry the same demands and responsibilities, or that basic life doesn't carry them also. I have to mention (for the benefit of all the single mothers) that the men who date them don't always realize that her kids come first, and that spending time with them is more important than spending it with a man.

This all deals with the issue of understanding the vision of your partner, which is the most important component of emotional faith.

Conversely, sometimes part of being emotionally faithful is being honest with someone who doesn't want to hear the truth. If you care about someone, you owe it to them to be honest with them, and if you don't understand their vision, then try to learn what you can to better understand their potential to live up to their dream and achieve their goals. Once you understand their vision, then you can give your own assessment to their odds of achieving it. This is your judgment and it might be right, or it might even be wrong, but it is yours to make. Not making it is more of a detriment to the relationship and really lets the other person know how much you actually consider, or respect, their goals and vision.

Now I want to get back to the issue of women settling just to have a man in their life. This is my book and I can choose to vent where and when I want to, and of course to have people rebuff me on my venting, but that's cool too. What peeves me are the women who put their emotional faith behind a man with no vision and only mediocre goals. It's true that you can only lead a horse to water, but I mean there are people who might get it and be inspired, and people who will never get it. Now this is not to misjudge anyone, nor underestimate someone's potential; I think we all have potential, but to be able to manifest it kinetically is another thing entirely. It usually takes someone believing in another to get the [second] person to start to flower and

bloom; the hard part is finding the person who can get that out of a person. Then, we also have to come to grips with the fact that some people just will never do certain things barring an act of God.

But I am talking about those women who invested themselves and more behind those men who didn't have a vision, if they ever had any goals at all. Am I upset? Hell, yes. Don't think I would not love to come across someone who could help me realize my dream; someone who could bridge the gaps in making the connections I have not made yet. Hey, I would love to live the life of either lead character in the movie *Cocktail*; one winds up a boy-toy to a wealthy woman, the other married to one. Ladies, men have fantasies too, just my luck that the women who come across my path like that I am not attracted to, or it's the wrong time and the wrong place. Women, if you are going to back someone, back someone with the drive, the passion and the forethought to go and learn that which they don't know, and think and act outside of the box. I remember Jay-Z's *Song Cry*, in which he talked about the woman who backed him when his program wasn't in the best straits (financially credit-wise). What's he worth today?

And sometimes it's not even about that. Sometimes you just need a person who spurs you on to bigger and better things and lets you know you are on the path and that they believe in you.

She might just be the woman to come over with a six-pack of beer, a bottle of Chardonnay, a big bag of Swedish fish candy and give you a back massage. She knows I am talking about her.

She might be the woman to come over with three bottles of wine, and you watch a movie and provide your own other more stimulating forms of entertainment. She knows I am talking about her.

She might just take you out for some quick drinks and a nibble to eat to cheer you up. She knows I am talking about her.

This section comes from many parts of my heart. For me, I had finally met someone who moved my heart in so many ways it was ridiculous, and my life started to fall apart. Besides that, not only did we have some areas of conflict within our own dynamics, but I did not know how to overcome those things, or shall I say change the dynamics. Hey, I remember a question into my goals that turned into a huge blown out argument on Christmas; if I could've only had the time to

show her the other side of the question she asked (and yes dear, it was something that involved learning the major points of, because the question was truly ambivalent to many things; this is a note to her).

As I said before, I will put myself out there, because someone has to lead by example, or at least let others learn from them. In this, I am an emotional cadaver; pick me apart and learn what you can doctor.

Back to the issue of emotional faith; it involves not only being honest with someone, but also truly coming to understand their dreams, goals and desires. It's one of those things where it's not just about you anymore, but it's about the two of you. It's where you make a stand and honestly give 100%. It might be just your heart, it might be more. You might hold some things in reserve, but as long as you give your heart and are honest with what you can and can't do, what you will and won't do, then you have laid the groundwork for a good relationship. If that is less than the person can accept, then hey, you tried.

Yes, I have fucked up my credit rating by taking a gamble on someone, and I know that many sisters have done the same for a ton of brothers. In my case, the money wasn't the issue; after loading up some of my credit cards the IT bubble burst and I was without a job; so it wasn't her fault. Hey, but I was at least willing to gamble on that person because I had the vision to see where and how they could succeed with that talent that they had, despite what they didn't have.

Emotional faith involves that truth, trust, honesty, support and confidence in your partner. You know if you ever take a typing test there is a sentence that talks about how Mark Twain said something in regard to how a compliment can fuel him for two weeks. We all hear so much bullshit lip service, but to have someone really be there for you and give you words of support; words that will spur you on; words that uplift you when you are down.

It involves trust of knowing that the other person is there for you, and would never do anything intentionally to hurt you. They are not going to cheat on you no matter what comes their way; and if someone cheated on you in the past you have to be open and honest to understand why they did it and that this person is totally different from them.

Emotional faith also involves understanding the goals and visions of your partner and being honest with them regarding their limitations when they don't see it for themselves. And being that truthful consists of being confident of the relationship you have and their acceptance of the level of intimacy, emotional intimacy you share together. But sometimes for that to happen, your partner has to have the same background and experiences as you, because then they can easily relate to you.

And in case that the person has had emotional faith in someone before you, and it didn't work out as planned, then they still need to be open to giving you 100% of their emotional faith. You are someone different, and if they can't give that, then what do they really expect from a relationship with you anyway.

RE-ANALYSIS OF VISION WITHIN BLACK MEN

Earlier in this book I discussed the caricaturish, if not sophomoric, manifestations of Black men in America. Remembering conversations with people along the way, I have to re-address those points. It is ironic when I hear people talking about the destruction of the Black male character and the advancement of the Black race, when their actions are in abject defiance of the words they speak. But don't get me wrong, we are all hypocrites on one level or another, and the people with some of the biggest mouths are the worst. However, when I look around and hear some of the arguments, they become nothing more than foolish prattle when coming from the mouths of some people. I am not saying the world is just, but that we need to be real with regard to bias and whatnot; everyone has prejudices.

Right now, I am talking about vision, and it's something most people don't truly have. Dreams, wants and desires are nothing more than that, but they are not vision. I am 33 years old and coming up on my next birthday, and it saddens me to see so many of my peers (in regard to the level of age and race) who can't see the forest for the trees. It seems that the people I come across in my age group fall into several sets. I can't name all the sets and really don't care to, but I do have a problem with the fact that so many Black males are trying to identify themselves as a baller, pimp, thug, player or hustler. What's most depressing about this is that none of these roles have any vision; they

either laterally transfer to the next level or they simply stay in the same frame of mind. There is no “what’s next?” simply because in entering the game in that capacity, it is like being in a job with no opportunity for advancement.

Then we have what’s considered “keeping it real,” “being ghetto,” “keeping it gully,” and “gangsta.” Flash news alert; true gangsters have many levels and at some point all have legitimate businesses in which they might exercise some off-the-record pressure to steer opportunities their way. You never see the upper levels trying to act like they are tough, or continually referring to themselves as gangsters. Real gangsters inspire fear on many levels, and can also assume corporate boardroom attire and posturing, even though everyone else in the meeting might know what they truly are. Real gangsters are part of organized crime, which is more than your “man an ‘em.” The Yakuza, the Russian Mafia, the Chinese Triads, and the American Mafia; those are gangsters.

Keeping it ghetto or gully speaks loudly of the fact that you don’t have vision. Hell, I am sure you don’t even know the true meaning and history of the word ghetto. Why would you want to stay in an over-infested area filled with chaos, drug dealing, drug use, lack of hope, stifled dreams, and almost no opportunities? Why would you want to leave that as your legacy for the next generation? Why would you want someone else to believe that it’s really “all good” there?

Those characters -- pimp, player, thug, etc. -- all pray on other people. Where is the vision in that? Vision is building something where you offer a good or a service that people readily pay for, and get other people to pay for as well. Something that is legal above all else. I am not saying that some criminals don’t have vision, but damn, if you are that smart then surely you can find out a way to make money the legit way.

I see folks from the ages of 5 and up who insist on speaking some of the most ignorant English I have heard, not only from the aspect of it being profanity-laced too much, but also from its poor grammar and syntax. Who wants to hire a person who can’t speak good English? And if so, what kind of job would they really be employing them for?

Above all that, we have the tattoos and body-piercings. If that's what you like, fine. However, getting them in the most visible places is not such a bright idea; the neck, the face, any exposed areas. For the women, it's really bad when they get the tattoo of a man's name someone on them. Doesn't that kind of mark you off from dealing with anyone else if, and when, that relationship ends?

Lastly, we have the drug use. Yes, I hate to break it down to you, but marijuana is a drug. It actually amazes me at the number of people going into a store to purchase "blunts." Let's be real, they don't just smoke blunts, they smoke blunts with reefer inside. We have kids in high school and junior high school doing it, not just people other than that. Newsflash: modern drug tests take a strand of your hair, not your urine, and even if you are bald they can still take a lock of hair from your eyebrows, beard, etc. And hair is like a tree when it comes to forensic analysis; each small layer is a snapshot of what chemicals were in your body at the time that it was produced.

But what's most depressing is the fact that there are women who gravitate to these men, and some who only are attracted to men like this. That's really bad.

Anyway, I just had to say that.

THE CRUX OF EMOTIONAL FAITH: TRUTH

As I was talking to a friend in the mental health field, discussing some of the issues that affect us as African Americans in this country, as well as some of the dynamics that are part of our lives, she talked about the underlying factor of everything, and that factor is truth.

To be in a relationship that works, we have to be truthful, not only to the other person, but also to ourselves. And at that crucial juncture, we must be truthful with ourselves about ourselves. We have to be truthful about our hang-ups, as well as be truthful about our shortcomings. We all have them, no matter how complete we think we are.

We are all hypocrites in at least some part of our lives, whether it is a big part or a small part. We say we want certain things, but when it comes to us, we don't want to accept it. I remember being in church a

long time ago and during the sermon the minister talked about people praying for one thing knowing that they wanted something better. The example he used was that when you wanted a Cadillac, you just prayed for a car. Now everything has at least two sides to it, for thus is the reality of metaphysics. We often want that which is not in our league, and thus in not either raising up our own bars or others not looking outside of their normal box, we become frustrated when things don't work out.

When it comes to relationships, there are so many variables that people don't want to consider, some of which might have merit and some of which might not. In some ways, there is someone for everyone, though possibly not in the way the person wants. We confuse lust and infatuation with love, and that only makes us harbor bad feelings when things don't work out as planned.

As a Black man in America, I see so many issues, concerns and problems that affect us as a people it's not funny, and those things exponentially increase when it comes to the issue of relationships. It's not that those aspects don't affect people of other ethnic backgrounds, but the dynamic of Blacks in America is one of the most bedraggled and unique in the whole world. In a society of excess and ignorance, we of all people seem to easily forget the negative aspects of our history in America, and those who forget the past are often doomed to repeat it.

If we were just a little bit more honest with ourselves on a larger level, it might allow us to be a little more honest with ourselves on a personal level. All we have is each other, and if we cannot see that which affects us all and deal with it, then for the most part, individual achievements can easily be glossed over and subjugated to the bigger things that are affecting all of us. No matter what you achieve, you always at one point have to go home, and by home I mean you have to deal with your people, Black people, wherever they might be. When you lose the ability to do that, you lose your ground, you lose your reserves. You can get a great job and move out to the suburbs, but not all of your family and friends will be able to do that. There will always be a reason for you to visit the city, if not the inner city, or in the least deal with someone from it. It's a dog-eat-dog world, and dogs are nothing more than a derivative of the wolf. Wolves are pack

animals and when you “dog” can no longer travel from pack to pack and ingratiate yourself into its social structure, the pack will destroy you if not excommunicate you.

Some dynamics of relationships are so simple that people can't believe it's there. For whatever reasons, two people can find themselves together and in that, they have to understand why they are together and see what kind of future they have together. It might not have to be permanent, but whatever they have should be fulfilling and not something that will take away from the both of them.

Women have to be honest with themselves on what they are bringing to the table, and so do men. Since everything is symbiotic and cyclical in nature between the sexes, we have to be honest with each other in what perpetuates cycles of bullshit, and what will break those chains.

As men, we struggle with looking at women as our equals, and for the most part we are not equals. For millennia, men have been indoctrinated to relate to women a certain way, and it will take generations for things to get to a point where women will not be offended by us and where we won't have niggling thoughts in the back of our minds when they do certain things. Reality to women: we will always have some niggling thoughts. All men are not the same, though most of us share the same instincts that are part of the fabric of our DNA, our chromosomes, our hormones and our masculine legacy. The mind is more powerful than the body, and in that we can limit our urges, or at least see the benefits in changing our actions and ideals. Isn't that what societies are based on?

However, on the flip side, there is the reality that we want the sex, and women need to understand that entirely. Ladies, there is a difference in a man wanting you, and men wanting to be with you. You need to understand that difference, and live your lives accordingly. For just about every woman there is at least one man who wants to have sex with her. Now whether or not he is drunk, drugged out, or sober is one thing to consider. Whether he will respect her afterward is another. I would even pose whether or not he respected her before or even after.

Ladies, you also need to be honest about yourselves and what you do to obtain interest from us. We all know our initial attractions are based upon looks and nothing more than that, and that men are the

more visual-minded of the sexes. Older women need to be honest with younger women about what men want, and the benefit of leaving men alone for awhile, using birth control, and getting an education (meaning a college degree).

It seems right now that we have a whole generation of younger women, starting in their early teens, who are so into having sex (trying it in any which way, shape and form) and being with men, they are not aware of the possible repercussions that will reverberate through their young lives. I see so many of them doing whatever it takes to receive attention from men, and hopefully for them, men who are older than them. We have a whole generation of them following what they see in rap music videos, trying to emulate the women that are part of the visual landscape. These same women who are not given any empowering roles, but are merely there for their carnal qualities and essence. These younger women are now doing so much to look like them that they actively, though subconsciously, hate themselves. I have never seen so many women wearing wigs, weaves and extensions, and let's not forget the tattoos. What makes it worse is that they all look like loose carbon copy clones of each other. And anyone who understands the simple laws of supply and demand realizes that when you can get a lot of the same, or like, products and services, then the value of it decreases in more ways than one.

And we men are sharks at times, if not total rakes, especially when we are not wise enough to understand the long-term implications and effects of our actions. In that, there is many a man who will say what we need to say to "complete the transaction" of getting in that woman's pants.

Let's take a brief walk down this road and look at a scenario. A young lady starts to physically mature. Due to peer pressure and the constant bombardment of sex in the media, she tries to emulate what she sees and what people seem to get attention from. Somewhere out there, at least one man (and we all know that one is way to small a number) sees her and starts to work his "Svengali-mack" on her. She being young, impressionable and desiring to follow through and get some rep, hooks up with him. Here is where it can get interesting; she can either get pregnant and/or catch an STD. Let's hope that if the latter happens, it is not HIV or Herpes because one marks you for life, while

the other one totally destroys you. She does everything she thinks will keep this man around; part of it is not going away to college. She falls in love, and for him she is just a mere conquest in a chain of links that he will build for all of his life. She leaves that relationship and possibly has a few more just like it.

She is now in her mid-20s and because of everything she has been through, which hasn't been overly productive for her life in total, she now has the feeling that there are no good [Black] men out there and vehemently expresses that in thoughts, speech and actions.

Am I the only one who has seen this scenario unfold, or different stages of it?

Now men, on the other hand, have to be equally honest within themselves about themselves. And I know the women out there are ready for me to dole out the whole dirt on men right here, but I've got good and bad news for you (women); I talk about the issues of honesty throughout the whole book and the shortcomings that both sexes make when it comes to being honest with ourselves, our hearts, and our desires. But right now, let's look at us as men. The difference between men and boys are the lessons that we learn. We play the game, though most don't realize that women invented the game; we just play lower levels of it on boards on which they don't care to position their pieces. The trifling amount of things we do mean a lot less than a few likewise actions that they could do in turn, for emotionally they are wired differently than us.

Many men miss the boat; it's not about the number of women you have had sex with, but the times you have experienced love. It's not about saying what you need to say, or doing what you need to do to bed a woman, because if in the end you don't see anything more in her that you want to connect to, and at the same time she went for your actions but never really looked at and/or into you, then it was an empty experience. Granted, mostly as males we amass a ton of empty experiences, and we wind up usually missing out on a good one because we were out chasing the cat.

We as men have to be conscious of ourselves, and what we really represent when we look in the mirror. I'll be the first to tell you that there are some things I have done that I am not proud of, and that's

with a willing female, but that latter variable didn't make it right. Trying to play to a woman or lying to a woman to get sex has no honor, and what we need to reclaim as men is our honor. If we did that, we wouldn't have to see so much bull on shows like Rikki Lake and the flurry, or slurry, of man-bashing all over the media and in the products of the entertainment industry. But if we want that to happen we are going to not only have to start taking responsibility for our past actions, but also start thinking and making the right actions in our futures.

And until we can love ourselves, how can we love anyone else? All we have in this world is each other.

Being honest and truthful with ourselves allows us to pass our wisdom and knowledge onto others so that they don't make mistakes that will seriously impair their development as well as their lives. All we have is each other.

The issue of honesty and truthfulness will strike home throughout this book, as this book will undoubtedly make different people look at aspects of themselves along the way of reading it. "If you throw a rock into a pack of dogs, the one that yelps is the one that got hit." I know I am going to hit a lot of people, and there will be a flurry of people pulling me aside to talk about what I said. Oh, and I won't back down from it either. I believe I have covered all aspects of this concept (and even more with that last subsection), and I am sure this section alone will be the instigator of at least 1,000 conversations.

The Best Man: And the Pearls Within

You know, you never know when you may leave this planet, and sometimes you never know when it's the last time you will see or hear from someone else. Sometimes, when you have that chance to say something, write something, create something or produce something, you need to make a point and send a message that will stick for some time. Everything I write a book, record a song, or produce something in film or video format, it's a chance to do so.

"Discretion is the better part of valor." This is something my good friend Tyrone Lacey used to always tell me. Well, even as I expose my own life in books, I have to sometimes use discretion so that someone else's dirty laundry isn't aired, or just some things that were private. It's kind of hard at times to be able to effectively distance everything, but sometimes you just have to try.

In this whole journey, I feel a little connected to the character of Harper Stewart in *The Best Man*. He wrote a book, and when making references to his life, too many people close to him took things the wrong way. Yes, some shit will always come out in the wash, but you definitely want to make sure it is caught in the lint trap. It is amazing how people look in the wrong places for patterns, and then don't see the issue of something that you did once, you doing again.

I write about the component of my life called love. That is not to say I don't have other manuscripts secreted away that deal with other thoughts of mine, but I have cast my drops into the see of print by writing about love, my love and how love affects me singularly, and

Black men in general. The first book *When a Black Man Loves* did get me some interesting reactions from readers. They ranged from some not wanting to look at me a certain way simply because they looked at the book as encompassing all that I wanted in women, to others who sought to be the next person in my life. Some people that I dealt with loved the book, including the sections that pertained to them, and couldn't read it simply because they knew what they lost.

Several weeks ago I had been looking to rent *The Best Man* simply because of the dynamics involved. I feel myself easily connected to the main character, Harper, and parts of his dilemma. However, it was also easy for me to see my connection to other characters, or some of the dynamics between them, if not how some people saw me.

A part of me was Quentin, highly talented and able to transition from one area to another. Rejecting the basic (or traditional) career paths of many other people, but not the womanizing part of his character. My ability to flirt (at times) and meet people can definitely be misconstrued by people who don't truly know me, and my integrity. But there was also his honesty, you could respect him simply because he was honest with his shit, and could thus be honest with you about yours.

I was the nice guy Murch, in his attitudes and actions toward his Shelby, because I had found someone that I thought highly of and wanted in my life, not that she might have been the one for me. Maybe if I would have asserted more dominance, some of that would have been resolved?

Though I can't say that I had many traits of Lance, which is kind of weird. No, I could say that my rigidness in looking at things through my point of view without accepting those of others at times, even when it hits deep.

Summarily, I was definitely Harper in many ways. I have had to worry that the words in my book will not hurt certain people before, but in this book, it's one person in particular. How can I tell the truth, be open and honest and not paint the full picture? That's a true challenge, but it is something I will attempt.

In some ways, I had part of a Robin in my life, but as we go to the airport scene, will she be there when I tell her "I need you?" That's

the hard part. However, this does remind me of the connection to Lance; we might be strong in every other area, but somewhere we have an intense emotional weakness (which also led me to be somewhat like Murch).

I know a few Mia's in my life, but never crossed the line. There are times when I wanted to with a couple of them, but knew that in opening up that door, I might not be prepared for all there was to follow. And I have met a Jordan once or twice in my life, and one does definitely stand out, but nothing will happen unless she sees something different.

The movie had a lot to say, and in that, packed a lot of things in which we could all relate to all or part of it. The characters formed a completeness of the inner dynamics shared by all people, and we could understand the love and the anger between ourselves, and people in our lives, just as we saw the individual dynamics unfold on the screen.

In the adage from Tyrone, I will make changes, sometimes subtle and sometimes glaring, but sometimes that's what you gotta do. I mean after all, this year has pretty much beat me up so far that I don't know what else I can do but to try to survive it. Maybe it was karma that I rented it on Saturday before a final chapter between "us" unfolded. It was later that day I received an e-mail from "her." I was walking away anyway and just wanted her to have a copy of the book, so I had mailed it several days earlier. Well, the response/feedback I got was typical "her" when she was in one of her "modes." I did offer her the opportunity to tell me what she didn't like so that I could make changes, but that's not what came back. What came back was nothing more than anger, seated atop whatever feelings of hurt there were before we came into each other's lives. What was said was more irrelevant than how I replied. Of course, the first thing I did was to respond with calm vitriol dissecting her attack, and saying what I had to say.

While I didn't go ballistic or make false accusations, I did say what I had to say and maybe what had to be said. I became Murch, dismissing Shelby succinctly and surgically, with no anger or animosity. But I spelled it out like only Quentin could do. Yes, I had to look at the scene in which Harper blamed Jordan for all of this, but Jordan spun it back on him that he wrote the book. Yes, these were

my words and they had done some hurt to the wrong person, just as the book *Unfinished Business* hurt Lance. And no matter what, there was someone in my ear (maybe an angel) letting me know that I had to do whatever it took to fix it.

That said, when this official release version comes, I know I can rest assured I did my best to tell the truth and be discreet; after all, it is/was written out of love. In the end, would it have been any different if I would have written it as a novel?

Precursor: What Love Is

1. A deep, tender, ineffable feeling of affection and solicitude toward a person, such as that arising from kinship, recognition of attractive qualities, or a sense of underlying oneness.
2. A feeling of intense desire and attraction toward a person with whom one is disposed to make a pair; the emotion of sex and romance

I can't speak for every Black man, or every man in general, but I will tell you what love is and how love feels to me.

Love is that feeling when you get in your car, cruise, and remember the times you traveled those roads going to or coming from the house of someone you have/had those feelings for. When you either let the windows down or the top down, and think of them at your side, or all of the drives you took together with them at your side, or you at theirs. When you play music that you played when they were beside you, or you were going to see them.

It is that feeling you had on the first dates and times with them that when you remember, bring a nice smile and a warm thought to your chest if not a hot rising somewhere else in you.

It is thinking of their voice as music, angelic pipes and knowing that you need to hear it again to calm you down and allow you to sleep peacefully.

It is when you hear a song that reminds you of a romance, or a romantic time you had with them, for the music was there, or it embodies part of the dynamics of all your relationship, or just a snapshot in time of it.

Love is when you see the make and model of the car they drive, not necessarily the color, and you try to glance at the driver to see if it is them.

It is seeing or hearing names of places you have been and remembering having them there by your side, and reliving the experiences in your head as your lips curve into a smile that only you and other people who feel love can truly understand the depth of.

Love is when you can wake up beside them and desire to snuggle them closer. When you look into their eyes the morning after and know you want to spend immeasurable days, nights, months, and years with them; when at that time you look and feel content. Love is when you long to lay your head on their midsection or their Venus mons, or have them laying their head on your chest. It is the feel of spooning them, or them spooning you, while finding the peaceful metronome of your intertwining spirits.

Love is when you accept them, curves, scars, imperfections, issues and all. Love is seeing the beauty within and not trying to change a person, but only trying to bring out the best in them as they will allow you too.

Love is that tickle in your heart, soul, and mind when your eyes take in the world. When you see the smile on a baby's face or small children playing. When you see an older sibling taking care of a younger one or a younger one trying to take care of an older one. It is when you look in the faces of your elders and think about all the fun things they might have done in their lives, and you still see the pep in them as they cut a rug or just throw a little "when I was your age" escapade.

Love is not holding hands, but holding hearts. It is the duality of fire and calm after the storm; the ability to fall into each other's arms and souls after a tumultuous moment. To be able to kiss, caress, and hug the tension and differences of moments before away, knowing that in the end, you will be in their life as they will allow you, and they the same in turn.

Love has levels, and love has corollaries. Sometimes love is knowing you are not right for that person right now or maybe never because that spark is not there and never will be there. However, sometimes love is just taking the time and giving things a chance and seeing if sparks exists and dealing with it accordingly. It is allowing yourself to be open, and beginning to see what there is to see and feel what there is to feel.

Love is sacrifice. It is feeling something special when you realize all that your mom has done for you, all the little things she got for you, when she was struggling with no support from anyone else, and wasn't making beaucoup dollars herself. It is recognizing the sacrifices that others made -- friends, family, and people who never knew you, because they either believed directly in you or in a concept. Love is sacrificing time, money, material possessions, and opportunities, if not your life, for someone or something else, because your heart was there.

Love is looking ahead and looking back as well as looking at now. It is when you remember the good times fondly and when you remember the bad times, but look past them and keep going forward with them because you see being with them as something special. It is awaiting the next time you will be with that person and wanting for it to be a special moment. It is trying to do better the next time and wanting to treat them as it might be the last time you are with them. It is knowing that you have today, for tomorrow is never promised.

Love is sometimes telling the truth, because the person needs to know. But love is also not revealing things so as not to hurt the person. Love is the ability to make that call and accepting the outcome nonetheless.

Love is trying to get it right the first time, for you have had experience in what not to do. Love is making up, and trying again, because we all make mistakes and everyone is unique. Love is going back, with the impetus of going forward; closure of the past, but paving a new future. Love is knowing that you are not the only one who changes, or has changed, but also looking at the reality that other people can change as well. Love is living, and trying, and getting back up repeatedly after the world and life keeps cutting you off at the knees.

Love can lift your spirits or bring them down when you are not with the object of your affections. Love is pain, love is happiness, love is everything and love is eternal. Love is something that I will never stop doing, until I am no longer here.

Honesty and Sensitivity

A friend of mine who loved the first book asked me to write an essay for Essence magazine, which was looking for writings by men. I choose a topic with which I know a lot about the former and am trying to learn more and more about the latter. Here it is:

The main the issue in relationships (from a man's point of view) is not money, looks, and sex (even though the latter is important); it is the issue of honest and sensitivity. Women want men who are honest and sensitive, yet if we men are totally honest, that causes problems. Secondary to that is the issue of expressing sensitivity; we too often have heard, if not seen, women ridicule a man for being sensitive, either to his face or among other women.

The conundrum is the strong, sensitive man. You might ask for him, but if you truly get him, he might show an Achilles heel that you don't want to see, because you still want to view him as the prototypical Black buck who has been categorized and stereotyped throughout history.

But we men do have a sensitive side, yearning to get out from under years of socialized perceptions and dogma of machismo and express ourselves. If you want to see a man come to grips with his emotions, sit him in front of a television and play "Antwoine Fisher." Hell, I cried and stopped the movie and called up an ex-girlfriend (who I was trying to win back, and who had told me the title character reminded her of me). I had to stop the movie and wound up writing her a four-page letter, then waking in the morning and continuing with my

thoughts. It's the kind of work that is moving; I get the same responses from some people who read my book *When a Black Man Loves* and are not yet prepared to deal with the emotions it brings out of people.

I even held a contest through my website to get people's opinions of what a strong, sensitive Black man is. What I received besides poems were testimonials and self-affirmations, but for the most part they were not good concepts.

One friend even said to me, if you really want to get a woman back, or keep a woman with you, cry with her. However, if we shed those tears we will forever question if and when that experience will be used against us in a fit of anger during a disagreement or when she is feeling pressures from the world; yes, women do sometimes take their anger out on the man in their life who is willing to hear what is affecting them, and try to make it better.

The issue of being honest about our sensitivity is not only on the heads of us men alone, but it is a process that can be healed with our life partners and other halves, our women. Some men, when faced with not being able to be open and honest with their sensitive sides, either avoid our women entirely or pursue half-hearted relationship and experiences with women whom they could never see themselves in a serious relationship with. It takes a strong man to admit to the world in general how he feels, but to his boys as well. An extension of that is sometimes just taking the time to be by yourself to heal your own wounds, instead of hopping in bed with a woman, trying to hide the hollowness they are feeling in themselves with each stroke in her spirit.

Summarily and quintessentially, if we can start to be open and honest with our sensitivity to ourselves, our peers, our mates and the world, then maybe we can finally discover not closure to parts of us, but new beginnings, and start to succeed as more wholesome individuals.

Just Why In The Hell Should You Listen to Me?

JUST WHAT THE HELL ARE MY CREDENTIALS?

I thought to write this simply because of two things that happened in my life as of late. The first was a preliminary conversation with a principal at a firm who might be of assistance (professionally, of course) in marketing my book(s).

The second was as a result of looking at the books on “her” bookshelf. On this second point, I started remembering the books I have seen on the bookshelves of different women I know and have known, whether they have been platonic friends, or we’ve gone past that point.

Let’s address the first point, because the second will be addressed later on in this book in its own section. When initially discussing the potential to employ this firm in marketing my book, the principal asked me what were my credentials on a professional level to aid in marketing my book from that academic standpoint.

First off, I am not a professional counselor, nor am I a therapist, psychologist, psychiatrist or anyone trained and/or certified in the fields of behavioral sciences or anything that deals with relationships. I must point out here that there is no formal training to become a marriage counselor.

I am just a man who is, always has been, and always will be forthcoming in his feelings of love and attraction with whomever I am dealing with, or in regard to them.

I believe a bevy of problems that come from relationships are a result of people listening to such “scholars” who in reality don’t know a damned thing. There is always a bunch of people with multiple degrees who can pontificate from an academic standpoint on some part of life, but in reality have never been there or done that.

I have met many people who can talk about the human body and [what they believe are] its limitations and capacities who have never been anything more than a nerd who never really did anything athletic at all. Would you trust this person with your training? Or your body?

I myself normally hold it against someone if they have a degree in psychology, and the points against them add up for every advanced degree that they have in that discipline.

Why is that? Well, I feel that most of the theories in the field of psychology are based upon studies and theories that are universally applied without deference to cultural and ethno-cultural differences. And for the most part, that is a huge variable in how we act and relate. This is not to say I think all people who study and practice in this field are not without merit, nor that there is no knowledge in it. However, knowing that we think differently based on many factors in life, and knowing that those who struggle more are usually tougher mentally, I cannot accept the analyses proffered by many professionals in regard to human events. This is not a civilized world, and I have a problem with what the definition of civilized behavior is. Who decides what is high-brow and what is low-brow?

Sometimes the differences come down to gender, sometimes race, and sometimes social class (based on wealth). Most of the time, it is the combination of the three that play an important role.

A little African American child whose family is economically lower class raised in the inner city (for the most part) is going to have a pretty different view on issues such as conflict resolution than a white or Asian kid raised in a nice suburb where the median family income is \$150,000 or greater.

Now, did you notice how I just constructed the preceding paragraph? I only said that the African American child was from an economically lower class and where they were raised, but I said nothing of the values in which they were raised. The reality is that both children could be raised with most of the same class of morals and values, but the one area in which I know they are different is fighting. Culturally, we fight differently. And this doesn't mean that violence is always an avenue, I just know that the African American child probably learned early on how to "hold their hands" and to not take any crap.

When I was growing up, we never had Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). We had whoop-ass. That usually got you focused. I think psychologists invent half the stuff simply so that they can be a pioneer in a new area, or walk away with a discovery. Everyone else starts to go with it simply because if they embrace it, they'll make more money one way or another; taking kickbacks from drug companies to prescribe medicines for something that a good talk and some tough love would solve, or in billing time for treatment.

I have heard stories about how the children of the esteemed Dr. Spock acted out, while he was shoveling the buying public loads of his theories about the ways to properly raise children.

I remember working for the False Memory Syndrome Foundation. Though I was only hired to do data entry part time, it was amazing what you could see if you just typed in enough of that stuff. To give you a brief recap: During the 90s there were a number of cases of people claiming to have had repressed memories of sexual abuse and whatnot that had happened to them when they were children. They would go to a therapist for depression or something like an eating disorder, and then undergo hypnotherapy. These memories would then come out during the sessions. Sometimes, through therapy, there would also be indications that it was part of some Satanic ritual.

In some instances, you had numbers of children at daycare claiming that one or more members of the staff had sexually abused them.

The foundation was set up by a married couple who were both psychiatrists. Their daughter, also a psychiatrist, brought charges against them, accusing them of this. As I entered records, I start to see the patterns regarding the families of the accusers. I also read a

number of articles on the subject and had met people who were both victims as in being accused of the crimes, and also in being victims in accusing their parents of the crime. I noticed that almost all of the families were in the upper class or the higher echelons of the middle class. When the adult children charged their parents, they never took them to criminal court, only to civil court. The homeowner's policy and other assets would be used to pay the civil judgments. And of course, they would then be paying huge back bills to their therapists for all of the hours used in "discovering" that they were abused, and for treatment of them recovering emotionally.

I don't know about you, but this sounds like the biggest racket out there. Oh, one thing that I left out: damn near all the families were white. Another point is that the parents were professionals.

As I was talking to one person whose daughter accused him of that, I asked him why he didn't kick the therapist's ass. See, I couldn't see an African American mom and dad rolling with some crap that their child has spent time with a therapist/psychiatrist for depression, and now was coming out with some cockamamie story that dad had been molesting her for years, and that mom was with it because it was part of a satanic ritual. Especially if the parents were from the lower class or had worked their way out of it. If I was that father, I could see me whipping my daughter's ass up one street and down the next. The therapist, well let's just say that they damn sure wouldn't be practicing, and I might just be a hell of a lot richer.

Any Black person who grew up with tough love (y'all know what the hell I am talking about) would not dare come up with that bullshit nor bring that to their parents. I am not saying that you don't have Black men who molest children, and the mothers that just stand by and let it pass. You do, and I think that they are sick. The men should be whooped and tried, and the women should be... well, let's leave that up to the victims to decide.

Additionally, I learned about the issues regarding child testimony, namely the pitfalls in it. They discovered that children tend to say what adults want to hear as a subconscious desire to please adults, namely their parents and the authorities. It is not as if they are consciously lying, but merely providing the adults with what they want

to hear. As of late, the Pennsylvania courts system has enacted new laws for people who are accused through child testimony.

Read a good book that kind of deals with this by Dean Koontz called *False Memory*.

Now I ask you, “of all the books written by so-called experts who have degrees in psychology and sociology, how many of them embrace such things as ADD and the idea of repressed memories (like the ones described above)?”

As I woke up one morning, my mind also gave me another point to put out there: how many cases have we seen of anorexia nervosa have we seen in African Americans? I would surmise that when we have seen those cases, they are living in areas that are primarily white by demographics and might be one of only several families of African American heritage living there.

Yes, I have never cohabitated with a woman, and I have never been married, so what the hell do I know about relationships?

Well, this book isn't about relationships in total; it is about some of the dynamics of them that I/we experience as Black male(s) in this society. I know from whence I came, and can relate in that to many other Black men in this society.

I do know about love, and that what's this book is about above all things. When I come across something I am not familiar with, I ask questions. I might ask an older man or woman. It could be a female friend, or a male friend who I trust. I try not to ask the idiots because I know that ain't going to get me anywhere. And remember, do not ask anyone who is jaded or carrying some open wound that they won't let close. These people will make it worse by far for you.

A Message to the Sexes

TO THE MEN

Many of us are too scared to admit how we feel to a woman because we don't ever want it to be brought back up and used against us as a sign of us being weak. The hell with it! Pay that no mind. Believe it or not, one man's trash is another man's treasure, and while one woman is talking all sorts of garbage about you and throwing you out the door like an old moth-eaten chair, there is at least one other woman listening who is ready to pick up the pearl that the first woman doesn't see.

There is nothing to be lost by saying how you feel and how much you care. Maybe things wouldn't be so bad when we date women who have heard these things from a previous man, but their relationship just didn't work for other reasons.

True strength can be measured in the ability to admit one's weaknesses and shortcomings, and above all, one's emotions. Yes, life is a battlefield (for us in some ways more than women will see), but that doesn't mean you have to exist on just one level. Even the samurai studied the arts, not just the martial, but also poetry (haiku), theater (kabuki), music, etc. I don't know one man yet who doesn't have respect for the concept of the samurai warrior.

Case in point, there are two men I have known for some time who I have the utmost respect for. One is Master Al Dukes; military/ex-military, martial arts bad-ass, superhuman strength levels, strong

spiritualist, knowledgeable, and overall nice guy. I had the fortune of meeting him during the early 90s and training under him for a brief time. Here was the guy who could easily drop a bear with his hands, but also knew the benefits of technique and application thereof instead of brute force. He was/is a man of arts and letters, more than a nice approachable personality, and was always humble when it came down to it. No matter what I thought I knew, he always amazed me in many areas.

The other is Frank Gihan; consummate executive and good friend. Astute, learned, savvy, tactful, and diplomatic, also a very communicable person who is also strongly spiritually grounded. Frank has always impressed me with his modesty; the man has more achievement than you can shake a fist at but never lets on to most of them, and you find them out usually through others speaking highly of him.

In each case, each man is not afraid to talk about their emotional self, and each one is highly respected and considered a strong player in their professional areas.

The depth with which we express ourselves emotionally to women will only come back to us in other ways. In this, I mean all women, not just our lovers, but also our daughters, sisters, friends, etc. Whether it's that we start to change in the belief that all men are dogs, or that men aren't sensitive, it might help ourselves out directly, or another man indirectly. He might be someone your age, or someone in the next generation down. I can tell you this; if you look at all the bad press we face from women, can you imagine what our sons and grandsons will have to face if we don't make a stand and start reversing the trend(s)?

Additionally, many of us are trying to find a place in life to fit in ourselves. What is being broadcast and bombarded to the masses may not fit our individual identities, and unfortunately there are times when we go along with the flow rather than be our own persons. Right now we look at the so-called mainstream in our America and we see the flash of bling-bling, exotic and/or foreign cars and designer clothes. These things don't make the man, but they appear to be the physical "gods" of both men and women alike.

It takes a lot to be yourself and stand by that, and a lot more of us need to do it. Many are followers and in that, the road they walk will only last as long as that trend is in. The more we can express who we are and be comfortable in it, the more we can achieve as well as give back.

P.S. We also need to stop trying to be so damned hard all the time and then maybe we could save a few more of our own lives, if not save ourselves from some bad experiences.

So I am in the gym talking with Clarence, a.k.a. Giz, and another brother (I keep forgetting his name, but let's call him John). We normally have some deep talks regarding relationships, life and love anyway, but this talk is interesting. I am talking to them about the new book and some of the parts about it, and we start to talk about some of those issues in our lives. In the background, one woman is smiling at some of my comments. Anyway, I get to the point where I talk about expressing our emotions and the effect that the movie Antwoine Fisher has on me; I think that if you (as a Black man) do not shed a tear during *Antwoine Fisher*, something ain't right, but this is just my opinion. So Giz talks about the movie *John Q* and how he gets at the end when they take the father away. Now mind you that while he is telling us this story, he is starting to shed a few tears.

Next he tells us a story of a woman that he dealt with after he and his daughter's mother broke up. (Note: Giz is a happily married father who has a relationship/marriage that is truly a prototype for any Black couple to emulate). In this tale, he revealed how he knew he had to end it because of them not having the mental connection and that she would be much happier with a man who had that with her. This itself started to bring tears to my eyes. In some ways, maybe that's what "she" is doing for me.

Three strong brothers in the gym, talking life and love, not being afraid to shed a tear. That's what I am talking about.

TO THE WOMEN

Now here is the flip side of the message. Stop cuckolding men when they start to show their emotional sides. You wind up not getting men

to open up simply because from the times we are little, you (as well as other men) tell us that men don't cry.

Sometimes life imitates fiction, and as a nation of people raised on movies and television, we see so many examples where men who show their emotions are viewed as weak. It's always the nice, sensitive guy who gets picked on by the more "macho" men in just about any teen picture out there. And let's get real; in the real world you rarely have some benevolent and kind big guy who protects those kids who are not in the alpha male pack.

You gals don't make it easier for us when you send us mixed signals. One minute you want the buck, or the shark, or the man who can bang the hell out of you in bed, and the next minute you want someone who you can share your deepest emotions with and they understand you and nurture you. Get real! On minute you are saying "give it to me hard baby," and the next minute you want to cuddle. Hey, if I can be lost on that one (metaphysically speaking of course, because I am a cuddler), then so can the rest of the male species. For the record though, I am not saying I can't oblige you either.

If you allowed for us to be more of who we are inside, maybe, just maybe, we could change some of the issues and dynamic problems between men and women in general and between us in relationships specifically.

Stop dogging the men you know one minute who express themselves emotionally, and then fawn over celebrities like Maxwell in the next minute. But then again, it seems like the only men you want who are that sensitive are the ones who are now celebrities in some way, shape or form. I really want to know how those men had it with women before they started to hit it big.

Stop bringing your corporate and organizational prowess home into the relationships and judging us by the same standards you would apply to your other investments like stocks and mutual funds. Believe it or not, that is just way too much pressure for most of us, whether in the short or long term.

Yes, we need to feel respected and treasured just as you do, but the reality is that we as men are judged much more harshly in this society in regard to what we have achieved and what we possess. No man is

an island, and we really can do the most when we have a caring and nurturing partner to share our lives with.

One associate said that if things are going to change, it will fall on the women's shoulders. While I don't agree with this totally, I do understand the logic that women have the nurturing side, and right now we need a lot of that. This is not to say that men might not need to lay down the side of being disciplined and resolute in how we chart the paths for ourselves, our families, our communities and our race, but the role that women play is a very vital one.

It All Started with the Book

For those of you who don't know, I authored a book titled *When a Black Man Loves*. I have garnered some strong responses from both men and women on it. I respect and cherish all of the comments that came to me, some of whom you would find hard-pressed to want to read poetry, but then again isn't rap music poetry?

Being a totally independent venture, and like this book, I self-published. Sales were done via friends, festivals, directly and through small gatherings. Unfortunately, with so many other things going on in my life and lack of financial support, I wasn't able to take it as far as I wanted in the amount of time that it has been out.

However, you know when you write the second book, the first starts getting more attention.

It all started with the book, which is both fact and reality. One woman once told me that no woman who dates me should read the book. Ironically, when doing the taping for the DVD, the guys were teasing me, like the book was divulging secrets that all men are given at birth and which we are not to share with them.

It's funny, and by that I mean the reactions I get from women whom I have been with or have known for years, who have now read the book. Many want to know why I never wrote them poetry, or they ask me to write them some. They want to know why the things I did with

another woman I didn't do with them⁴. Hey, everyone goes through things and some things you only do for the person you have those electric feelings for. Cooking is one of those things; I used to have no problem whipping up one of my favorite dishes for a woman I was interested in. Over the years, I just started to slow that thing down. I did get a chance to cook dinner for "her," not that the chances weren't readily there (and I am sorry for not doing it more).

Then there are those who want to be the next chapter in the book, or maybe the last chapter that I have and never have anyone else.

However, sometimes you can be too open and honest, which is one of my fatal mistakes, and being that the book invites people to want to know more, it's many of those things that they don't need to know so it doesn't ruin a potential relationship waiting to happen.

Saying it all started with the book is at once a fact and a misconception. Remember that I said this book was the result of a relationship that started from me selling the first book. However, the book was in some way or another always in me. The emotions were always there that formed the poems that were a huge part of the book, it's just that my life was waiting for the players to come into it to manifest if out like it did and how it did. While the romantic component of my life was different – she was different – the overall dynamics of meeting someone, knowing them, loving them, falling apart, getting back together, and then letting life take its course was not too different. The differences were in the points of where I was in life, with whoever was that one in my life.

As I am rewriting this book from the original manuscript, I am also including those realities and emotions from those other points in my life, because truly they all exemplify the concept expressed within the title; still loving even though. Oh, don't think that this book wasn't influenced by a relationship with one woman, an angel. However, the dynamics encompass more than her, for else it would just be my call to her to take me back and make me the happiest man that I could be ...

⁴ Alla just asked me if I cooked for anyone lately; read the first book and you'll understand.

HOW WE MET

It happened in 1993, I believe the date was October 13th. I had been asked to attend to help with a men's program and also to provide some security for one of the speakers, i.e., act as their escort. While the event itself had me ready to go upside the promoter's head by the middle of the day, it allowed me to meet her. I had glimpsed her as she came in and for me it was love at first sight. Somehow, I garnered up the nerve to introduce myself; I have a shy side that only those who really know me know is there.

She had come there promoting her line of greeting cards aimed at African American men. We exchanged numbers and over time started having brief then long conversations on the phone. It wasn't until a little more than a year later that we first went out on a somewhat real date. I had already fallen in love with her looks, her physique and her mind from the first time we met.

I met her while I was on a temp assignment at a company. Some of the people in my division found out that I played several instruments and knew of someone who also played at least one of those instruments. We were introduced and I was very interested in knowing her better; she was just so damned cute. I asked a couple questions and got the answers I didn't want; I didn't think we were compatible. But I still would have pursued her if she had not had a man at that time.

She was short and cute, with those freckles that really throw a brother. I can't remember her hair, because over time she would grow locks.

What really got me about her was when I heard her sing. That really hit me. My break came when I called her one day and found out that she was with him no more ...

I met her through Yahoo personals, or was it love.aol.com? Either way, it was really she who met me. She saw my ad and then contacted me. E-mails led to phone conversations and then one day we finally went out. In fact, I was out of town and just came back for the

afternoon to have a date with her. I was attracted to her mind as well as body.

Our second date, I met her in another section of the city and before getting to the location I picked up a bouquet of flowers. I can't remember if I threw in orchids, in fact it might have just been white roses. Unfortunately, it would not be until the next year when we would really get together ...

I met her at a party at the University of Penn. She reminded me of a lighter version of Vesta, and in seeing her in stockings I was swept. I had met her through a mutual friend, and over time we came to become friends ...

I met her also at Penn, not at a party but while hanging out with some buddies who were students there. I was, or should I say that my heart was, hammered at first sight. I was at a place in my life where I was just trying to learn about business and proceed with the reckless abandon that a maverick to that game would.

She was definitely butter pecan, with what I thought was the prettiest face, lips you thank God for, and a body that I dreamt about from time to time.

We would occasionally run into each other on campus, but I never knew how to really step to her, or should I say I didn't feel comfortable about where I was at in life to say something to her. Then there was the time when we were together in a friend's room at his frat house during a party. However, I had way too much too drink, probably on the order of eight pitchers, and from that you could tell I was in no way to "put my thing down, or put my "mack" down that evening ...

I met her while going to the dentist to see about getting my wisdom teeth removed. Actually, I didn't meet her, but I met some of the other assistants and I could have sworn that the attending one saw my

interest in her and called her over in conversation so that I could hear her name.

She had a pleasant smile, a lovely voice and some dazzling eyes. She wore her hair very short, and reminded me of a life-size kewpie doll. She was a butter almond with a sensuality of cinnamon and nutmeg.

When I went back to have my procedure done, it was on my mind so much to meet her that I kept waking up during the procedure (while intravenously sedated) and asking the people in the room where was she at ...

I met her during an after work party at the Kat Club while hanging out with my buddy from college. I saw her, and the two of them started speaking. I found out that she was his cousin and I asked him to hook me up. Her response was for me to hook myself up. So, I went over after getting over my fears and started a conversation.

She was maybe 5'3", a medium brown complexion, wore her hair in a French curl, cute as hell, a Gemini and a twin to boot. She had some very nice hips, and a nice ass; you know how we brothers like our women – she had some nice back. Somehow, days later we took things from there ...

I met her through my “brother” while we were at the gym. I ran into her several times while I was working out by myself and after two times when we met up with each other we started to work out together.

She was a beauty whose heritage sprang from the West Indies, a little taller than myself, with the body of a long distance runner. She had the prettiest eyes, the most succulent-looking lips and a smooth voice. Her skin was the color of burnt sienna.

More than that, she was not only talented academically, but also painted some wonderful artwork. She had an attitude that I loved, but I had an attitude that went far beyond hers, but the latter could be said of everyone that I met.

[For the one who touched my heart the most, I write the most]

I was selling my book for the first time at a big convention. This just happened to be the Sisters event sponsored by Power99 FM in Philadelphia, PA on May 11,2002.

The day started out slowly, mainly from my inexperience in doing direct sales, but also from issues such as location (within the layout of the convention), no advance advertising of my book in any way, shape, or form, not enough decoration for my booth, etc. One main factor to be considered was that after writing a book that opened up my soul for a period of over 11 years, it is kind of hard to then go and market it to people who have never met me. Those feelings were very deep and intimate to myself, and it was not something that I could just as easily put out there as a mix-tape or some hair-care products.

Anyway, after a certain amount of time and only twelve book sales, I changed my approach and business started to pick up. There were times when there was no space for anyone else to come up and try to look at my book, and that was good.

Luckily, I was also not alone in this endeavor. Friends, both old and new, came through to help me when they could: Barbie, Pace, Maya, and my cousin Shawncie. It's great when you don't have to go and do something by yourself; it can be the loneliest experience and a very hard feat.

Then "she" appeared. In this book, I will always refer to this angel as "she" or "her." She appeared, and purchased a book. Within a few minutes, she asked me if I was single, and upon answering yes, she told me what she did for a living and asked me if she left her number would I give her a call sometime and maybe we could go out.

Anyway, whether she realized it or not, I was smitten at first sight, and of course I said yes. I had given her a once-over before giving her the answer, but there are times when you look at a person and see something, and this was one of those times. She proceeded to write down her numbers for me (she was out of her own business cards), and I gave her my card(s), telling her which number was the cell and which was my home; hey, I wanted her to have every way to get in touch with me. While there were a ton of other beautiful sisters walking around the convention throughout the day, I really didn't concentrate on meeting anyone else.

Later on in the day, she returned with a business card of hers that she did find. Two times I saw her in the same day; boy was I happy! At the end of the show, when we started to break down and I went to get my car, I was hoping I would run into her once more; I wanted to see her smile and sparkling eyes again.

While I was taking my crew out to dinner in appreciation for their help (sales could have been better, but we did sell over 130 books with no prior advertising or marketing, no name recognition, and crappy location), she called me on the cell phone. We made plans to meet up later on that night at one of my favorite spots in the city, CopaToo.

We had a wonderful time that evening, even still talking until almost 4 AM after the place closed for the night. I must admit that at our time at the CopaToo, I probably said one of the most honest, as well as stupid, things I could have, namely, that I was not looking for a relationship. I already had several people in my life in different capacities and was trying to figure out what was going to happen with them. While I saw a lot in her, internally and externally, no one can decide what will truly happen in the future between two people. This one statement probably did more to harm the future potential of us than any bonehead thing that I could do.

Her, she was definitely rum raisin, with a nice set of long shapely legs, the warmest smile, and the prettiest brown eyes that shone at you and into your soul.

KNOWING HER

Knowing her was getting to know her family, and in part her getting to know mine, or at least know my family dynamics. Not everyone got to meet my family, but that was not as much as matter of not wanting them to meet my family as much as sometimes what I was going through with them at that stage in time. There was a period in which I didn't deal with a bulk of my family for at least seven years.

There were also her friends, and not always were they the people who I would make my friends, or even my associates.

Knowing her was interesting, simply because she embraced beliefs in her life that I was not akin to. It might have been diet, lifestyle, how many times she attended religious services.

There were the weddings, times spent at cookouts and family reunions, going to the movies, cuddling in the renovated basement, hanging out at the club, or even drinks at the bar.

Knowing her was understanding her past as well as her present. It was learning the things that had hurt her, and the past relationships that had led her to where she was and made her feel and act in the ways she did.

It was learning her favorite colors, what she liked to do most, her dreams and the things that worried her. It was taking walks in the park, spending lunch together, or having dinner. It was the conversations when we were apart, whether local or long distance. It was dancing in the club, or enjoying a jazz concert at the waterfront, or a performance.

It might have been her coming to a performance of mine, seeing me in a pageant (there's a story for you all), watching me while I played drums for African dance classes, or working out with me at the gym.

Knowing her was meeting her roommates, both animal and human. In the case of the former, pets always loved me.

We had some wonderful times together, but we also had some bad episodes between us. There were dinners and times out for drinks in my neck of the woods as well as in hers. There was her taking me to concerts and me taking her to concerts. There were the celebrations of each other's birthdays and other holidays, whether or not it occurred on that day due to the differences in our schedules.

There was almost getting snowed in together during the big blizzard in February (I would have loved to, but I had some work that needed finishing for a client), as well as drives through bad weather, whether it was snow, snowstorms or rain so bad that you literally had to slow down to ten miles per hour. It didn't matter if it was her coming to me, or me coming to her.

There were fireworks for the fourth of July, whether at the house of a relative or in Philadelphia. Then there were the fireworks shared by the two of us.

There was coming to her house and cooking her dinner, or making her lunch and bringing it to the lab where she did her research. There were times spent in hotels and motels, whether Hojo's or the Inn of the Dove. Private picnics in the park or in a hotel room.

There were trips to places like Cape May, NYC, Ocean City, Washington DC and Virginia. There was the happiness in the journey, whether she was driving or I was driving.

These were the things shared among many, but not every person.

As I said, there were bad times, but honestly, I would have rather gone through some of those bad times with her than to go through good times with anyone else. I judge the strength of a relationship by what storms you weather together and keep going forward. It's no good knowing someone, hit a rough spot between you after you have committed some substantial amount of time together, and then they walk away from you. Get it all out at the beginning and have nothing but smoother times for the remainder of your walk together.

I remember all the good times, and many of the smaller points and memories in them. I can remember our conversations at the Erykah Badu concert and where we went for drinks before the show. Where we sat at the bar and what drinks we ordered. I remember holding hands when we went to see Floetry and India Arie.

I remember going to see a boxing match at a casino and hanging out having drinks at the Trump Taj Mahal at one of their outside decks. Having dinner at The Library or our Valentine's Day celebration after the day.

I still remember white beaches, two ferry rides, and the way to Ocean City, Maryland. A nice place called Secrets, and the boat ride there and back. Falling asleep during dinner. The Bull on the Beach. Walking on the beach, looking for sand crabs and finding a shark's egg case.

Ladies, when a man really loves you, he remembers all the little things. He might not remember the actual dates and times, but embedded in his memory are a number of experiences, as well as how he felt during them, whether good or bad.

One interesting thing in my life was that the experiences took on more meaning the older I got, or shall I say I was fortunate that the people coming into my life became better and better for me, and that the last person was the best person I had ever come across.

APPRECIATING HER

This section is lopsided because it only deals with one person, and that was the last person as aforementioned in the last paragraph of the previous section.

She was the woman who showed me the benefits of getting facials, pampering myself, and always having some good travel bags. She was the person who would make me feel good when I was tired, or just bring me something sweet when she came through that always cheered me up. She stood out among everyone else I ever dated or ever loved.

Now that statement will definitely cause me some problems, but I gotta keep it real. Yes, there were fun times with other women, women I have known for a longer time, but in most of those cases, the dynamics were lopsided, and it was me always doing something thoughtful out of my time, emotions and finances.

This was different in that she made me feel special (with all the little things that she did) and just spending time with me. She put a move on my heart so much, whether or not that was her intention (which I don't think it was), that in two weeks I knew to write her into my living trust.

She had an eternally kind soul, loving touch and gentle voice (except for when she argued with you, then her voice could take on a tone that would make you want to go blow up something; rule number one: a man should never hit a woman [and I never did or have]).

She had a lively sparkle in her eye, a warm smile and a cute laugh. She offered of her own volition to help me around the house with

things she knew I need help with (here I admit one major issue that factored into ruining the relationship; she had the insight to see and know where I needed help and offer it, and I didn't necessarily have the insight or the moxie to do the same).

I admired her for her independence and the spirit behind it. I can remember every little place we went, either in her neck of the woods or in mine. I can remember every little thing she did to make me feel special, or just because.

LOVING HER

I loved her for the beauty in her. I snuggled in her warm embrace and treasured running my fingers through her hair, if not just wrapping my arms about her and laying there together in a double spoon. At times, it was her head on my chest, and my left arm under her. At other times, it was me laying with my head on her stomach, or even the spoon with our positions reversed; she on the outside and me on the inside.

It was loving the smell and the taste of her, either from lips above or lips below. It was the massaging and caressing her breasts and the licking and the suckling of her nipples, and her doing the same to mine. It was the way that our bodies intertwined, whether while in the act of lovemaking, laying together after the fact, or just cuddling and sleeping together. It was the embrace, the times spent in showers together, if not taking bubble baths.

It was kissing her, and feeling the shape, outline and texture of her lips. Tongues engaged in their own tactile sign languages.

It was enjoying the taste of her pearls, either before or after her excitement. Reveling in the saltiness of her whether between her thighs, on her neck, or even behind her ear.

It was the sounds she made when we were together, and the sounds she made emanate from me. It was sometimes trying to muffle the exclamations of ecstasy with a pillow, or turning up the volume so that someone two or three doors away wouldn't hear it all. It was the great vibrations and banging of the bed-frame against the walls, and the screams that were so loud that when you left the house, you were

expecting the neighbors to look at you like “damn!” And if they didn’t see you when you left, then the next time they did, you just knew what they were thinking about you.

It was the rolling of her eyes when I hit that spot, and the wiggle of her hips. It was the stupid looks I gave when I finally could expel; those looks which I was either thankful for the darkness or simply had to place my head side by side to hers so that she couldn’t see the goofiest look on a face that otherwise gave off a serious visage almost at all times. It was the stopping of my heart and the shortness of my breath when she at last allowed me to usher myself forth. It was the temporarily blindness and the loss of blood to my head that caused me to grab the furniture when I stood up after the release. It was the curling of toes, the letting down of walls and the cleansing of emotions.

It was the “quickies” which still stuttered your advance out the door. It was the long endeavors that left you wanting to go to sleep and left your legs tired for the rest of the day. It was when you had wasted your time even trying to go to the gym after that. It was when sometimes time slowed and sometimes when time seemed to stand still, but hours had passed.

It was getting out the shower after the first episode and then looking back at her again after toweling off, and going back to the bed one more time. Sometimes even repeating that cycle two times depending on the day.

It was sometimes the agony and the prayers to God of just trying to let my body release one more time, after becoming less sensitive after getting the first one out of the way. It seemed like running a marathon and hitting the wall, and the act of pushing and restarting again and again; too frustrated to give up and too frustrated that it didn’t happen again yet.

It was the moving around and trying different positions, if not different places within the confines of the house. I will even mention to you that it is tricky doing it in a Toyota Tercel. It was the tangling in the sheets and sometimes the total destroying of the covers on a bed. It was the generating of sweat and sometimes the total drenching of the bed linen.

It was sometimes locking the cat or the dog out of the room, if not knocking them off of the bed when things were getting started.

It was the smells of the exertion of the act, of her, of me, and of us. The odor that infused the air and permeated for awhile.

It was the feeling I got when I was waiting for her to arrive at my door, or the feeling I got when I was driving to see her.

It was taking her in completely in my eyes, and understanding her heritage and the metaphysical dynamic of the coupling of us, whether physically or genetically, looking at us through the eyes of our ancestors.

It was sometimes being lost, whether in the moment or even more, and allowing her to find me and show me the way.

It was the sharing of energies, of allowing her to become part of me, and allowing part of me to also become part of her.

It was a heaven that in some cases I wished to not only experience with her on merely that level.

I must say this was different because she was not like anyone else I had ever been with, and that was the challenge of it, not as if I was looking for a challenge. Nothing was necessarily easy, and there were times when I could have been more reciprocative, if not more considerate (hey, it's something that every man should be honest about). It was dealing with who I was dealing with, and not backing down because of how I felt about her. It was about learning more and learning how to satisfy someone who had a different sharing, if not a slightly different dynamic with me.

In loving her, I loved the essence of who she was, and what I saw in her. There were no issues in me of her being too tall, or having to have a physique like a Hollywood actress or a model. She was the woman I loved, and I accepted her wholly for that person, and loved that person, internally and externally. Nothing was taken for granted, but each time was remembered and appreciated. I loved her for her curves and her imperfections. That made her even more real, and all of it was/is beautiful to me.

There was never a comparison of her to anyone else in my past sexual dealings, or thinking about anyone else when I was with her. There

was never a desire for another woman there, you know, the threesome that most of us men fantasize about.

There was only her and me, and the two of us together, and not ever wanting to lose that for anything. There were going to be no incidents of infidelity, going to strip clubs for lap-dances (ain't into them) or somewhere for a blowjob (and not consider it sex). I loved her for the woman she was, and the woman she is. And all in all, I looked at her as my present, my future and my end all.

We had some deep times, and sometimes in the heat of passion you let it all out. I am not a talker in bed, but at some point I let it all out. I mean a full-blown, no-holds barred life and love forever conversation. I have never had one of those before and I let it all out. She was who I wanted to leave the game for, and spend the rest of my days as happy as they could be with her. Yes, I knew that like any couple we would have an occasional fight here and there, but every time I looked at her, I told myself that this was the woman I was in love with, and I accepted her totally.

The Breaking Down of “Us”

Besides just some stupid incidents and/or incompatibilities and/or misunderstandings that occurred between us and sometimes contained the one or both of us, and sometimes others, the rest was basically insecurities and basic miscommunications within both of us.

Was it that I did something wrong versus she did something wrong? Who the hell really cares? The answer is that we both made mistakes, some of which were just natural mistakes, some of which were just plain stupid mistakes. The diplomatic thing to say would be that there were conflicts in our dynamics fueled by the differences in the two of us as people, which constituted our life experiences, education, dealings with others and philosophies, as well as outlooks on life and its many subcomponents, including the gray areas.

What’s funny is that I saw a copy of Essence magazine that listed that seven dating don’ts while I was in a CVS one day. I took a minute to scan through it, noting that in most cases the stories behind what you see on the cover is pure bull anyway, but was surprised at the truth in the article. Had we in some way or another visited all of those scenarios? The answer was yes, though not everyone was the same as spelled out within those two pages.

We both gave each other some unnecessary drama along the way, some of it that could allow us to chart solutions, and some of it that was just unsolvable. I guess the main things were that since I was adding another person to my life, I still have to understand how the

dynamics of my life would affect them, or how they would feel toward them.

For each person in my life the reactions, or shall we lightly say combinations, were different. Not everyone underwent the same experiences with me, and that is simply because everyone is unique. There is no overall formula to love and relationships and only so much of what you apply to one relationship can be applied to another with the same success, unless you lucked out in finding the same type of person and you were consistent in yourself.

There were people who got to know my family members, both immediate and extended, as well as some of my friends. Then there were some who didn't meet any of them. Sometimes that was intentional on my part, and sometimes I just felt that is wasn't important one way or another.

This would sometimes lead to problems involving the connections I maintained with friends of the opposite sex, some of whom I had previous (more than platonic) dealings with, but this should not have been a factor. The reality is that I know many people, some of whom are friends and many who are just acquaintances. I really don't believe in "bedding" anyone whom you cannot be a friend with on one level or another, so for the most part, that which didn't work out on one level can always remain cool on another. My old friend John, who has known me since 1991, actually said that the person for me is just going to have to be secure, and also accept that I am not going anywhere. I have been known to turn heads, but that doesn't mean I do it on purpose or that I accept the advances.

However, it says something that I have been able to keep the friendships, relationships, and affiliations I have after all of these years, through good times and bad times with both friends and family. There are people who remember me cursing them out, and we can sit down calmly and have a nice conversation. I am not the type of person to start with someone; I react where appropriate and react appropriately. Anyone who I have really had to get into their world will admit that I did it, only after being pushed to a point where other people would have reacted more violently a long time ago.

There is a saying that the brighter the picture, the darker the negative. Well, even the kindest person has issues, and the only person who may see them is the person they date. No one else might see it, but then again, why should they care; they are not the one that person is dating. Everyone has issues, and a dark side.

Oh, we had some doozies, and in that I mean just about every one I dated, but most of them I guess revolved around the differences in our lives; how I saw the world and lived it, and how she saw the world and lived it. In most cases, I dealt with older women and sometimes that can be a problem in saying something which slips their mind but that makes them feel insecure of themselves, or how you as the man see them.

She was older and had been handling her business for years more than me, and here I come doing something like telling her about how to walk in the city without looking like a potential victim as if she doesn't know how to take care of herself. Oh, there were other times when it was a conflict of my knowledge and experience of how to handle myself in situations, as well as see what was about to unfold against her laissez-faire attitude from growing up and living in the suburbs.

Then there were times when it was just the differences of upbringing and from that the differences of outlooks. Sometimes, when people are raised in environments where they have been shielded from the realities that many of us [African Americans] experience, their opinions and views on topics that relate to us can be different. Sometimes, those opinions and views can be viewed as abnormal (don't take offense, abnormal just means not normal and in this content it would be outside of the norm).

But you know, sometimes saying things to people, even if they've given you props for yourself and what you know, can detract from a relationship. Sometimes people can marvel at your accomplishments and knowledge, but you will still be the last person whose opinion they ask on something. Then again, it could just boil down to the attitude you might project, which might not be the attitude you have. Boy, I have made that mistake more than once.

My uncle once talked about sometimes being put in impossible positions by other people. An example is that they are looking for the pot at the end of the rainbow and telling you that you can get it, and it hasn't rained for weeks on end, nor are any storm clouds in sight. This could be looked in at this case as looking for certain things to happen, or have happened without giving them enough time to develop.

I admit I am the type of person that you either like or dislike; there are no in-betweens. First impressions can be wrong and most people don't know me long enough to really know me; I guess I am like both my paternal grandparents combined. In all of this, the person may be so concerned about how you feel about the differences between the two of you, they can dampen the chances of something special really taking place. I think that, well really know, that this was something I experienced with her more often than I care to remember.

I think that in essence, maybe she was looking for a man to fit into all of her desires and life easily and who would make her feel comfortable. In that case, she could have been any of them, meaning those women that I loved.

On the first part, I am who I am and I don't have ESP. If you want something, talk to me, not at me, or around me. Talk to me. In regard to her life, she had developed both a shell and a routine, and when you deal with someone else, know there will be growing pains and that it takes time to make adjustments. On the last piece, you must first feel comfortable with yourself and the fact that the other person chose you. Also, give them an honest chance, just don't assume that because they have qualities that remind you of someone else that they will in turn do everything that the other person did, especially if you see more good in them than the other person.

From my side, and this is part of me, I will say that I dropped the ball in many cases. I don't blame her for anything in particular, I just look at life as a series of events. While I realize now how I could have adjusted my words and actions in different situations to have affected different outcomes, it is the love I have for her which will not allow me to turn around and just skewer the history of what we had.

Sometimes, what you bring to the table the other person might want and might even need, but might not be ready for it at that juncture in

their life. Surely, we have all heard people say down the road (and when you are no longer in their lives the same way) that you were right and that they should've listened to you.

Love is not something that manifests the same way all the time, for each person who comes into your life will not only have a different effect on you, but you will have a different effect on them. For every person the dynamic we shared was different, but the core was the same. Yes, there were those who I had stronger feelings for, better dynamics with and whatnot, but the sincerity of the emotions were always true. There was no deception on that part. If there was something that I could feel, then I wanted to share that love with that person. The only flipside was that sometimes while you felt the love, you knew it had its limits.

Maybe we weren't mean to be, maybe we weren't meant to be as we were, at that juncture in time.

The questions and admission at the "breach:"

I found this while looking for something on my hard drive and thought it was interesting, so I added it. I wrote it right after we broke up and had a conversation a few days after.

Okay, call me exceptionally dumb.

Right now I don't know where 'we' stand in your eyes right now. Is there an 'us' and then you are just taking some needed parameters of time and space to figure this out? Do you want to go back to us just dating each other exclusively and it not being a 'concrete' relationship? I figured that it was more or less over, but by some things you said in our conversation on Wednesday, I knew that all the nails weren't hammered in the coffin.

Friday you also surprised me. I take you at face value and don't ever want to misinterpret your words. You talked about us being able to hang out and do things, and I cherish as well as relish that.

You also joked about the sex thing. So what do we do and we don't do as friends, if that is what we wind up as in the end? And what is it that we do now?

I have never been here with someone before [exactly]; I definitely don't wanna go through what I went through before and don't think that you will do that to me.

Today, I am blue. Boys night out was very interesting. We had a good time but that's not where I really wanted to be [at].

I guess part of me realizes in retrospect some of the things you want[ed], but didn't know them then [I knew that we were an 'us']. I can't say that if you give 'us' a chance, I will do everything at first, or whether or not I will do it all in totality. Though knowing what the stakes are, that pretty much makes it easy to figure out what I need to do. And don't start with the not trying to change me piece. As I said before, change is good sometimes and my biggest thing is that in some ways I crawled away from the world and a lot of different aspects thereof (like cooking and cleaning).

My words are simple and few. I want you, and need you, in my life as not only my better half, but as my best friend. If I am screwing up with you, don't let it go, take me to task for it and tell me to get my shit together. As a friend, I only ask for that much respect. If I am screwing up with something I am doing in life, get on me on it. I feel that I can do anything out there, as long as I have your love behind me 100%, and I will give you 100% myself, everyday for all the days that we are an 'us.' if there are things that you want to do, tell me, and we'll do them. Miami, or just getting away for the weekend, fine. What you want to do for fun is just as important as what I want to do for fun. We don't have to be cooped up in my house when you are in Philly, nor cooped up in your house when we are in your neck of the woods. Life, our life together [if it comes to that], is what we choose to make it [whether as friends or more].

For me, life is too short for me to blow the 'bestest' thing/person that has ever come into my life.

Deep inside I am a true romantic and when I fall for someone, I fall hard. I have fallen deeply over you. I just needed to get that out there and ...

Hey, I don't think that I have all the answers.

Whatever Happened to Going the Distance and Phenomenal Romance?

My question is unique and sincere. Whatever happened to a man serenading a woman because he loved her, even when she didn't look at him as potentially the one for her? We all know about those storybook situations, as well as the ones in the movies where some guy, normally the underdog, goes out of his way to win the heart of a woman who is either in another league or had been through some stuff in life where she did not have the ability to really trust a man.

In the former we have tons of examples and here are a few:

Dwayne and Whitley in *A Different World*

Lee and Havilland in *Hav Plenty* (my favorite movie)

In the latter we have heard those stories like when a guy marries a woman with five or more kids, and they live happily ever after. Or there are those when he sees something in someone who has been through a lot, and is willing to stand there with her, and by her so that the healing process can start and complete (could by any chance that be like *The Bridges of Madison County?*).

Along with the former, I guess I have always been the underdog. Normally, I would meet a woman when my program was not at the best level that it could have been. Hey, there are a number of men, Black, white, Latino, etc. who all know that feeling. When you have your money together or are at a certain point in life, you don't feel

uncomfortable with stepping up to the woman that you find attractive, no matter how different you might be.

Hey, you've got your car, a nice house or apartment, a job and a little money in the bank. You're not necessarily one paycheck away from having your ass thrown out on the street. You can afford to take her to a decent restaurant and a movie on the same evening, and still afford to eat and drive your car for the remainder of the week; I've heard stories of men eating nothing but macaroni and cheese or something like that all week just so that they can treat a woman out nicely one day of the week.

On the flipside, it's hard stepping up to a woman with a car if you don't have one, or you don't have an easy way to travel to her and take her out on a date. A cab sometimes is cool, that is if you have some good cab money. Then what happens if you are going to get lucky? Hopefully, you have a place to take her that she will feel comfortable at, or she has a place she can take you. Hey, years ago I used to live with my mother, but now she lives with me in my house, which vastly changes my "having a place to get busy" dynamic.

On the latter, regarding those stories where the guy comes in, falls in love with the mother, and takes her kids as they are his own and everything falls into place like dominos? I can say that, for the most part, I have never really dated someone whose children weren't grown. However, I have met some people who had one or two kids who actually made me consider "what if?" I also just remembered that one of my boys out in Detroit met a woman with five kids and married her. In fact, she was nine or more years his senior!

But what I am talking about is laying it out on the line. I mean, when the shit is hitting the fan and for whatever reasons (she is scared of falling in love [with you specifically, or just in general], or you've fucked up outside of doing something like cheating on her), she ain't feeling the "you" of the two of you together?

I will admit to anyone that I am a pussy when it comes to love; I fall hard and I love hard. I freely admit when I am in love and put my heart out there. There have been more than enough phone calls, e-mails and letters written by me in my time. Any woman who has been loved by me will readily attest to that. And the most important thing is

to hell with trying to act strong in the face of your friends and family; they are not in the relationship, you are! I am not having sexual relations with my boys, I am having it with the woman I love. To hell with what they have to say regarding my relationship; I want to get out of the doghouse and back in with the kitty! Unless I am married, or I know that the relationship is that strong where we can just chill out in our own corners for a couple of days and everything will then be okay, am I not going to be worried about the “us?” Then again, I can counter and say it depends on the woman and what I want. For some women, you will ultimately know how to deal with issues that may arise between you, but for the most part in my case, I like to handle a situation then and there. There is no reason to go to bed angry, and there is no reason to go to bed and wake up alone. That’s just the way I feel about it.

Note: this in no way implies that I fuck up regularly, but that maybe there were other reasons why they weren’t picking me then and there (read the first book for some detailed insight).

Whatever happened to showing up with flowers and/or some other things and trying to work it out? Okay, the drive thing is not always the best idea, as I found out the last time I did it. The first time I did it (the drive), I was trying to get a committed monogamous relationship. It was something I had been trying to have happen since the first of the year, but it took a blowup from an article in Cosmo to be the impetus for it to happen.

I wound up driving down to her job after picking up three dozen long-stemmed roses. On the way, with a conversation I had on the cellular with someone she recommended; her best friend. They heard my side and understood it and explained her side of the dynamic. One thing I had never considered was how much it affected her after all these years for the breach of trust someone had put her through (which they brought to my attention). Well, actually that was the thing holding back the relationship; trust. My side was if I want one, and you are holding off because you are scared, don’t be mad at me for not acting like we are in one, and by that, having to cut off my conversations with friends, some of whom might be past lovers and some who might not be.

Anyway, I arrived at her job and called her on the cell, and she told me she would get back to me shortly. Not knowing whether it was the temporary brush-off response or not, I went into a restaurant nearby and waited for the call.

The waitresses asked if the flowers were for any of them, or if they were for sale. After hearing who they were for, they all gave me deep wishes for what I wanted to happen (I never mentioned a name, I just gave them a short synopsis of me loving this phenomenal woman). Twenty minutes later, no phone call. So I leave a twenty to hold my beer and my seat and go drop the flowers with a note at the front desk of her job. Well, I get a call in less than three minutes and she joins me for lunch in about five minutes. Well, we then talked for hours and decided to do the relationship thing.

The last time that I did the “drive,” it went in the other direction. Let’s not go into detail, but I will tell you that it was not another person at the house or anything like that.

The reality is that in the games of love and war, there are no rules. What works one day might work another. What is deemed romantic in books and movies could become date rape or stalking in this day and age. Don’t lose your head or you will truly be in a world of grief.

But you see, that’s the problem. Men sometimes feel powerless, or are powerless in trying to win the heart of a woman. If she starts to see something good in you or has been in a relationship with you, you might be able to win her heart. However, if she has closed herself off to the possibility of you, then you might need to start looking for a good defense attorney.

I am sure that I can’t be the only person who liked the last scene in *Deliver Us From Eva*, where LL’s character shows up at her job on horseback and tells her that he is going to keep coming back day after day until she gives him another chance. Or the scene in *The Best Man*, when Harper tells Robin at the airport that he needs her, only to propose to her later during the reception. What about the ending scene in *Hav Plenty*, where Havilland approaches Lee and puts her feelings out there? And you know when Quincy extended the odds toward Monica in *Love and Basketball*, it made you feel something. But one

scene that sticks out most of all to me is when Dre calls into the radio station to get a connection back with Sidney in *Brown Sugar*.

The rules have been changed by women and we have our hands and our emotional hearts tied. One woman I know asked why men expect women to call us now or ask us out. Hey, we don't know when we are wasting our time pursuing a woman or simply if she just wants some free dates until she finds someone she is truly interested in, whether sexually or for more.

Winning Her Back [Round Two]

With anyone I ever cared about, I set out to win her heart back while at the same time still trying to live my life. You see, I had been in this place before and knew that I would not just go around pining for this one woman and not living my life. You can't, and I couldn't. Yes, I loved her deeply, and the people closest to me, as well as those who were good friends, all knew what was shaking in my life.

Okay, so she dumped me, but I felt as though all the reasons she gave were either bullshit or could be communicated through and solved. I kept looking for reasons in me that verified her point and tried to understand them, but the more I looked the more I came up with bupkus.

You see, when I had met her and got to know her, even though I might have vented about some of the episodes we went through, I never cursed her out or turned against her. For those people who had known me for years, some platonically, some "biblically," they all knew that she was a special person and probably the one I would settle down with. I praised her so much to my friends that in the first two conversations in which they would hear about her, they all knew she was a keeper for me. Oh yes, I will admit that I bitched about things as well, but they were never enough for me to ever look back at her and say I wanted to walk away. In reality, we had some real fucked up episodes, but I was never the one to just jump and lose my temper, and even she knows that. One thing I have is tolerance and temperance, and only those who know me very well know that. If I go out and

curse someone out, or knock the shit out of someone (which is rare for me to do because I believe that violence should be the last resort, though at times I know that you need to throw all the other choices out the window sooner) or step to someone, then it is justified and warranted.

Oh, there were times when I wanted to just get in my car and drive the hell away, but I knew that would send the wrong signal, and I didn't want that to happen. Back to the story: It is times like these when you know who your friends really are, and who the opportunists are. If you recall, I said that I still have friendships with women I have "been" with and that I would not lay down with someone who could not become my friend and that I could not see being theirs either. It amazed me; not the responses I got from people, but that they were so much wishing for me to get the person I truly wanted and deserved.

Along the way, I had become the male lead in the film *Two Can Play That Game*. It seemed like I was going through some seven-day cycle to really show her that I was true in my pursuit. Remember that I said that the book was sometimes a bad thing? Well, one major concern was whether or not I was just trying to win her back, but that in the end and if I did, I would just pull up stakes anyway. That wasn't the case, and it wasn't the first time I got that from a woman. Another ex-girlfriend also peppered me with that scenario, and before you ask, she and I didn't work out for other reasons.

I became the character, or the dynamic of his character at the movies' end, that once a woman had started to talk to me or try to get to know me, I would still be talking about "her." And that would of course ruin any new relationship I could develop. You see, at this point, the love demon had me in its clutches, and I could neither make friend or foe of it just yet.

The Love Demon – explained

The love demon is the spirit that comes over you and reminds you all the time that you are in love with a person who is not in your life right now the way you want them to be. The love demon is no more your friend than it is your enemy. The love demon is just there, taunting you, making you feel lonely at night, or when you go somewhere and are eyeing some attractive women (remember, I am writing this from a

man's point of view), but you can't bring yourself to make a move because you still have her on your mind and in your heart.

The love demon will try to fuck with you, and if you are a weak person, it will really get to you. It will make you stay away from all love songs or listen to them and feel like the sun is not as bright today as it was yesterday or that your food just doesn't taste that good anymore. It will make you slack off your workouts and stop eating (or eat more for those of you who go in the other direction). In my case, I lost 12 pounds of muscle, which took me about four years to put back on.

The love demon will have you remembering every little detail about the person you are now missing and make you miss them even more. The little scar they have, the way their toes lay, the way they get out of a car. Hell, the love demon will have your heart skip a beat every time you see the model of car they drive in their color. Not only will you get an emotional hiccup, you will then try to identify the driver, if you haven't already looked at the license plate wondering if it is really them.

The love demon might have you looking at the Caller ID to see when was the last time they called you. It might have you avoiding the spots and restaurants that the two of you went to together.

It will have you looking through all of the cards, e-mails and text messages you received from them. I remember being out with some of the guys on a Friday night, and a couple of them were teasing me in a good way. I looked down at my cell phone and started reviewing old text messages she had sent me. At that point I knew I had to leave. I was planning on stopping by an old friend's house who I was very much attracted to, which I did. However, I just spent the time sitting on the floor at the foot of the bed with my head on her lap and just sleeping.

The only way to defeat the love demon is to come to grips with the fact that you are in love, whether partially or wholly, but that you are in love. Make that call, send a letter, a card, or whatever you need to mail. Do something, but don't just sit there letting the love demon punk your emotionally retarded ass out everyday.

Both my best friend Pace and I were being affected by the love demon at the same time. Him with a woman named Melanie and myself with “her.” Well, I was determined to beat the love demon and win her heart back.

Visuoautospousophobia

The date is September 28, 2003, and my condition is getting worse. The love demon is really giving me a run for my money now. For those of you looking at the medical term I just put together, it actually is a combination of Greek roots meaning fear of seeing the model of the car that your ex drives; I might have inadvertently mixed Latin and Greek roots, so don’t kill me. Maybe I should really change the word to be an “-itis,” which of course would be an inflammation. Hmmm, but of what, my heart (cardia), my emotions (pathos), my love?

It all started on Friday as I was driving to the Congressional Black Caucus annual event in Washington DC. While on the road, I keep seeing the same make, model and color of the car she drives, and every time I see one, my heart flutters. Of course, the last thing I want to do is see her at the event with someone else. It gets worse when I see tags on one with the same state as hers; no, I never memorized her plate number so you know my butt ain’t obsessed, just in love. At one point, I need to pull up to one driver until I see he is some Asian dude and I can calm down a little more. Yes, I would like to see her again; that’s how love feels.

On Saturday, I am leaving a friend’s house and headed back to DC and talking on the cell phone with Pace, my best friend. I am telling him about it, and then another one rides by. Saturday early evening, and I am back at my friend Montressa’s house getting ready for the main event, the dinner. We were talking about Erykah Badu earlier and she wound up purchasing us both copies of the latest CD, *Worldwide Underground*. As we are both getting ready in different parts of the house, she put her copy on and had it loud enough so we could both listen to it. For me, it brings me back to when “she” took me to a Badu concert. That concert was the bomb and made me run out and get Erykah’s live album. We actually got to go backstage and I gave Miss Badu a copy of my book. I still have my ticket stub; I saved a reminder from about everything we attended together. What reminds

me is that she performed some of the songs on this album at her concert.

Well, track number four, *I want you*, is one of those infective tracks that has gotten ahold of me and starts bringing out those feelings; I play this song over and over. As we arrive at the parking facility for the dinner, I see that vehicle again, parked!! I later got a chance to walk up to it and see the plate, and knew it wasn't "hers."

Today, as I leave for home, I put on the CD and just let it permeate through me. Of course, I see at least two other vehicles just like hers and have to go through my responses/reactions. It's funny that this song is Montressa's favorite on the album and becomes mine as well.

Okay, I am near Philadelphia and give Tonya a call. I tell her about the experience I am going through, and she says for me to write about it in the book. We are joking about it as a short skit in which a guy starts taking out drivers on the road with that same vehicle; it could probably become a nice cult flick.

And then of course, I come across three more of them between the point at which I call Tonya and where I get off my exit on Route 76 West. Our conversation is funny in that Tonya says I know I am feeling that way because I am in love, and I can't lie to myself that the feelings are subsiding because there has been time and distance between "she" and I. We also talk about the movie *Hav Plenty* for which I loaned her my copy. Not only does she really love the movie, sees the direct similarity between the lead character and myself as well as the story and my current saga.

What's even funnier is that on Saturday morning, I had called my friend Sharon who lives in Beltsville, Maryland, and I was telling her about my "condition." She laughed and was amazed that men go through it also, because she thought it was something only women go through. Okay, now knowing this, the condition has to be changed to be more genuine in meaning: fear of seeing the car driven by your ex in the same make and model as well as the same, or similar, color.

Sidebar: I want to send her this album with a little note, but I won't. I can't or I must not. I want it to happen again, but I guess right now, it would be nice to get some little sign that something I said is taking root and that a flower is blooming.

I wrote e-mails, made CDs and sent cards. The CDs weren't your normal CDs; since I am also into music production, I could easily throw some bars together, loop them, and just let my words flow over top of them. For me, sometimes that is much easier than writing.

Mail went out through priority mail and through FedEx. If something came to my head on a Friday and I wanted her to get it before she left for work on Saturday, FedEx got the job. It got to the point where the FedEx woman knew my story and was wishing me the best of luck.

Over time, we communicated and it seemed like at times things were getting better, while at other times things were getting worse than before we ever met each other. However, I guess I finally made a breakthrough when I received word from her. Essentially, thoughts conveyed allowed me to know that I was starting to make the wall come down between us, due to a large part from my writing. I even received high scores for my determination.

Actually, in trying to find that particular e-mail I went through a lot of other ones, and let me just tell you, several of them would have made another man just up and walk away if not turn around and just to make themselves feel good, slam the other person to all of their friends.

My best friend Pace once said that "persistence beats resistance," and in some cases it is true. I was totally persistent because while I was in love, I also knew that I did not do everything right and that there were a lot of things that I could do better. Hey, I know there was a lot missing from my life by not having spent enough time with a strong other half who could also show me things that I couldn't, and didn't see, as well as humble and "train" me.

Some of you might laugh at the term "train," but the reality is that in most cases, it is the woman who trains the man in a relationship. We learn to cater to their whims and needs in more ways than they cater to ours. I remember talking to a martial arts master who I once trained under about love and sometimes dealing with the shifting moods of women. I asked him how he dealt with certain things in his relationship and what it would take for him to walk away or for her to leave him. His reply was that they probably would never break up;

she had trained him. There's no sense in walking away once you've done that. The last I heard, he was happily married.

Our needs (as men) are for the most part simple and theirs are very complex. I wish someone wrote a good book of understanding women, for men, because we need one. When you are in love with a woman, truly in love, she has the power to mold, bend, and shape you as she wants because you give her that power. In this case, I gave her that power more than she realized, but maybe she was more hesitant to readily and easily use it.

There were ways that I could have been more considerate of her, and more supportive as well, but sometimes you only learn those lessons after the fact or when you are in the process of losing that person.

My question is, "can you go back to being friends with someone (who you would want to spend the rest of your life with), continue the intimacy, and play everything cool until they have a change of heart?"

I am sure that other people have done it superfluously and got what they wanted in the end, but at the point of life I am at, I guess I hadn't received those lessons yet.

Trying to Recover Once More

So what happens when you can rekindle the romance (to some degree) and it just falls back out of sorts again?

Well, if you are me, or a man like me, you get back up and pursue again. You might win, you might lose, but you at least need to try. Hell, they might just be testing you to see whether or not you are really sincere in what you say you want. Women have heard men talk crap for the longest, whether or not it is to get something for the moment, or to escape something else.

I, myself, am the type of person who no matter how bad things get, I look toward ending on a peaceful note and leaving things on an even keel, where the door can always remain open to at least be amicable friends. We don't have to talk, call, write, or visit, but at least we can be civil in the long run. You also never know when you see something like an opportunity for someone, or they for you, and one of you will make that call and help out the other.

In loving her, no matter who she was, and trying to get past the hurt that other men had inflicted on her, I endured a lot. A lot of arguments. A lot of animosity and distrust at times, and overall, a lot of bullshit. Of course, you might ask, "why in the hell would you go through all of this, Zach?" Well, the answer is that I am a true romantic at heart, and in that there are times when you can look past all of the scars and hurt and see the beauty that lies within. It's like you know that there is a pearl there, but you are gonna have to wipe away all the crud surrounding it when you open up the oyster. We all

have scars and we all have wounds. That's the only thing that is certain in life.

Case in point: I used to occasionally go to a strip club with my boy John. Actually, I wasn't into the strippers but the other events happening at the same time. Since I myself had danced a little bit (and no, I did not like it and got out of it rather quickly) it had opened me up into another world. In going to the strip club here or there, I would actually run into other male dancers who were doing security or helping some of their "sisters" out. We would wind up sitting and/or standing to the side and just talking and joking while we were listening to the music and drinking. Also, the music for the most part was better than what was playing on the radio in these parts.

When some of the women knew you were part of that scene, they actually relaxed around you and would talk to you as a person. There were, of course, those who realized that since you were part of the scene, they could "formulate" certain types of relationships quickly if the desire was mutual. I, for the most part, stayed away from that. The answer is yes, I did once sleep with a stripper, but it took her a while to get there with me, and I only did it after one of my road dogs kept telling me about how "nice" she was. Hey, I make no apologies, sometimes you've just gotta have fun.

Anyway, a lot of the women started to give me a different type of respect because, unlike some other men who were also dancers, I never tried to cop a free feel, and even when approached (literally being pushed up on) I always refused.

It was ironic, you could look at some of these women and really see something inside of them, but you knew that for the most part, that would be the longest battle you could fight to bring out the beauty in them. Make no mistake, I am not talking about the women who can easily make hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars in one night; I am talking about the places you see in some of the low-budget rap music videos, the spots where women might even have to come in to dance.

Sometimes, you could really see something in these women, but it would take a lot of love and maturity to get past some of the things they did, and have a fulfilling relationship with them. I am not saying that it cannot be done, but you as a man would have to really

understand that you love that woman and check yourself from ever using her past against her, even denigrating her in an argument when you are really steamed.

Back to “us.” I never used her past against her; never talked about the fact that she dated this man or that, but I did suffer in some ways for the men she dated before me. Even she said, when we first broke up, that the main issue was that she dated a lot of losers. It didn’t matter if it was a woman who had been through a marriage in which he decided he did not want to be married anymore (I think he decided that he didn’t want to be married to her). It didn’t matter if it was she who had been through three violent marriages (okay, I am just using her as an example, because I wasn’t in love with this one, but had a respect for her). It didn’t matter because the past was really the past, and only the history that we made mattered.

Hey, I fear someone who hasn’t been through anything, for how will they react when something comes up. We all need a woman who will be with us through the good times as well as the bad, and who won’t abandon us (within reason) when things turn sour. I think of Chris Rock’s character Mayes Gilliam in *Head of State* after his office was taken over and his car repossessed. Of course, his fiancé wanted nothing to do with him, or had secretly been acting of her own accord anyway and left him when he truly needed her. How soon things changed when his star began to rise.

True, she and I did get back together as friends and our relationship proceeded (changed from its original dynamics, but it did proceed). And why did it proceed? Well, in the long run, and after everything we had been through, we had respect for each other as friends. On top of that, we had feelings for each other; my feelings didn’t matter in this case, only hers did.

So where does that leave me? Just as another Black man affected by the love demon who cares and is willing to forego any issues and try to make things work out in the end? It leaves me as a man, a Black man, who is willing to try and find happiness through the morass of past relationships, bad experiences, miscommunications and misjudgments. It leaves me as a man who is willing to try, even though ...

What made the day (of again losing a love sought) more palatable was that at the end of it, I called my buddy Barbie while I was driving on the way to get plastered with a friend (and no, I didn't get plastered). Barbie and I have been cool for over 12 years (minus the time that we had a falling out, but we were able to repair our friendship; such is the true meaning and reality of a friendship). Usually, she and I were so close that we knew each other throughout all the highs and lows of our relationships. Barbie knew me and saw me throughout every relationship I had been in since we became friends.

She was one of several friends who when I first told about meeting "her" and in subsequent conversations over the course of several weeks, let me know that it looked like I had found the one for me.

On this day, while I was driving a long and curving road, an actual road, not a metaphysical one, I called Barbie up. You see, Barbie and I were kind of having the same dynamic going on in our relationships. We are both fire signs and in that have like traits. Barbie told me (which made me feel a lot better) that it might have never been about me and "her" in a relationship. I like to look at it as a period of then, but maybe not in the future. She went on to say that maybe it was meant for me to be in her life to show her that, through it all, there was someone who truly loved her and/or to allow her to see the path to healing some of her wounds. It might have been the reverse, and it was meant for me to heal and learn, or it might have been for our paths to cross and both learn as well as heal, and maybe, just maybe, come to a point in our lives where in the future we would be together. Barbie went on to say that maybe the lessons wouldn't come immediately, but in looking at our time together in retrospect, that they would follow.

Anyway, this made me actually relax a lot and just be able to "man up" and accept it a lot better. Maybe that was the purpose. Maybe it wasn't for the here and now. Maybe in the future ...

You see, this didn't bother me because deep down I am a true romantic. I believe that love can conquer a lot, not all things, but a lot. One friend tells me that with this attitude I am going to [emotionally] tire myself out. If that is the case, so be it. I believe that in life, we can help and heal each other and that no one comes to the table with nothing that cannot become better, or comes complete. However, you

have to realize what can be augmented, diminished, and reshaped and what can't. We all make command decisions, and I was at the point in which I looked at her and was fine with her, both the good and the bad.

Today, I talked to a friend of mine who I have known for almost a decade, and wrote something about in my first book; Frank Gihan. In telling him about this book, he mentioned that I should put something about where I am at in regard to my age difference between the last book and now.

The last book was started when I was 20 years old but was never intended to be a book. It just was some poems that I wrote when I was in college, which started with the penning of "Thoughts of a Black Woman" for Nicole Honeywood. It spanned to things I wrote when I was 32 years old and after dealing with an assortment of women, some close to my age, some as much as 20 years my senior.

Had my feelings on love changed or the extent to which I would go for love? The answer is no. The only difference was that I was a little wiser in my choices. "She" always wondered what would happen in the fact that I had wooed other girlfriends back and then nothing happened.

Well, in most cases of wooing them back, some things happened after the fact that ruined our chances. In other cases, even when wooing them back, I wasn't necessarily looking to put a ring on their finger; in "her" case I was, I just knew I wasn't where I needed to be financially to do that. If we were to have gotten married, I would have had all of my financial issues looking good before merging with her financial portfolio.

I am now 33 and still attracted to older women. This is not to say that I wouldn't date a woman a little closer to my age and that I don't find them attractive. There are just some things I don't want to deal with in my life right now. Now, let me tell you the other side of that scenario; if someone comes into my life who totally throws me for a loop, this logic might go out the window like some total bullshit. Might make me rethink the whole of not wanting to have kids and everything. Anything is possible; just don't expect it to happen too easily if it will.

Retrospective Flipside: Maybe She's Not Worthy

As I am sitting here drinking a glass of merlinfandel (that's a 50/50 combination of Merlot and White Zinfandel, but I am thinking about naming it merlinfandot) and figured I would give the other side that some of my people have had on their mind.

Then as I sat at O'Hara's drinking two pints of Bass ale, I started thinking about closing the book and writing this section as well. Unfortunately, I came home, had a glass of merlinfandel and talked with a friend (and more) over the phone and that was it for me for the night.

In all relationships, or should I say more aptly, in the split in a relationship, there is a point in time where you might need to look at the other person as being totally wrong for you, and that the whole thing was a bad decision. Sometimes, you may actually be right, but there are other times as well when you are completely wrong.

Anything worth having is worth working for, and in this day and age of hearing women say more than often, "I want a relationship, but I don't want to do work," you can see how one part of the dynamic between two people can always be reduced to a surgical incision versus treating the problem with an antibiotic, rest and therapy. Let's be real, I had been in the situation before. I had been through trying to rekindle relationships with a number of women in my past, several of whom are mentioned in the last book.

Well, the point was posed that maybe she wasn't worthy of me. This was not to say she was a bad or deficient person, but that maybe she wasn't the right one to receive the attention I was giving her. I will be honest, she made me feel like no one else did, and rightly set the bar for me or for what I wanted in someone.

But sometimes you wonder if you feel like writing something like "loving an angry woman," or "loving an evil woman" or "loving a frustrating woman." Some of you reading this know exactly what I am talking about, and exactly what I mean. Sometimes, you can do so much and the other person is just not responsive at all.

I mean, there were the disagreements, the arguments, and the frustrations; the zings and insults and insinuations against parts of my character, as well as trusting me. I would have taken no more than 10% of it from someone else. I mean, who the hell was she to try and tear me down certain ways? Who gave a damn about her situation that she had been through; clearly I had been through a hell of a lot more and had known, if not dated, a plethora of people who had been through more? What gave her the audacity, because she damn sure didn't have the right to try to tear me apart when she couldn't see the forest for the trees? I never hit her, or worse. I never cursed her out, or told her that she wasn't shit. I never brought up the fact that she had dated anyone else and held it against her. I loved her for her, and tried to accept her for her, but maybe she was so scarred that she couldn't offer the same to me.

Maybe she wasn't worthy.

If I give you easily 15% of what I have, and you have a lot more than me, and would only offer 5%, then maybe you are not worthy. I am not saying that it happened or it didn't happen, because I am just making a statement.

In my travels, and in my past, there were many other women who would accept me for what I had to offer and willingly build upon it. Friends were telling me that it was easier to just move on and let it go, that she obviously wasn't the one for me.

Had I not been totally honest with her, especially when asked in reference to past relationships and what not, and still been assaulted with her tongue later by them? Had I not dealt with the fury she held

onto regarding her ex and everything he did? Had I not taken enough of her frustrations in regard to all the things that men in her life had done wrong to her and to those who she cared about most, even though I was not any of those men?

In reality, she was the woman I loved and was in love with, and for that I gave her leeway. One crazy rule, but one that could easily be rolled over, is whether or not you tell your closest friends about what you are going through. The flip side is that if part of it is caused by your madness, then what happens when the relationship is healed? Will you then go tell those people you were wrong about the other person, and to not look at them like they really didn't have your best interests at heart?

I asked one friend of mine the question (regarding worthiness) and this is what they had to say:

If you had asked me to address this type of thing before last week ... you would probably have gotten a no. That is the selfish person talking. I would say that no one is worth the effort if it causes you to question yourself and cause you suffering. But after this past week., I realize that people come into your life ... not necessarily to be the one for you ... but to help you make changes in yourself. Things you would not be able to see without having gone through it. So as of right now, I would tell you that yes, she was worth all of it because you are a better person for it.

It's funny, because at this point in a relationship you have to be like a drummer in a percussion ensemble. Let me explain. I used to play for a number of West African dance classes in Philadelphia and New Jersey and even became part of a dance company. Because the music is polyrhythmic (several different instruments all play unique parts which when played together form the actual rhythm), you have to know your place (among everyone else) and not let another person's mistake cause you to lose your place. It becomes more important when you start playing the bass drums (djunjun, songba, and kinkine), because at that point you are the foundation for the rhythm and everyone else follows your lead. You cannot let someone else's slowing down or speeding up make you do the same. It's hard, but it becomes easy with practice and performance. My first instructor

would always tell me, “pay attention to nobody, but listen to everyone” (or something like that).

If you know where you belong, someone else making a mistake, whether it is losing the rhythm, speeding up (two things that new drummers tend to do when they fixate on a woman dancing), or slowing down, you will not lose your focus. Well, life is a rhythm and everybody has a voice and a drum.

When you are in a relationship, or just come out of one, you have to listen your heart, but also sometimes it is good to hear what others have to say. They might see things that you don't and be able to give you better direction. At times, they might just piss you off as well.

During the times when we had an episode, or after a breakup, I got a lot of feedback from friends. Some just said what the hell and told me to move on and that I was wasting my time. Others admired me for sticking to my heart and my guns. Everyone has their opinion and they will not be right all the time, though sometimes they may have a point.

One important thing to remember is that people only look at a person by their interaction with them and what you tell them. If you color one side of it against them to your friends, and never point out the good side or what you may have contributed to a situation, then the advice you get might not be the best. Additionally, judge the messenger just as much as you judge the message. A person who is pissed off about a divorce and a bad marriage may not be the best person to talk to about a committed relationship, especially if there were other variables present in their situations.

If I would have listened to those people initially, she and I would have never got back together in any way, but we did. There was the friend who apologized for telling me it wasn't a bad idea to take the drive down there.

To the question of worthiness, we are all worthy of another person. We all make mistakes, and we are all flawed because we are all of the flesh, which is imperfect by nature and design.

What I felt for her was genuine and all-consuming. The issues and concerns that she had, I was willing to face and deal with, because I

loved her and wanted us to be together. There was nothing in my eyes that was too hard to deal with because I loved her deeply. So what that things would take time to heal; was she not worth it? Was she not the person I could see myself with 10, 20, 30, and more years down the line? Was she not the person I would gladly tend grandchildren with and be for no matter what transpired?

I was becoming my uncles, my father (don't tell him that), my best friends, and my grandfather. I was shedding the bullshit and pulling my number from the game. I was chipping in and trying to make my lifetime contract. It was her, all of her, everything about her, and everything connected to her. It wouldn't be easy at first, but it would be worth it for everything. And above all, the dog loved me.

Now for the next section, and to answer a question that people, both men and women have for me:

Self- and Relationship-Analysis Phase; What Did I Do Wrong?

This chapter is interesting because it comes at a point where I really had already finished the book, but after having some revelations about myself, knew that I had to add it. It might be out of sync with what is written after (from my heart), but you'll understand it.

One thing I did was to start to look for answers in myself. I had already gone through lengths to get feedback on what I might not have brought to the relationship dynamic correctly, but now I needed really to look at me.

UNDERSTANDING ME

I chose numerology and astrology and started to really understand who I was, and what I was giving off. This started to make me not only slow down, but also to stay still so that I could really see things and to also take myself away from certain types of interaction with others.

Along this path of self-discovery and understanding what changes I needed to take effect in my own life so that I could be successful in my endeavors, I also chose to analyze the dynamics of our interactions. In this, I was really floored by the fact that I started to now uncover how the dynamics of me affected her. In that was the knowledge I needed, as well as the understanding of what she might have been going through emotionally, and it was true enlightenment.

Sometimes a woman and love for her can humble you, and I think that it really should. And sometimes when you find the answers to your questions, it really sits you on your ass.

Well, here I am now, apologizing for what I didn't see was happening, understanding what she was feeling, and trying to make changes within myself so that if either she returns in my life, the road will be easier, or if I come into someone else as dear and special as she, those dynamics will not exist.

LOOKING AT MY FAULTS

I'll admit from the door that not everything I did was correct. An older man would've known a little bit more about how to approach different situations than myself and thus would've passed loads of these "tests" with flying colors.

Some people say that I work on shock value, and to some degree this is true. I always say that if you want to quickly win a fight, do or say something that will make the person's thought process freeze up, even if the space of time is the fraction of a second. Seize the moment and drop 'em.

So there were times when I said things that either unnerved her directly, or unnerved those people she was close to. Hey, you can't be everyone's friend, so why try? And sometimes, you've just gotta let people have it like it is, then try to pad everything for them. Case in point: when you see some of the people at the American Idol tryouts, you wonder where their true friends were, because those people should've been honest and let them know that they couldn't sing. If you want to make an omelet, you obviously have to break a few eggs. But I guess we are a nation of either pass the blame, or as long as I don't actively participate in the violence then it is okay. People eat beef, but don't agree with hunting deer. Vegetarians talk about cruelty to animals, but wear leather shoes and also boil tons of innocent plants each year to death. Get real and deal with the sum total of your actions! It's like yes, by partaking in drugs like heroin and cocaine you are at the end of a chain of violence that begins with the subjugation, if not murder, of people in some Godforsaken third world country.

Sometimes the truth hurts, and there are times where you can do nothing more than tell the truth. If I get on you because you leave your car running while going into a convenience store, am I an asshole? Or if I strongly word to you the repercussions of walking down a city street like “a victim?”

My faults ran the gamut of things that became bad because of the reaction of her to things that I didn't do because I didn't know any better. Oh yes, communicating with a woman is an art form, and it first starts with knowing the type of woman you are dealing with. The same can be said for all people, regardless of their sex.

Sometimes, in even turning down something that might have been the wrong thing to do, though there shouldn't have been anything wrong with it.

There is also the issue of what you say in jest being taken by other people the wrong way. Men, the harsh reality is that when you are dating someone, you are unfortunately forced into a series of diplomatic negotiations and situations that you are placed in with the people who comprise their life as well. You are nothing more than a scout, until you can comfortably become more than a scout.

Ladies, I am definitely not saying that I do not have my faults, and that there were times I could've done better, but sometimes there are extenuating circumstances. I would not survive with a vegan woman, especially within her circle of friends, family and associates who might also subscribe to her way of thinking.

I looked back and through it all, I searched for every possible incident in which I did not do the right thing, or where I could've handled it differently. I pored over our history together, and even sat with my “council” of sisters from time to time. Some said that it wasn't worth it and there was nothing that could change (maybe they were truly correct).

I remember one incident in which she saw another side of me, which was funny. We were leaving a favorite establishment of mine that I have frequented since 1992. As we go outside (crossing the street to where my car was parked) there are two guys in a souped up Audi at the top of the block who start roaring down. Now, they are over half a block away and as they start to accelerate they beep their horn. I pay

them no mind and slow my roll, as she is on the protected side of me. They slow and as I go to open her door, they stop a little past me and try to get smart. Hold on now, you are trying to get smart with Zach?

Granted, most times I'll pay you no mind because I either know you are joking, or I don't feel like filling out a police report. Also, sometimes violence is not the answer and we would only wind up hurting each other and starting some damned feud which would do no one any good in the end. The two occupants of the car are white and they proceed to think that they can intimidate me. I proceeded to curse them out (hey, I've been doing the lingo since second grade) and challenged them to get out. They talked, but they walked. I had already had it figured out how I would beat them, and whom I would start with, and probably just take their wallets and car keys and roll. Let the cops sort it out later.

What's so funny about this incident is that a friend of mine told me about a man she used to date who I am a lot like. He was military, State Department, an entrepreneur, and most of all we were born on the same day. She was out with him and he was driving his Rolls Royce. While stopped at the traffic light, several white guys in the car next to them had something rather unpleasant to say. Well, in a quick moment he exited his car and exited them out of their vehicle against their own will. As she told me all of the details, I just started laughing and could imagine myself in that situation. That is not to say that I would do that, but I could put myself inside his shoes in that situation.

I would like to one day meet him and just learn what I can, especially in regard to dealing with other people.

One associate told me awhile back, "The man sets the precedent." This is an important thing to know, but to know more of that sometimes the precedent is just to be like a duck and let some things roll off your back. No one said relationships would be easy, and in this day and age, people have so many ideals and philosophies they have heard on talk shows, the news, read in magazines, and listened to from others that no one knows truly what the hell to do correctly.

What worked with woman "A" does not work with woman "B." Maybe sometimes people expect you to do things that normally you wouldn't unless someone said something. I normally heard the issue

of not being “considerate” enough. Consideration, ha! There are people you can say that to, and there are people you can’t. All in all, it’s still a matter of what level, or manifestation, of consideration you are talking about, and it is always subjective.

Always asking if someone would like more to eat versus ready to be part of a team, train relentlessly and be the first one through the door in a hostage rescue situation?

Thoughtlessly getting someone something to drink in the morning versus telling someone how to look out for some trouble about to jump off in a club?

What’s more considerate, I ask you?

Oh, and there were incidents in which the outcome was not emotionally good because my feelings were not taken into consideration of knowing myself and knowing what I don’t want to do or where I don’t want to be.

What if I don’t want to go into this club, but you take me anyway? What about when I am ready to step to someone who keeps bumping into me from behind because they are just drinking and having a good time and that’s the way they are in clubs? Why get mad at me when I don’t want to leave until you’ve finished your drink? And why chew me out because I move you physically (but you didn’t see that something was about to go down between a drunken partygoer and the group he was trailing)?

I also didn’t go along with a lot of things. Hey, I am not a bull with a ring through his nose. Okay, maybe I am for the right woman, but I have my limits. I often heard about how I was the only man she ever dated who said certain things; I guess I cared enough to say those things even if they might have rocked the boat a little. Some of those little things could save a lot of pain later on, if not a life.

There was a flip side to this, however. She tried to bring a smile to my face as often as possible, and maybe at the same time didn’t understand my limitations, or rather I should say my likes and dislikes. Sometimes people want to expose you to something else they think will broaden your horizons and whatnot. Sometimes they are right but at other times it’s definitely not good when they are wrong. I am

definitely a man who knows what I can't stand, and sometimes pushing me through that, or putting me through that, allows me to reveal a side of me that is not a pretty one.

You know, I did some wrong things, but there were things in which any other person would've looked at them completely different and stated who was in the wrong and who was not.

There was also one major mistake I made, and that was being too damned honest. Granted, I am known for my honesty, but sometimes that doesn't work in a relationship. Because she had purchased my first book and started to get to know me, she asked me a plethora of questions in reference to my past relationships and dealings with women. Actually, I answered all of them and held nothing back, which in retrospect came back to haunt me. Anytime she had something snide or hurtful to say (you know how women can be in arguments, and sometimes even men), there were references to my past. And like most comments, retorts, and accusations hurled when someone is arguing, many of them were definitely taken out of context, as well as out of focus.

Anyway, everyone has to figure out when something doesn't work out, what they didn't bring to the table and what they did which could have been a factor. There are times when no matter what you did or didn't do, it just wouldn't have worked. I feel that in some ways, this was part of it. As men, we are sometimes forced to deal with all of the things a woman has been put through prior. There are few people out there who can honestly say that what affected them before is not something that the next person will have to deal with in some way, shape or form.

The more that I look at it, the more I see our differences and where between them, without concentrating on making a better connection, we were doomed to go. As she said repeatedly, she wanted a relationship but she didn't want to do any work. Unfortunately, relationships are work; friendships and associations are another matter entirely. When you bring another person into your life, you have to make adjustments. Not comprehending that from the start will only allow for some good times and some bad times to happen. At the end of it you will be exhausted and wanting to walk away from everything.

Like Cher sang, if I could turn back the hands of time I would gladly start our process all over again, for now I know how to better fulfill my part of the dynamic. If I had the power to change certain things within me, I would. If I could easily look at the world right now and be able to conjure some of the dynamics, I don't know which I would choose. Maybe it would be a younger version of her who would be more tolerant, or more willing to do some of the work that was needed in this relationship. Maybe I would choose someone just like her, but with different family dynamics. The reality is that you find what you like in a person, and if you can deal with it for awhile, then you probably could deal with it a lot longer, if you came to know love with that person. That's not me saying there are not limits to everything, either.

In summation, I can say that if I were so bad, then it wouldn't have lasted as long as it did, and there would have been no second and third chances. They only existed because something was seen at the root of everything, no matter what other pieces rested on top.

“Why am I Single?” – My Component

It’s funny when I get asked this question. I wonder if I have that “I-should-be-with-someone” look. Shouldn’t the next person be just happy to catch me while I am available? And let me restate that, as single; I have heard from one female friend that when a man says he is available, it doesn’t mean he is single (hint for all of you women hoping not to get with a man who is married or otherwise engaged).

See, I know you wanted to ask me this question because you are looking at me like, “If I am bringing so much to the table, then why am I not with someone?”

Okay, so there are usually three sides to every story, and I am not saying that I was perfect in this or any other relationship; however, in talking with people who know me (and would be quick to point out my errors), the consensus from them was that there were issues from before I even knew her. Even I myself had said to her after the first breakup that certain things would’ve happened anyway, it would have just been with another man in her life. This is not to say that the whole thing was on her, it was on both of us whether the amount was equal or lopsided, and along the way she admitted that as time passed she was not looking to be in a relationship.

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

The January 2004 issue of Essence magazine contained an interested article. Like most articles published in women’s magazines, it was

only two pages long even though the headline was the second one down the cover. In fact, the article had a two-page cover to it. However, I was surprised that in those quick two pages it had some good points, so let's take them one by one (hey, I thought that the article was interesting). I am only addressing six of the seven because the other (style shortchange) never really bothered me.

Sex too soon

You know what, I am a man and in that I am going to go for sex as soon as I can get it simply because part of me is wired for it. I think that when people are mature adults, the issue you have to really consider is that of STDs more than anything else. Pregnancy would be second, but STDs can be fatal. It is up to both people to address the situation as adults and handle it as best they can.

This point is a judgment call. If you can handle the fact that you had sex for sex's sake, then maybe everything will be cool.

Imposing Family Ties

I cover this phenomenon in one of the other sections (Impediments to Loving), so I will only briefly go into it here. Forced family ties can easily break a relationship before it starts. While first impressions are great, it takes time for people to really get to know you (especially if you can come off as obnoxious or otherwise arrogant – I hope I am not implicating myself right here).

We know that everyone has some crazy relatives and it might not be best for the one you just met to meet them all of a sudden until they are sure about you. Otherwise, it could be meeting their children too soon and the dynamics that might ensue. At other times there might be a familial situation in which you might have to meet a member of their family at the onset of knowing them.

I remember the case of one person who I always was attracted to, that when I finally got to know her I had to be aware of her situation. She was taking care of her aunt (it could've been a great aunt) who had dementia. It was a noble and proper thing to do, and I know it was an extreme emotional and psychological burden on her. However, she did it without truly complaining about it. Unfortunately, we might

have gotten to know each other better, and spent more time to ourselves, without that sword of Damocles hanging over her, but that's life. It wasn't her fault and I don't hold anything against her. Family first. Would we have made it? Probably not, but that was for other reasons.

No Romance without Finance

This is a funny one to me because I have always freely given of what I have had financially, especially when I didn't have much. It didn't matter if I was making \$8.50 an hour or \$60 an hour, I gave.

In the article, the author cites the example of a man dating a woman who along the way [she] is in need of a car repair. She asks the man for the money. Is this a bad portent? Hell, yes. It should be up to the man to make the decision to either lend her the money, or simply help her out. I can't say that I have ever truly been in this position but that I have had a weird scenario or two come out along the money lines.

The first was dealing with someone, just dating but no commitment, where they once looked at me and told me "to let them know anything that I ever wanted or needed." Well, this was an interesting piece to deal with, but the fact was that I liked them for them, not what they could buy me. Their thing was that was how their relationships tended to go, and I was not looking to "juice someone like Tropicana."

The second was more interesting and that was dating someone who saw me crunching numbers for another product I wanted to launch. While watching me, they told me about how they wished they could invest in me, but explained that they don't lend money to the people they date and told me a story about someone they dated where the lending of money became an issue. The funny thing is that I never asked this person for anything at all. The drama that ensued was that when I did need a small loan to tide me over, I got it from a previously [intimate] friend of mine. Well, of course the one I was dating hit the fan over this. Did she have a reason? The answer is really no. All in all, my buddy Barbie explained to me why she was upset (hey, us men couldn't really figure it out because she had no foundation to get upset, as she had previously laid down her rules on money).

TMI – Too Much Info

I can't even front on this; I am an open book (somewhat) to someone I am dating. No need to hide anything, especially if they have read the first book. They will ask the questions and I will provide the answers. It's like the old saying about how you shouldn't ask questions in which you cannot handle the answers. Hey, but I am guilty of being a proponent of TMI.

However, there are times when information best comes in spurts or when the relationship has reached a certain level.

Captain Save-a-Ho and the Savior Complex

Okay, we have all heard the saying that "you can't turn a ho into a housewife" and who am I to knock generations of knowledge, though I do know that there are some exceptions; I am not trying to find them, though. I think this section goes two ways; trying to save someone and trying to change someone.

You always hear of women talking about changing a man who has always been a ladykiller, if not an outright dog. Hey, sometimes it works but if you've got a dog that has a tendency to wander, unless you have him caged or your "stuff" has Pavlovian potential, it ain't happening. Well, if you reverse the sexes, then Captain Save-a-Ho would be the male equivalent of a man trying to turn a woman with a voracious sexual appetite unconfined by monogamy into a woman in a committed monogamous relationship. It ain't gonna happen. I just love the song *Don't Save Her* by project Pat, which addresses this issue to a tee.

On the other side, you have the issue of people trying to come down and rescue someone from a bad situation or such. Love is a pretty interesting thing, and so is independence. I have seen many cases of women rescuing a man, if not getting him fixed up, only to have him either leave them outright or cheat on them furiously. The author went on to give the example that all patients leave their nurses once they are healed.

This part of the concept is a very touchy one because it is not only predicated by the issues of self-esteem and how each partner respects

and treats each other, but it also touches on some of the realities of dating and relationships in Black America.

We are a demographic that has been splintered along the lines of economics, religion, philosophy, lifestyle and many other factors. Our specific statistical demographics are quite different from a lot of other ethnic/racial groups in this country, and we are still at the point where we need to look past disparities in economics (to say the least) to possibly find someone who might be “the one” for each and every one of us. It is up to us to at least try to expand the visions of one another, for if we don’t, what potential are we leaving for ourselves and subsequent generations?

There are limits to everything and everyone has to make their own choices when it comes to “being a savior.” I myself tend to ask people when I meet them “what is it that you want to do with your life?” I might not look totally at the relationship with them, but also look to maybe help them fulfill their dreams and potential as well; it takes more than one person to be able to achieve things, i.e., no man is an island. One ex-girlfriend reflected on an incident in which when one of her clients asked her what does she want to do with her life, she immediately thought of me, and that is the type of question I ask people. Mind you she was 10 years my senior and had the house, the car and the career but didn’t have a good answer for this question posed to her.

Always Driving the Relationship

Hmmmm. Can a man have too much control, or could sometimes the contributing factor be that he doesn’t wait for someone else to make a decision? Or maybe it could be the issue of his spirit naturally making someone else place himself more in the passenger seat?

In many ways I am guilty of this. Hop in my car and I have my music. I get in your car I might bring my CDs (in case you have no “good “ stuff in your own car).

BACK TO REALITY

But let’s focus on me. I always get asked the question as to why I am single. In essence, the answer can be simple, or it can get multi-fold.

The quick answer is that “it was not meant to be at this point in time.” Okay, I look at that as a universal cop-out, but it is not without its merits. I already wrote earlier on what I thought I didn’t bring to the relationship so I won’t repeat that, but as far as just me, here is what one friend and acquaintance wrote:

Zach has a very strong personality that could be overwhelming to deal with over a period of time. He also is very strong-willed. He has definite ideas of what is right or wrong; what he is doing with his life and where his life is going.

Any woman in a relationship with Zach would have to have a personality that was as equally strong. She would need to have a purpose in her own life as not to feel as if she is playing second to his goals and ambitions.

In this, she says a lot and it is so true about me. If you make it past a couple of weeks with me, then you see something. It is not that I am such a hard person to get along with, but that I do have my steadfast conviction to my beliefs and ideals, and there are just a lot of things being circulated in this society that I don’t agree with. I see too many conundrums and contradictions (hey, we are all hypocrites, so let’s clear the air) in our lives and our society, and I just tend to stay away from people who embrace them (too much, or in some cases, who embrace them at all).

Not everyone can deal with that, and it does breed conflict. In most cases it would be easier to just keep my innermost thoughts on life, actions, and reality to myself, and things would go more smoothly. However, do any of us really want to have to hide our true thoughts and emotions to someone who we might build a future with?

For the most part, regarding my strength and will, maybe I am just too much Leo. It’s my sun sign, my rising or ascendant, and in my Mars and my Mercury. That’s enough to deal with as it is. Additionally, my Venus is in Virgo and I’ve got to somehow tone that down a bit; too damned critical when it comes to love. My aunt Robin says I am like Seinfeld in that I have nicknames for every woman I have dated, every woman except for “her.” Over the past weeks I have done some serious analysis of myself through numerology and astrology and,

damn, I can see how I am a lot to deal with. Maybe there lies the answers, and now I know what needs to be fixed (in this lifetime).

Timing is also a factor with me. There was a time when I lived in my mother's house and had no car and no job. Those were the learning years for me, during which I studied business and worked on my proposals and ideas. I might be in a computer lab anywhere from one to eight hours each day working on financial calculations via pro forma documents, or just revising my ideas. It's funny; I wrote some damned good proposals years ago, and in some cases I am pulling them back out and blowing the dust off.

At this time in my life I read magazines like Inc., Entrepreneur and Success religiously, learning what I could from other business people's experiences. I just didn't have the credit or the collateral to go into a bank and get loans, nor were there any potential investors around. It was of course easy to figure out that I wasn't trying to step to anyone hard, and I didn't. I did meet people who later on I would start dealing with when I got in a better position financially.

Later, I would start taking part-time jobs and then transition into temping. At that point I actually did pick up a girlfriend (chapter two of my first book explains that), and after we broke up there was no one for a little over a year. But before and even after that girlfriend, things were not how I wanted them to be in my life.

Let me also explain that I have always had an attraction to older women, and while I met quite a few, part of it was the fact that I didn't really know how to talk to them. Life is funny in a way that sometimes what you are looking for is right in your vicinity, and that they might be looking for you, but no one knows how to gauge the other, and thus the opportunity is lost. I remember when I "knew" one person; it took years for us ever to get into a conversation. After a number of conversations (sparse that they were) over the course of years, we finally got together (somewhat) for a brief period of time. What is ironic is that I used to see her walking her dogs and would just "think about her" but never felt I was in a position to talk to her. Honestly, the timing wasn't right; I was not in a good position.

Also with another woman who I was madly in love, with it took at least a year before she realized I liked her; I actually would say about

15 months. But more importantly (at this stage of my life) was the fact that I didn't have my own place, a car, or any money to wine and dine them like I really wanted to. Hey, I turn off my game in those situations and just stick to myself and deal with the occasional person I can just have sex with.

I was also at a point of learning myself as well, part of which I am still doing. In this, it's about learning how to transition from one environment to another and learning how to navigate as well as prosper in the new arena.

I still remember some of the women I have met during those times and sometimes wish that things weren't the way they were when I met them. I lost touch with many of them, or really I should say all of them, so even that when I was in a better situation, I had no easy way to get in contact with them. This is not to say that I didn't meet women, and develop some relationships that lasted from a period of a few months to longer, but they just deep down weren't what I was really looking for.

My best friend Pace and I joke about how it seems that you come across the right woman when you only have two nickels to rub together in your pocket. Some men aren't phased by this, but because I was raised alongside a sister, and many of my conversations were with her girlfriends, as well as the fact that I have mostly female friends, I really wouldn't feel comfortable stepping to a woman without having a halfway decent program together.

There was also a point at which spirituality played a part. I did finally get together with a beautiful butterscotch-complected sister with the most succulent lips. She was a student at Penn at the time and from somewhere in Ohio, and I had been attracted to her from the first time I laid eyes on her. I did have a previous chance to really talk to her and let her know my intentions, but it was at a frat party and I was significantly done. This was of course after not telling her how I felt about her for the ten or more times I had bumped into her previously.

Anyway, when we finally got together it just wasn't good for her; I had just gone through an African spiritual ceremony/ritual, and several major things changed in me as a result of what was introduced into my system: the major thing being my sex drive, or shall we say, ability. It

just wasn't cool for a while. Hey, think about the fact that I am being so honest about it, and it just affected me, man! I do think I got a second chance to redeem myself, but it was the same result. Anyway, that took several months if not a little more than a year to work itself out. There was another woman who I met during this time in my life, and she actually thought that when it came down to it (between the sheets), that I just wasn't really attracted to her.

Right now, I am 33 and, am of course, still mainly attracted to women in their 40s. Does that mean that when I get to be around 40 I will be attracted to women my age? Who knows, but when I fall in love, I fall in love with that person, regardless of the age difference or the aging process. What's interesting is that after the breakup I met a phenomenal sister only 34 years old who definitely made me look at things a little differently. I started looking at personal ads of women 30 to 34 years old; at that point, we all knew that the love demon had me strong.

I just got off the phone talking with a good friend of mine and I asked her why she thought I was single. She gave me the flat answer that it was because the right person hasn't come along. She also said that the same applies to her life; that's her answer and she is sticking to it.

As a man raised in this society, I myself do not feel worthy of really trying to step to a woman when I am not at my best, or at a place I feel comfortable with. During my relationship with "her," after losing my consulting position, I did not feel comfortable with her taking me out more than I was taking her. Granted, if the positions were reversed, I would have had no problem always taking her out and never having her pay for anything. But that's me; not everyone feels the same way in that situation, but I am myself.

This leads us to another dynamic of whether or not the person meant for you will see you for who you are and deal with you in spite of where you are.

It takes a lot of maturity for a person to deal with you when you might not be on par with them at a point in time. Normally, women prefer a man who makes as much, if not more, than them. Unfortunately, if we look at Black America, the first thing we see is that more Black

females are attending college and graduating than Black males. We also know the reality, at least some of us do, that corporate America has no true love for strong Black men. In this, I mean Black men who strike an imposing figure mentally as well as figuratively. Here is a good example:

I remember when I was fired from one job; I was actually shocked that it didn't happen sooner. The main thing that put me on alert was that I was the only person of color in an IT section and we didn't even have one Asian; now that's scary and interesting. This is not to say that all IT departments have Asian employees, but damn, I was the only person of color!?! So when things got rough, I just started to get real nervous.

Additionally, I clashed with one of the project managers, who was a weasel. In the end (and this was at least four months later), I was let go, and had an interesting exit interview in which the CIO asked for feedback from me so that things could be better in the future. Note that even the HR person said she never got an impression from me that I would do what was reported. I asked him whether or not he wanted political correctness or reality, and he chose the latter.

When explaining to him that the environment was uncomfortable there and I stood out like Rudolph and wouldn't play in their "snow white" reindeer games, he was appalled. But then again, I told him that I had been Black way longer than he, and the fact was that half of them were intimidated by me as soon as I took off my coat. The other half (of them) were intimidated once I opened my mouth and realized that I wasn't an idiot.

The funniest thing was that they couldn't figure me out; I was definitely athletic, but not into sports, and since I wasn't a nerd and had more of an urban upbringing, they didn't know how to gauge me. There was no easy way they could place a label on me, and whatnot. If I went to the lunchroom, I had great joking relationships with the cashiers and the cooks. If we walked through the halls, I always talked to the people who did building maintenance and janitorial. I made alliances with other people within the client organization who these people never met. I guess they didn't realize one major thing; the color of the skin that was shared by myself and these other people.

Some of you know how it is when you are someplace new and another brother or sister gives you the nod from 40 yards; the nod which acknowledges that they are happy to see another face which looks like a face from their family or community. And some of them are not only happy to see another one of us there, but someone who isn't wearing a uniform, if you catch my drift.

No matter where you go as a Black man in this society, if you don't conform to their perceptions of proper attitude and behavior, then you will definitely be outpaced by Black women and others in corporate America. Why do I say Black women and others? Well, the first thing that any sensible employer is going to try to do is to have some level of diversity, and as far as ethnic groups ranking in this country goes, we are second to whites, with Asians next, and then Latinos. Hey, is anyone trying to bring in any Native Americans?

The greatest weakness is that many of us Black men are not well versed in the arts of diplomacy and group dynamics as defined by the ruling and business classes of American society. Simply put, we don't act like them, and in that is a weakness, or deficiency, in our portfolios of what we are bringing to the table. Sure, we know that in this meeting that Bob called everyone is going to play a round of pass the buck, as well as shuck responsibility, and that if we just call someone's punk ass out then that might straighten it all out. However, while this just might be the right thing to do, they just might be so conniving as well as presumptuous that it's only a matter of time before you call their weasel candy-ass out on the spot so they make alliances, or should I say dalliances, and get your ass in a sling. Now, while the major problems haven't been solved and the business is not expanding any or becoming any more profitable, they are still around for some more weeks, if not months or years, collecting more paychecks.

It's like in sports, where a team would rather recruit someone who has played on teams before because they have been trained in the group dynamic, rather than the maverick right off the street.

What's funny is that some sisters just don't believe this (at that time) and "she" was one of them.

I also spoke to the point that some of the project managers expressed fear at working with me. Well, I replied that they were probably more worried that I wouldn't put up with their ineffectiveness and ineptness rather than let it fall on me. If I came in under par, they would skewer me in a minute; they were just more afraid of me skewering them at the level above. Remember that shit falls down, and if you don't cut it off above you and stop it from happening, then it will be all over you. That ain't my way.

We as Black men live with both those experiences in corporate America, as well as its bias against us, and then we are faced with [some] women who won't give us the time of day if we are not in their league.

In the end, the company lost the consulting contract with the larger company we worked for, and I heard that much of it was in part to their performance on dropping the ball with the project that my team was pulled off of. Oh well, another one of those experiences.

So here I was, scapegoated by another boss who really wasn't up to snuff in the new system, in the old system, nor the technology in general. I will admit that I could not only smell kickbacks, but also him maintaining the image that his decision was correct. From the door I told him that the old system and the new system were crap and to develop in-house. He asked me to do the best I could, which I did. I also sensed that maybe some hanky-panky was going on between him and the president; I guess she was getting screwed two ways. And since I knew too much that would make him and his department look totally inept if it got out, then I had to go. Oh yes, if someone in his department had moved a database correctly, I would still be there, or shall we say have been there for a little while longer.

At this point, I had my book, my poster, my brains, some freelance potential, unemployment pay and the footage for my DVD. So I went back to mine, doing my things. That took me from September to now, and a number of places in between. It put my foot in the door, showed me new opportunities, and allowed me to chart new paths. It also forced me to do a lot of juggling financially, as well as say what the

hell with a lot of bills. Hey, they ain't going nowhere and I need to deal with the more important ones first.

For every recession, there is hopefully a recovery, and one can only reach it if they hold fast, keep at it, improvise, adapt, and overcome. For me currently, I am coming out of it, but not everyone is ready to stay by your side when you are there.

So what does this all say without me going too far off track (chances are I did and I get that whole thing about long-windedness and going on tangents from my mother)?

Before her, the reasons why I was single were quite simple. One: either I was not comfortable with talking to a woman when the chips were down or I wasn't in the position financially I wanted to be. And, two: I found people that I fell in love with but things happened which either diminished my feelings out of the "in love with" level, or just completely turned me off from wanting a committed relationship with them. This is not to say it was their faults that the relationships worked out. Like Harper, there were some things I could be comfortable with a person if I was just kicking it, but couldn't take in a committed relationship. We all have our peeves and whatnot, and sometimes you know you are not the right person for the other person involved.

But what you also get from this is that I am a strong-willed person, which sometimes can be a turn-off, or a part of myself that does not allow me to peacefully co-exist with everyone else.

Summarily, we are all single, those of us who are, for at least one reason. The easiest thing to say is that we haven't found the right person yet, and in some cases that may be true. But there also exists the possibility that in finding the right person for us, we will also be making changes, if not evolution in who we are at a point in time, and the right person will bring that out in us.

"She" once said I might like the challenge of the chase; truth be told, the chase is fun if both parties make it fun and you have the time and resources to spend, if not waste, in the pursuit. At this point in my life, the hell with the chase! It's the same as if I was in a fight; I don't intend to go 12 rounds and take, as well as give, punishment for a

lengthy amount of time. I intend to end it as quickly as possible so I can get on with my life.

The question is: “are we sure why we are single, and do we see if there is any part of our lives where growth would be a boon in us finding someone good for us in our lives?”

In the Meantime...

...and in between time.

It seems that my life has become the prototypical love story, or a combination of a bunch of them, that we see in print, theater or some other method of expression. Maybe it mirrors them because they in turn mirror life.

Since her, I have met new people and haven't shut the door to knowing new people. I have also still maintained and nurtured the emotional bonds I had with people before her. It's kind of a funny situation that women might come and go, but that your friends were here first and will still be there for you.

Is this the right time to be out "there?" Who knows; only the cards of life can truly decide. If anything, I find that in my travels, I tend to meet more people and become friends to them as they to me. In most cases, we wind up being people who can talk with each other about our own personal struggles and get some feedback that allows us each to get a better grip on each other's lives and chart a better course.

I actually find that since I come across as forthright and honest, more people tend to want me to follow my heart and for "us" to be back together again. I learned a lot from "her," and in reality, I don't want to share all of my lessons with anyone else. She taught me and should benefit from the fruits of her opening my eyes and my mind.

I actually am at the point where I tell people that the intent that we meet might not be the reason at all that we are fated to know each other. I might be there to share something with them that will get them through, and vice versa.

As time goes by, I find myself sometime reflecting, and in that, remembering qualities about her that I can't stand or things she does which I don't understand or can't come to terms with. But let's be real, a brother is deeply in love with her. I've got it bad!

In one conversation after returning from the caucus, a friend asked me several questions. The first was when do you draw the line in pursuing someone. Another was would it be best for me to be by myself right now and just deal with my relationship with "her" ending.

My response to the first question is that you draw the line when you are tired, and sometimes you just rest for a minute and re-pursue them. From my experiences, we have seen that I was able to get her to open up to dealing with me again, even after she had it made up in her mind that she didn't want to see me again. There are no rules to love, and everything and everyone can show and see a different side of everything. Nothing in life is truly concrete, except death in the physical form. Additionally, if you receive the answer of "no," just move on, but barring that answer, there is always a chance.

To the second question, I pose the response that life can take many twists and changes, and while you are waiting for one thing to happen, lightning could strike from somewhere else. Being at the caucus, I of course ran across a horde of beautiful women who I could definitely see myself with. I talked to some, joked with others, and left with none. If it is the cards that one of them will be the next person, and possibly the final person, in my life, then I am not closed to that.

In all reality, I am not getting any younger, and sometimes the person who isn't your first choice is the person who becomes the best choice. Hey, it could even be someone who you never looked at a certain way before.

I ran into women who I just had to complement on their looks and appearance, others who I met before but nothing happened, and those who seriously struck my fancy. And at the spouses' fashion show, there was one model who definitely reminded me of "her."

In some cases, I choose not to get close to a woman I find attractive, knowing that either them or me might get in over our heads with either one another or the other person. There are the ones you run into that you know for the most part could offer you some good “sexual healing,” and for the most part, those are the ones I leave alone. However, there are those other times when maybe that’s exactly what you need. Remember the rule: if you can’t see yourself being friends with that person, leave them alone.

In the meantime, I don’t close my heart off to the possibility that I might be meant to be with someone else or that I need to seclude myself from new experiences. One part of me might wait for her while another part is pursuing another path in life. At some point, one part will win over the other, but it’s not all up to me.

In the meantime, I struggle, build and try to succeed. In the meantime, I am a man in love, open to love, and not waiting for it to happen, but also challenging it to happen and not denying its graces.

So at this point, I concentrate of getting this book out, the film, the next DVDs, the artwork, the photography, the other websites, laying the foundation and getting ahead.

It’s time to fly, or be reborn from the ashes.

Am I the Only One and What About the Man Shortage

As the subtitle of the book suggests, there are still some good men out there for you women; in fact, there are a lot of them. I surely am not a perfect man, and you would be hard-pressed to find one, but I am a caring and single man, and every day I come across a number of men who are single and looking. We all have our differences in our experiences, goals, dreams and educational level, and in reality, I can't see some women dating them, but there are a number of other women who would still be very comfortable with them in a minute.

For this to occur, it will take many different moves and actions for us to accept one another more readily and be willing to stand by someone and work with them. Part of that is having the ability to truly size someone up and hear them out, and then take the time to get to know them. I am not saying that everyone has to be open to everybody else because there are things that definitely turn me off in a woman, and there are definitely some things about me that turn women off from me.

Some things about people you can only know from experiencing some things with them, be they casual, serious, or intimate.

I think there are a ton of men out there who want to express their emotions, and maybe just cry sometimes. Hey, why do you think geishas were so popular in Japan? For a country whose culture prides itself on separating public and private thoughts, they needed a place

where they could just let things out. The key is, would you be more willing to accept those men when they show their weaknesses, which in turn is actually showing a type of strength.

And what about the reality that there are a substantial number more Black women than Black men, and I am sure you have more women than men in general, with the major changes being in places like Alaska; there, the women ain't complaining.

I believe I mentioned my conversations with one friend on the issue of it not mattering what the numbers were but that you step up your game to find what you needed. Hey, in life there are going to be some winners, but more importantly, for everyone who wins there will be a lot more people that didn't. There are a plethora of men out there, if you take off the polarizing lenses, the blinders, and any other optical filters that you metaphysically have in place, then you actually might start seeing them out there, everywhere. And remember, I am not saying that everyone fits the bill, but I do believe that sometimes you can bring out the potential in others, and not everyone has the key to everyone else. When the situation becomes less than favorable, you can either be happy with what you find, keep looking and having fun in the process, or just wait until you find what you really want. Your choice.

I remember one dinner conversation with three people in Annapolis, MD. There were two men and two women, one of whom (the women) had a nice six-figure paying job for a telecom giant. From talking about the book, we had got on the number of Black women dating white men and I started to look at it from the position of those women wanting men who had as much as them or more. I discussed this earlier and in reality there will be fewer brothers than sisters in positions equal or higher to those sisters in corporate America.

I went on to say that sometimes the person who might treat you like a queen won't be in your same financial category; he could even be a garbage collector⁵; Charles S. Dutton in *Roc* was a fine brother who a lot of women could be happy with in their lives. I added that just

⁵ Don't be fooled and think that garbage collectors don't make any money. It's just one of those jobs that many people tend to look down upon.

because a brother might not have AAA credit, that doesn't mean you can't build something nice together. Her response was typical (in these conversations) as well as more revealing of how she looked at life. What she said came with fervor and volume and went something like, "if a brother has fucked-up credit, then what can he do for me?" She went on to say about how not many trashmen would be suitable for her, to which I asked how many had she indeed dated.

But her first response was interesting in that I never said the man had totally fucked-up credit, but that he merely didn't have an exceptional credit rating. Well, she revealed how she looked at men, and in reality, if many of the women who say they can't find men are looking at them through that aspect, then your chances of finding someone is going to be better if you get them while they are in their freshman year in college.

Another woman said to me once that a man had to have as much or more than her, but then added ten seconds later about how he could also just be able to take care of himself. Hmmmmm.

Picture yourself in a club, and you're not perfect, but a guy is thinking of stepping to you in spite of it. You are talking with your girls and say that. Somehow, he figures that you make more money than him, have your own house, and drive an exceptional vehicle. Maybe he found that out through someone else, or just by overhearing the conversation, and he just wants to talk to you anyway; he is attracted to you for you and not what you have. Just when he is ready to approach, he hears what you need a man to have, before you think twice and add the last part, he then just walks away and approaches another woman.

Now, how much more would you react against him if that woman isn't Black??

I myself am sick and tired of hearing some of the arguments that women make over not being able to find men, though I can give some legitimacy to some of the cases by some of the women. In selling my first book and also having conversations with a number of women while discussing the book, I find more bullshit (sorry, but there is no other way to say it) than substance with some of the gripes and whatnot. Women complain that they can't find men, but when asked

about whether or not they go out or not, and then where they go out, the answers are the opposite of someone who either wants to find someone or wants to be found. I ask them whether or not they ask men out, and many times the answer comes back “no.”

I remember when I went to speak at Tavis Smiley’s Youth 2 Leadership Camp this year (several other people and I) where in a break room for facilitators, somehow the conversation turned to dynamics of women in groups. Then, another person there who was also an author started passing out bookmarks to his book, so I started passing out flyers for mine. One of the women in the room asked me for my opinion on the issue of why aren’t [successful] men attracted to getting into relationships with [equally successful] female counterparts. While I started to address the question as generally as I could, because I did not know her own individual situation nor her personality, I asked her the question of what type of man she was looking for, as well as her age.

Well, the first thing was that she was in her mid-twenties, which for me, and some other men who in some ways might think similar to me along certain lines, is too young. The second thing was that she was looking for someone who was a doctor or a lawyer. As I revealed to her that sometimes likes repel, just like in magnetism, I asked her whether or not she asks men out, to which she replied no. Ladies, communication is a two-way street and if you want something, you just can’t sit around all the time and expect someone else to give it to you. That just doesn’t cut it. As one woman [whom I had learned later than expected that we were both attracted to each other] once told me, “a closed mouth doesn’t get fed.” If one of us would have just said something to the other, maybe something would have happened, not just for the moment, but for a long stretch.

I then proceeded to also tell this sister that maybe she also would want to take the ring she was wearing off of “that” finger. While she replied that it was not a wedding ring or a ring of any significance, I told her that men can see a ring on “the” finger at 30 feet away in a dimly lit club and that any worthwhile man would not try to step to her. Hey, we don’t know if she is in a relationship with a man and they have agreed not to go overboard with overpriced jewelry and may be trying to keep it simple. While she defended (stupidly) that she liked the ring

on her finger, another male chimed in and supported the statements I was telling her. Oh well, youth is sometimes wasted on the young.

I just wanted to put that out to the sisters just to let them get another spin on things. One excuse that some brothers give is that Black women are inaccessible. I don't necessarily agree with that but can say that a sister can definitely have you crash and burn with her if you aren't stepping with what she expects you to have, especially if she has become totally "corrupted" into the whole "independent woman drama."

I remember hearing George Fraser speak, warning people to be careful on whose toes you step on today, because they might be connected to the ass you kiss tomorrow. You never know what lies ahead in that person's life, and he might just "bubble up" tomorrow and now you are interested. It's a sad but true part of life, sometimes we don't look at people unless they have what society cherishes.

As long as I can meet Black men who are single and don't seem like total screw-ups, wherever I go, I really don't want to hear about the shortage of men. There may be issues of compatibility, but for the most part, we are out there, and if you love us enough, we will come through for you.

Lastly, if there is a shortage of what you are looking for wherever you reside, either import us in, or travel.

ARE YOU RUNNING US AWAY?

While I did intimate some of this dynamic in the preceding paragraphs, I would like to give it just a little bit more focus here.

Recently, a friend of mine sent me a Washington Post editorial written by Joy Jones . It was entitled "Why Are Black Women Scaring Off Their Men? A Fighting Spirit Is Important -- but Not at Home." In this editorial, Ms. Jones discussed the women who are strong in their church and/or successful in their careers, but still come back to an empty home, or have no one significant in their lives.

What's even funnier is that one associate and his wife were telling me about a couple of women who might be good for me to have on the panel of my next DVD, and one of them fit the bill in this article.

Back to the article; before I read it, my friend and I were discussing the concepts over the phone while I was driving someplace. She thought at first that the person who sent it to her had indeed written it himself, and gave me a description of him. Before I got into my analysis (read skewering) of his stance on this matter, I talked about the similarities of thought in regard to the truth in this concept.

An ex-girlfriend of mine left her marriage (to an army officer) simply because he couldn't separate his demeanor and behavior with the troops from his relationship with his wife. On the flip side, there are a ton of women who unfortunately bring their same methodologies and strategies for working with corporate America and other organizations into their relationship with the man/men in their lives, and for the most part ladies, we ain't having it.

We have too much to deal with on the regular than to have to deal with that lifestyle at home. Some people might put up with it, and even deal with it successfully, but let me tell you that somewhere, it starts to form a cancerous tumor in the relationship that can play itself out (manifest) in a way that is going to have some dire consequences.

We have all seen in numerous television shows and movies where you have a drop-dead gorgeous woman who is the type of go-getter that many men fantasize about, but is always single.

I remember meeting one high-powered sister who became a client of mine, and had been married – and divorced -- three times. Both she and her two business partners were all fine as hell, but she was the one who was single. Well, it took no more than three business meetings with her to figure that one out.

I often would sit down with a neighbor who is a minister who “tells it like it is.” The funny thing that we talk about is all of the women in church who are looking for God to send them a man, but can't realize why the men in their lives always go away.

OR ARE WE JUST PUNKING OUT?

Okay ladies, I am not going to hammer [a subset of] you, but will also bring some fire and brimstone to the brothers out there. Remember that I am neither a psychologist, a psychiatrist, a sociologist, nor any

other professional who overanalyzes things so much that they lose the human factor. I am a person, and in that have to naturally be a combination in part of those three in addition to whatever other professions I take on in life.

I am not saying that Black women are too temperamental, too loud and boisterous, or too combative to get along with. I don't believe that in a stretch. However, I do believe that at times we can be in places where we need proof that life is not just so bad, and that we don't have to be mad at the world, or a whole group of people, for the things we suffered from just a few. Sometimes, it was the fault of the other people, but inasmuch as that needs to be considered, we have to also look at the issues of what are we doing that is allowing those situations to occur in our lives. There are some very strong women out there, some of which are just too much of a firebrand to deal with. But there are also a number of other women who can learn to acquiesce somewhat, and compromise to make something work. I will admit that sometimes the compromise is too much in total, or for where we may be in life right now.

There are a number of men who punk out, or shall we say go for the easy mark. This might be someone who is more enamored of them just because of their skin color, or someone who just isn't on the same level as them mentally, financially or even physically. Some men like a challenge, and there are many men who don't even want to be challenged. Then, there is the issue of, "in what areas does one really want to be challenged?" At some time, you want to stop fighting and just have everything be free-flowing; no qualms, no fights, just smooth sailing. Some men like the chase. Myself, I don't have time for that; I have some things I am trying to accomplish in my life. While I am not going to go into every detail and try to address every issue, I will say that ladies, it is important to understand why a man is dealing with you, or won't deal with you. Sometimes, you can help to uplift someone's spirit and self-esteem, but be wary of the person who will not deal with someone who can go toe-to-toe with them.

Before We Can Address The Issue of Love: Let's Heal Ourselves

ACCEPTING OUR OWN ISSUES

I have this theory that some people agree with initially upon hearing it, and others agree with upon me having a dialogue with them. The theory is that women are crazy and men are stupid. Now some of you will initially agree to one part of this, and some will agree to both parts of this. And there are others that will not agree with either side quite vehemently.

That's okay and it really doesn't matter to me what one you believe in this regard, but if you really start to do an inventory on men and women, you might soon agree that I might have something here.

Ladies, we men are not the smartest individuals and for the most part, and on a general analysis across the whole spectrum of males, you can see that we continually do exceptionally stupid things. The fact of the matter is that you look at us like we really are intelligent at all times, and that just ain't true. In the movie *Fight Club*, Ed Norton's character says essentially that given a long enough amount of time, the mortality rate for man is 100%. Well, if you give men enough time, we will do something truly stupid.

The difference is that we have a knack for hiding our stupidity and you women have the issue of tending to keep looking at us as complex individuals. Let's get this straight; "men are simple creatures!" We

only want certain things in life for the most part, and everything we do and/or amass is to get those things.

Like all people, regardless of gender, we are very insecure; you women just aren't smart enough to see it for what it really is. I remember one conversation with a friend who is a phenomenal woman, in which she told me that one man actually asked her why she would not go out with him. Well, the fact is that when we are turned down, we kind of all wonder why, but for those of us who have more than one avenue to pursue, we tend to either push it from the front of our minds, or forget about it altogether.

During the whole conversation she was stumped. She could not get over that one fact I told her about men. The fact that we are so simple and while she looked as his actions as childish, or immature, I said that at least he had the guts to ask the question. The worst was that he could learn something from her.

If you look at the fact that men are externally thinking, while women are internally thinking, you can better understand my theory. Let's look at it from the issue of abandonment of a child, or neglect in some part.

Right now, I am looking at working on a book on how the roles of our parents in our lives affect our relationships, and of course I will start with the impact of [our] fathers.

We all know how things are in the case that when a woman gets pregnant, no matter what the man does, she is stuck with the child to raise. A man can easily just up and walk away and we would look at that as the man is an asshole, and we can assess that there are few acceptable reasons why it would be the right thing for the man to do [in leaving the mother and child]⁶. Men essentially are not the nurturing component of a relationship; it is the woman.

⁶ In Tupac's song *I'm Sorry* he talks about what it was like to go through life without his father. What he does which is unique is rap from his perspective and then rap through the father's perspective. In the latter, the reasons the father gives for walking away are credible, and in the end, the son forgives him for he understands the logic of his father's actions.

Now, if we go back to the movie *Antwoine Fisher* and look at the issue of the mother giving him up, as well as how she treated him when she met him, I would tend to go with the crazy side of the logic. Yes, I know that this is really giving an extreme case of explaining my theory, but I think that it is a good one.

For a woman to do certain things, I figure she has to be a little off. This is not to say that we are all not a little off, because everyone one of us has our own little psychoses; none of us are really normal. If you look at the mental wards in this country, and you think about the world that we live in and what we accept and even expect on a day-to-day basis, you can probably surmise that the people who are quite normal are reacting to this madness in the world. The people who don't ... I would think are a little nutty.

Now in this whole book, I do not have the time to really convince you of this theory, so I won't. I am just putting it out there.

But what I realize more and more as I grow older and somewhat wiser each day, is that maybe the problem is that we really aren't admitting how screwed up and clueless we all are. If you think about it, you can grow when you truly accept where you are at, meaning your weaknesses and shortcomings. If you show the cards in your hand, the other person at the table has a better understanding of who you are, and can really make a decision of whether or not they want to deal with you. Sometimes, honesty can be an asset and the folks who couldn't take you where you are/were at maybe aren't the people you need to be dealing with anyway.

Maybe if we just cleared the air of mystery regarding some of our issues, then people would actually voluntarily and quite eagerly come into our lives. Why does it have to be so complex? And is it because over time we have become more complex that relationships become harder? If we are looking for people who fit into 80% of what we do and who we are, is that wise or are we really missing out on a complete other set of experiences?

THE MALE SIDE OF THE EQUATION:

Being a Black man in America is a daily struggle, if not a lifelong set of trials and tribulations, which only become more encumbering the less that you have in life.

I often have conversations with Black women regarding male-female relationship issues, and one major concern is the state of who has been through worse, us or them. Because I am a man, I would say it is us, the men, who are in the worse state of affairs. This is not to say that Black women don't catch their share of elbows from the world in general, Black men in general, and other Black women. However, in this world we are judged not only as a threat to those in power, but we also have a set of standards foisted upon us by society in general, and our women specifically.

We as Black men in America are subjected to the ideals that we must be tough in some sort of streetwise way, and always relate to the realness of the majority of conditions experienced by the majority of Blacks living in urban and rural environments. Well, every city has good parts as well as bad parts, and I haven't been in a city yet which is all 'hood. While I myself believe many of us should understand the basic plights that most of us face, and be able to relate to the majority of Blacks living in the lower middle class to lower class economic brackets, there are limits.

It doesn't mean that we as Black men all need to start sporting cornrows, get a number of tattoos proclaiming our hood or toughness, or hit the gym to the point that we look like human pitbulls and Rottweilers. It doesn't mean that we need to disrespect women in our conversations, or always talk about hustlin' and keepin' it real. It doesn't mean we have to downgrade our speech, both in vocabulary and delivery, to sound like a thug.

Just what the fuck is "gully" anyway? Hell, anybody Gullah who says that bullshit? If 10% of the people who carry guns illegally and act so tough were to actually use them like they would want us to believe, at least half the population in the inner city would be gone within one year.

... and the meek shall inherit the earth

What trips me out is when I walk somewhere and someone questions my hood credibility simply because I might be wearing “strict” business attire, can write poetry, or can speak academic English. To use the vernacular, “nigga please.” If you like rap music, you like poetry, though you’re too damned ignorant to realize they are one in the same. Just because you see a man in a suit who can speak well and doesn’t sport tattoos all over his body, it doesn’t mean that he may not be the wrong n*gga to fuck with.

The toughest guys out there don’t show it, and don’t talk about it. If you are so damned tough, train to be a SEAL, or a PJ, or even a paramedic. Learn to heal and to save and you prove to be a bad motherfucker in my book. Any idiot can talk shit and take a life, but few people can heal one or save one entirely.

We are living like grown boys trying to prove we are tough so nobody will bully us around. Get a real look, the whole damned country is bullying your Black ass around in ways you don’t even realize. You are getting played in politics, religion and law, yet you are too stupid to step your game up and triumph over it.

“Oh, I’m a player, or a pimp, or a hustler.” What, do you really expect someone to respect you who really has their shit together? The greatest criminals in this country were able to turn their family names into respected names and turn their illegally gotten revenues into legitimate business ventures that make even more money and allow them to operate inside the bounds of the law. Hey guess what, in some cases they even lobbied lawmakers to make laws that would give them loopholes or allow them to make more inside the lines of the rules, because they had the rules shifted.

There ain’t that much money in the hustle simply because your target market’s capital resources are becoming less and less with each passing year.

Say you wanna be a rapper, and really do some hardcore shit. Hey, if you want to go mainstream then you need to realize that many of your purchasers won’t be Black or Latino and living in the hood, it’s going to be folks from middle class (and above) backgrounds who just wanna act like their lives are so stressed and complicated so they can get some cool points. How many white people bought Eminem and

live in lower class digs? The only rapper besides Jay-Z making that real big money is Will Smith; go figure.

Or you want to be known as a player so much? What's the next thing, a white woman for some, an Asian for others, or a sister that has damned near white features anyway? Hey, getting sex is the easy part, finding a good woman is an accomplishment. She doesn't have to look like the woman every man would covet, she just needs to be the woman who's going to complete you and help you achieve your dreams and goals.

Brothers, what the fuck are we doing (to ourselves)?

And let me just say here that I am not into tattoos; if that's your thing, then it's your thing, it just doesn't work for me for my own reasons. There is nothing wrong with working out in the gym; it's something I do and have done for some time and it's something I believe every man should do, as well as know how to fight. There's nothing wrong if you want to speak one way versus another, just remember that being able to communicate with people, no matter what language is spoken, is paramount. If you want people to respect you, then they not only have to like your conversation, but be able to understand exactly what the hell you are trying to get across.

No matter what you are doing, you (hopefully) always want to make it to the next level. To make it to the next level, you need to understand what that level is and what is required of you, and that includes dress and speech.

I was just watching "Drumline" on DVD, which is a movie that amps the hell out of me, mainly because I am also a musician; a drummer. The movie has a lot of lessons in becoming a man that may go overlooked by many people who can't see the forest for the trees. But there is one interesting part that really hits, and that is when he goes to see his father after graduating high school. His father doesn't know who his soon is (by looks), and it is obvious that he hasn't been a part of his son's life for damned near his whole existence. There are a ton of us who experience this relationship with our fathers in some way or another, and even in some cases when we have relationships with our fathers, the dynamics of the relationship is so skewed that we still

don't get the knowledge and insights of manhood that should be filtering and transferring down to us.

As you look at the main character's progression throughout the movie, you see that there isn't much he really knows about being a man, whether it's relating to women, handling responsibility or giving respect. Some of these things you can factor to the point the he was an only child, and didn't spend a lot of time with male cousins and uncles, for if he did, he would know just a little bit more about respect and giving it.

In time, he starts to pick up different parts as he is put in different situations that make him either act like a man, or go out like a bitch.

What is the measure of a man? Is it how much money he makes? How many women he can sleep with, or the looks of the women that he gets? Is it the bass in his voice or the gait of his walk? How about the size of his muscles, or how well he can make love to a woman?

Well, I counter all of this and say that the measure of a man ultimately rests with how he walks with respect, dignity, honor and integrity in life, as well as his commitment to uplift himself and others around him. If I am the only person making it out of the 'hood, then I have failed because at the end of the day, I stand alone without an army, let alone without a team. If you die today, what have you accomplished, and who have you helped? What did you help others to do that have either positively impacted the lives of others, or will in the future? What have you left for others, other than some material possessions?

Back to the movie, one of the pivotal lessons and transformations comes when he receives a package of cassettes from his father, who he also didn't realize was a musician, and a drummer to boot. Maybe, in becoming solvent within ourselves, one of the first things we need to do is to resolve our relationships with our fathers. I am not going to say that this will work in all cases; there is an aloofness between myself and my father, while I have always gotten along perfectly with my stepmother.

From that, we need to start respecting and having love for each other more than we have today. Hey, I don't have too much love for pretty boys, nor for guys who just lift weights to attract women, or in general

one-dimensional characters, but it serves me no purpose to walk around hating on them.

We need some personal and professional development within our ranks so that we can start doing for ourselves, our women, our families and our communities instead of pandering to, and paying, everyone else for the things that we need, or that we want to do.

We can sit and gripe about the world, and the hood, but a lot of our gripes are from not seizing opportunities left and right. No one has ever put a gun to your head stopping you from taking advantage of the public educational system or any other institution set up for self-improvement, such as the library. That same dry cleaner or corner store owned by a Korean probably went unoccupied for years.

No one said life was going to be easy, and we all know the decks are stacked against us. But are you just going to give up and sit around and bitch about it? Selling drugs, hustling some bullshit or robbing people ain't the answer, and there is no longevity in it. Pimping ain't it either. Hell, if you are that good, then get a good (legal product) or service, and take your business acumen and set up a company that can grow and expand.

At least, stop bullshitting and stop the bullshit. Life is too short and too damned precious.

THE FEMALE SIDE OF THE EQUATION:

You know, honestly, there is so much here to say, and equally as a man, I am not really the one who can or should say it.

Sisters, I know you have been through some things, some of which were your own fault, and some of which was because of someone who was physically, spiritually, or mentally more powerful than you and took disadvantage of you based on that. However, all men are not dogs and all men are not shit, or less than it.

What gives it another dynamic is that if you look deep enough, you will find that many of us don't know what the hell that we are doing, and that we lacked the nurturing and guidance we needed all along. Who do we blame for all of this? Well, if we take enough time, the

list will get pretty long. Maybe we just need to start working on solutions and then execute them, rather than get held up on everything that has happened or led up to it.

Whoa, did I just say that? I guess that's a part of my maturing process. While I believe in Old Testament damnation and laying waste, I do know that most of us can't solve problems and hold people accountable at the same time. You might find it easier to just deal with certain people who have done you no good in a detached format and love them in some way despite their shortcomings. You might also just choose to leave them the hell alone, which is also an effective solution.

Maybe you'll have to look around you and sit with those men who you respect, and start to get some answers from them that may heal an emotional wound or two. Or maybe you will give that other brother a chance to love you for who you are and bring some joy into your life.

And just maybe, you will lower your defenses, which in some way might be offenses, if not offensive.

But maybe the greatest thing is to look at the learning process and lessons learned through each thing that you have been through in life and be able to walk ahead and forge a new future.

As I said, I don't have all of your answers, or maybe just not the way that you want to hear them.

Heathcliff Huxtable is a Myth

I love my “she-ro” simply because no matter what is happening in her life, she can always have conversations with me that show me other aspects of situations. She also has some of the best analogies and parables out there. I am told that she is working on something, and when she is ready, she will present it to me and I will of course assist her in it. Let’s see what we have come with at this point in time:

Ladies, there is no Heathcliff Huxtable! He is a fucking myth and you need to get over that bullshit!

There, I said it and now you have to deal with it. As an African American, I watched many episodes of *The Cosby Show* just like the rest of you out there, but let’s be real, for the most part it wasn’t realistic. It showed essentially an African American family dynamic functioning like a Caucasian family dynamic, much like a colorized version of *Ozzie & Harriet* or *Leave it to Beaver*. I am not saying this is not possible, but I am saying this is mainly different from the majority of the African American family dynamics in this country. I have seen parts of my family try to duplicate what they see on the screen and have warned about the ramifications of it.

I am not slandering Bill Cosby; he was the producer and a comedian. He was in the business of producing a show, and that show was the most successful in the history of television, topping even the success of *The Beverly Hillbillies*. It was so successful because while it tapped into the African American dynamic, it stayed within the framework of prototypical American society that is for the most part shaped by white

people. In reality, Black urban culture might be one of the most copied and translated components of American society, but only in regard to entertainment and nothing more. That is not to say that other parts of our culture(s) have not been stolen and duplicated; we are the ones behind the lottery, if you don't know it.

Have you ever heard of a Black man named Heathcliff? Or a Black person with the last name Huxtable? Did the show ever portray or deal with the issues of racism? And how do Black families normally deal with a child who acted like Denise? Did anyone ever get the switch or any form of ass whooping?

I don't know about you, but that was some real entertainment piece they were projecting. On the flip side, there are a number of African American families where both parents have gone to college and received advanced degrees, but did they act like the Huxtables? And in the end, how fucked up did the kids turn out?

I have an aunt who tried to manifest that ideal years before this show ever aired, and her son who received tons of privileges and opportunity turned into an alcoholic and drug abuser. Honesty people, honesty! But let's get back to the fact of the matter. There are several generations of Black women who fell in love with the ideal of a Heathcliff Huxtable, something that doesn't exist.

Real people have real issues and if you look around, you're not going to see many examples of H.H. That is not to say that there weren't components of him that many of us don't have one or more of, but damn, was he not just a little bit too overloaded with them?

Women have been looking for prototypes that have been manifested from romance novels, movies and television. Men, unfortunately, have to deal with the ideals that have been put forth. We suffer because of it, and you [women] make us suffer in your search for the impossible, or should I say the improbable.

Question:

Why is it if you look across personal ads on the internet, there are so many women who are always looking for men who make more than them? And I mean so much more than them?

Where Are All the Good Black Men?

Contrary to popular belief, there is no shortage of good Black men. Okay, maybe there is no shortage of Black men, and then again when you look at it there are more Black women than there are Black men. However, and for the most part, there are a ton of single Black men walking around (who haven't even been given a chance). Many are not even given a second look because of the way they dress, their station in life, or the fact that they may come off as a jerk, an ass, or worse simply because they really don't know how to talk to a woman.

One problem is that many of these men (as well as women) need some healing, education, and direction. Some might have made some bad decisions, had a bad life growing up, or something or another that affects their views of the world and their successes as well.

The reality is that while we are growing up there are many chances to find that other person from the time we are born until the time we graduate from high school. Yes, chances do occur after graduation, but in those 12 years of general education, the girl or boy next door might wind up being the person you can build something with. Okay, life is actually more complicated than that, but let me just paint you a scenario.

Because I knew I just needed to add some facts and figures to back up some things, I went to the net and started grabbing some statistics, namely from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2000 Reports and Results, and also from the website www.lenzine.com.

As of the last census, Blacks comprised 12.9% of the total (reported) population, which amounted to 36.4 million people. Of that, only 1.8 million people reported that they were Black and one other race.

Of that 1.8 million, the most common partnership was Black and white, which amounts to not even 800,000 people of Black and white heritage. So if we step one generation back, we can't act like a huge amount of Black men are having babies with white women. This is a good thing to print because I remember when I was selling my book in Roanoke, Virginia, at a festival. I had a number of sisters who stepped to me on the title of my book and was highly upset at the amount of interracial dating that was happening there (where the Black participant was male). I even had one sister who was becoming either a lawyer or an accountant (and of course had been jaded by an ex-husband who was Black, left her, and shackled up with a white woman). She sat down with her friend and they talked with me for a good 15 minutes. Since she had been taking some statistics classes, she felt that she would rattle off some numbers she believed in. One of them was that 85% of Black men are dating white women! I doubt it is even like that in Roanoke, folks, though there were a lot of sisters in that area of Virginia complaining.

Now it seems that more than half of us live in the South, while the rest are mostly split between the Midwest followed by the Northeast, with about 9.0% remaining out on the West coast. However, if you go to the figures in the census report, it would seem that when you look at the population spread of Black and one other race, it seems that it is mostly split between the Northeast and the West coast. Since Virginia is in the South, so much for that sister's thesis.

As far as the male-female ratio, it's about 101.8 men for every 100 women for the age group of 25-34, and 98.9 men for every 100 women for 35-44. This is non-race factored. Now it seems that women have the ability to whine the most in New Orleans and Shreveport (LA), Mobile and Birmingham, (AL), Baltimore (MD), Richmond (VA), Philadelphia (PA), Gary (IN), Jackson (MS), and Pembroke Pines (FL) because for places with populations greater than 100,000 people, they have the largest male-female ratios going. In the 10 largest cities, Detroit and New York have rates of 89.1% and 90% respectively. But

remember, I have not thrown in race or economic class yet, and I am wondering if jail populations are considered in the census.

In the population of 25 and over, it seems that of about 20 million Black people, only 72.3% graduated high school, 42.5% have some college, 14.3% have a bachelor's, and only 4.8% have an advanced degree. I would like at this time to send a shout out to Shawncie, Montressa, Kamau and his wife Karlene, who not only have the bachelor's, but two advanced degrees. These aren't the only people I know like this, but damn the 4.8%; I'm going to get my shit back in gear folks. Oh, and the "Asian only" group led in bachelor's and advanced degrees. Maybe I should have kicked it with that Amerasian PhD who came up to me my first time in DC Live (just kidding folks; I thought she was nice, but it was my first time there and the dancing hadn't even started).

One study of occupations says that Blacks (who reported no other race) were prominent in areas of production, material moving and transportation occupations. Now that scares me because, for the most part, we don't have our own manufacturing plants, but remember that this study has to deal with occupations, not business ownership.

Now DC (51.1%) and Maryland (41.3%) had the highest amount of people employed in management, professional and related occupations; it's really time that I do move, folks.

Now in regard to shacking up, 15.5% of all unmarried partner households were Black only. I should really say that of all unmarried partner households, regardless of opposite or same sex, the number I gave was for opposite sex households. Also, the number for two or more races was 12.1% (hetero, 13.7% overall) and since Latinos eclipsed us at the last census, and there are other trends in this society, who knows how that one breaks down for us.

When you start to look at the disparities between Black men and Black women regarding the census figures, you start to see an interesting shift. There are 3.825 million households headed by a woman with no spouse present, but only 450,000 headed by a man with no spouse present. That's a ratio of basically 8.5 to 1. This is for the year 1993.

When it comes down to the distribution of occupations for Black men and women by gender, men only outnumber women in the areas of

precision production, craft & repair, operators, fabricators, and laborers. In the areas of service, managerial and professional specialty, technical, sales, and administrative support, Black women outpace Black men with the last area having them at least double the numbers of Black men.

What does that say? Well, some of you sisters in those three areas in which you outnumber us are definitely going to have to start dealing with brothers who are either in your field and potentially not making as much as you, not in your field at all (and no issue on what they are making), or you just might open it up to dating non-Black men. But then again, you know that the numbers for white men and white women in these latter three areas are going to be closer together, so you are going to encounter more difficulty there with the numbers game as well.

WHAT ARE YOU REALLY LOOKING FOR?

In the animal kingdom there are three main roles in males that females are attracted to:

The Bull (or Buck)

This is the strong alpha male who can be expressed as the star athlete who plays football or basketball (hey, soccer and baseball players as well as other athletes ain't getting all that love in comparison). Depending upon where you grow up, they might be on the team or in a league, or just one of the guys around the way who can ball his ass off.

The Peacock

This is a person who often has the looks that women die for. Whether its Fabio, Maxwell or Denzel. This is the person who wins women over on looks alone, and in our community it is because they have fairer or lighter skin, what is considered "good hair," and eyes which may not be brown like most people of the Negroid race.

The Fat Cat, or Boss Hog

This is the person who has money or at least the family has it. They or their family can afford to dress in the latest designer fashions and possibly even have a car once they reach driving age. They may not

have to work a part-time after-school job and can still afford to buy nice things for a woman or take her out.

As we go through life, these roles become more prevalent in life, but let's get back to those first 12 years of formal education.

I talk from the viewpoint of the little kid who was cute, but not dashing. Who wasn't dirt poor, but was poor enough. Who wasn't athletically gifted, and was normally one of the last guys picked when sides were chosen. I guess you could say that in some ways I was an ugly duckling. While I was academically gifted like there was no tomorrow, girls at that age weren't interested in the smart kid, or maybe they were, but society had me focused on the cute light-skinned girl with "good" hair.

Anyway, let's get back to the book. For the most part, most girls are interested in boys who fit one of these three profiles. While females mature physically faster than males, I do not subscribe to the belief that they mature mentally or emotionally faster. Now in "hood vernacular," "big bank takes little bank." In this terminology, those who have more of what people are looking for tend to get the attention of everyone. The average man gets easily overlooked. Time to step up your "A" game, brotherman. But what is most interesting is that women all seem to talk about how there is no one out there, but all around me I see a number of good brothers.

Where to Start: Understanding Men in General

If you want to understand Black men, the first thing you have to do is understand men in general. Men are very simple creatures. Most of us want no drama and just some good times. We don't need extravagance but are mostly happy with the simple things in life. As long as our basic needs are met, we are pretty much easy to get along with.

If you are a woman, you are probably saying "what the hell is this man talking about? I know right now that he really is off his rocker and not qualified to be writing this book!"

What I just described is the basic man. From this you get all the variations, but for the most part, we men all have this grounding. We have our fantasies and that is probably why places like Hooters were/are very successful. Aristotle once said that everything a man learns is to make him better at war. Well, an adjunct of that is that the powerful men are usually the ones who attract all the women. In that, just as the samurai exercised a change from that of bushido to kanryudo, warfare to business, we men manifested a change from being powerful on the battlefield to becoming the "pseudo-warriors" of the material world. What gets women more than anything is material excess, if not material splendor; it catches their eye. It might not be the thing to seal a liaison, but it does provide the lure, and without a lure you have nothing.

In that, men can be divided into many different levels and divisions, and not all of us are the same. Some men set out to develop themselves on the physical plane, some on the sexual plane, some in the areas of business, and others in the areas of the mind. There are a multitude of areas and a plethora of subcategories, but for the most part, this is who men are if not what they do. And for the women who say that intelligence turns them on, let's be real, you can't tell how smart a man is by looking at him.

There are those (men) who achieve by being true to themselves, while others choose to do things that directly key in to what (some) women want. In this, some women are attracted to men by the men being just who they are naturally, while other men attract women by doing and showing exactly what a woman wants to see. That's a great conundrum for a man to face when he is not where he wants to be, or not blessed to be naturally shining in his own light and his own right.

To better explain the two, I will first take the former scenario. I chose to advance myself physically because of something I wanted to do with my life that required it. I was gifted academically, so I came to learn as much as I could out of an innate passion and ability. Through time, there have been women attracted to me because of my mind, and because they appreciated what my body looked like. What I did that they liked the results of (in regard to my physique) was for me, not for them or to get them.

Now on to the latter dynamic, the men who do what it takes to attract women. Sometimes you can respect them, sometimes you have no respect for them, and sometimes you hate them outright; this is from the perspective of a man in the former group dynamic, or a woman. In this group you have the men who will go to the gym like crazy to be the Adonis who catches a woman's eye. You also have the men who try to get the flyest cars, clothes and houses, not for their own satisfaction, but to pull women. Then there are those who fake interest in the arts to appear sensitive and win women from that side. Come on, how many men have taken up reciting poetry or singing to score?

Let's face it, the first thing men want is sex. Porn-quality sex. From women who look like porn stars (or fit the bill for our individual carnal desires). In some cases, we want to be able to pull the threesome

consisting of us and two women. What's the easiest way to get it? Enough said.

REALITY: THE THREE DISTINCT MINDSETS OF MEN

While there may be three types of men that women are attracted to, most women don't realize that there are three distinct mindsets of men (when it comes to dealing with women).

The Amicable

This person is the one who says what a woman wants to hear, or keeps his mouth closed, simply because they either want to eventually get between her legs, and/or just doesn't feel like arguing with her. Point: men and women think differently, and (while the reverse of this theorem is true) women will do whatever to not agree with a man's side or advice when he is trying to tell her something.

The Valiant

This man is the one who will tell a woman what she needs to hear even if it is going to piss her off because: a) he doesn't care whether or not he gets into her panties, and might not even be interested in them anyway; and/or b) he cares more about her condition than anything else.

I would call this person the perfect friend, because a true friend will tell you what you need to hear, versus what you just like. Sometimes, a person can only strengthen themselves by getting a no-shitter on something in the first place.

The Experienced and Fed Up

For a while, I just theorized that there were only two types of mental states of men when dealing with women, but after talking to a neighbor of mine, he pointed out the last type. This man is the one who will not tell a woman what she wants, or needs to hear and will keep his wisdom and insight to himself simply because he doesn't want to hear any argument and/or he knows that the only way she can learn is from the experience.

THE FRAILITY OF MEN

Most men don't realize how frail men truly are. More than trying to come across as if we are all that to women, we are also competing with other men. We are competing with the stereotypes put forth over time of what to be and what not to be. We are caught up in becoming the empty shells, but not the actual substance within.

Overall, men only have three areas in which to really shine (overtly) no matter what else people say that really matters. Those are in the areas of physical prowess, money and looks.

Physical prowess has to deal with athletic ability with a leaning toward sexual ability. People are enamored of athletes; women flock to them. Outside of famous entertainers in acting and music, there is no other measure of a man that draws more attraction, groupies and fantasies. Basketball players attract more women than football players. Soccer players in other countries are treated like gods. And all of this translates into what they perceive, or assume, transfers and translates into the bedroom. This is not to say that people like cyclists and marathoners don't have their admirers, because they do. However, I don't think that anyone is a ping-pong groupie, but I could be wrong.

I always laugh when I walk into a business environment when I think about the first thoughts coming across someone's mind. "What sports does he play and how good is he?" "I wonder how big he is and what he's like in bed?" If you are an athlete in any way, and people can easily see it, or they assume your physical prowess based on your form, you are going to generate those thoughts in people's minds.

The next area is that of money. You are also judged by how much money you have, or the illusion of money that you have. Hmmmmm, what's this illusion piece mean? Well, for the most part, wealth is also something that is more perceived than is actual. People make judgments on wealth based upon the lifestyle you live in reference to clothing, housing and transportation. I remember watching an episode of *Girlfriends* when Toni was upset that her husband was in debt up to his ears. Sure, he spent a lot of money to get her because he knew that would get her attention. He was a professional who had great earnings potential over the long haul, but at this time he was leveraged to the hilt financially. In essence, he was the opposite of wealthy. There are

more millionaires in America than most people realize, but the liquidity of that money is not something that can be manifested in most cases. Being a millionaire doesn't make you rich, it might just be the assessed value of all holdings that you have.

There are a ton of people who have money, money that can be liquidated into cold, hard cash that you would never realize. Why? Because these people don't find the need to spend it ludicrously on jewelry, fancy cars, designer clothing and extravagant abodes.

The funny thing with wealth is that it is something that attracts women and other people, but only when you have it. When you are doing the things to generate wealth, people don't look at you the same way. Many people are more admiring of the person who has already amassed it versus the person with the plan to make it. So for the man who is in between "states of wealth," the analysis is less than favorable; don't look for a high rating in this person.

The last part of the three basic areas of men is the category of looks. Looks and physical prowess for the most part overlap each other because looks encompass the head as well as the body. The head more or less deals with the ideal of beauty that people view regarding face and hair, whereas a man with a good-looking head on his shoulders can get away with not having top-notch physique. In fact, as long as the physique is not out of shape and the man has an attractive head on his shoulders, he can get far with women. If you look at many of the men considered so sexy in Hollywood and whatnot, you realize that their bodies are just "regular" physiques and their athletic potential/performance is pretty much lackluster. Note to all of you out there: a man's average strength is actually pretty weak.

When it comes right down to it, these are the basic areas where men are judged, and pity the man who cannot improve these areas of himself and was not blessed with assets in them. And for the most part, there are very few men who get high marks in all of these areas, so you can see how fragile the egos of most of us are when you cut through all of the bravado.

Understanding Black Men Specifically

Now that you have the basic template for men in general, let's go to the template for Black men in general. I say Black men in general because we are not a homogeneous group. While many of us can be attributed to two environments, country and urban, as well as two socioeconomic groups, lower class and middle class, some of us transcend both of these dynamics.

OUR HISTORY AS A RACE

Ever since slavery, there has been a war on Black men. It was the only way to keep us as slaves for generations. Not all Africans accepted slavery as a way of life. There are stories like Ibo Landing where upon the arrival of the Africans in the New World they simply "walked back" to Africa. There were others whose knowledge of self were so advanced that they merely sat down and willed their biological systems to stop functioning. Then there were those civilizations who had heard about what was happening to their peoples at the hands of whites and not only fought to the death, but would not allow any of their own to live if they were going to lose a fight.

The Black man in America (and while slavery existed in the Caribbean as well) has always been mentally subjugated not only by direct force, but also by the knowledge that if he fought back, others would suffer. While our women were being raped, we could only stand by and allow it to happen so that all of us weren't killed off.

We had to historically take the road of inaction in order for all of us to survive, which I guess is why we as a people have grown reliant on prayer alone as well as being counteractive instead of proactive.

We have been marginalized so much that the affects of it have conditioned how we can normally become successful in life because we are not used to seeing ourselves in certain capacities, and society will for the most part only allow a few to easily succeed in those roles.

Ask yourself, how many “Black” television shows and movies are anything other than comedy based? How many Black male children dream of being anything more than an entertainer, usually by being a rap star, or a professional athlete? What happened to all of our role models and whatnot? Today there are more Black men in jail than there are in college, and the disparity grows larger day by day.

We have been systematically hobbled, as well as outright raped in our own minds, to the point where the paths we choose to embrace are largely those that merely retard us and imprison us in our own cages.

Hell, I loved Tupac and have great admiration for the hustle and skills of many other rappers past and present, but at what point do we realize that more people are embracing paths that will not uplift us as a whole, and in some cases will cause the loss of hopes and dreams for a bunch of other people?

I am sick and tired of hearing the stories of “I had to hustle (drugs) to survive.” I myself am a young Black man trying to make it in various fields of legitimate business and industry, worrying about losing the house and car (at times) but not turning to pushing death and destruction on my own people or any other peoples.

I will be the last to say that American society is one where a strong Black man can achieve his dreams; we all know that it is easier for a weak (culturally, i.e., watered down) Black man to advance in this country than for the strong one. Other than that, you have to entertain the masses through either sports or music and the arts, and in almost all of those cases you will still be marginalized. How many of us are in the ownership or coveted executive positions in sports franchises? Have we not entered into another manifestation of shucking and jiving in the entertainment industry to get ahead? Let’s get real, most rap acts who sell millions of units are heavily purchased by white and

Asian youth who want to emulate what we have inside, or what we have become to deal with society.

Come on brothers, let's get really real, most of us don't know what tough is. We have more people running around talking about how bad they are when they ain't never been more than a buck fifty soaking wet, have no fighting skills, no combat experience and never took a good ass-whipping. Yet, we run around trying to act like we are the baddest men on the block.

I don't fit three of the four things brought up and will be the first to tell you that I ain't the toughest out there, and am nowhere near it. The last thing I want is a fight, not that I am scared, but it changes my dynamics of life even more. Chances are if I whip someone's ass they just won't let it go and then I always have to look over my shoulder until it escalates with me having to leave town so I don't kill someone or wind up dead. It ain't worth it; we have more to gain by building alliances between ourselves than by dividing us more and more.

We as Black men have had to become actors since birth, in order to wear different masks and build facades so that we don't have to show our weakness and in some ways, frighten others out of the idea of threatening us.

We have had to become emotionally cold in order to be able to not think about the rest of the world and take care of our own selves, because in the end all we have is ourselves.

We as Black men have had to learn to become entertainers, and sufferers of fools and others who don't understand our plights and our histories.

Dealing with the “Strong Black Man”

In all of my travels, travails, and experiences, as well as that of other Black men I have discussed this with, it seems that most Black women don't know what a strong black man is. Furthermore, when they get one, depending upon their own lives, they may in reality balk at having him in their lives.

In this, I am really referring to the independent Black woman. This is the woman who has dealt with the world on her own, or at least not with a male partner. This is the woman who may have raised one or more children on her own. She may have a degree or two, and maybe even a graduate degree or higher. She may have enjoyed some success in corporate America or in capitalist pursuits. She may have a house, one or two cars, and her financial affairs for the most part seem to be in order.

Is she ready to deal with a strong black man who might tell her things that she could use and incorporate in her life? You've got to realize that he doesn't act like all the rest who will only care for what she buys them, or just simply getting in her pants. He's the one who might tell her that she should be more observant of her surroundings when she is walking down the street. He might be the one not to assume he knows what you're thinking, or how you would want his help with something ('cause you're that independent woman who doesn't need a damned thing from a man, as you have said numerous times).

He might be totally honest with you when you ask him a question regarding your figure, or his assessment of what you want in life and

what steps you are taking to get it. He might love God, but not have time for the church and all its weekly and daily dynamics.

He might be like the strong father that you had growing up, who you didn't truly appreciate until you were older and not under his wing and his roof anymore. And this might just lead you to not understand the beauty of him until you have ruined the relationship, and have gone through a number of relationships with men who just didn't measure up.

He might be like your brothers who watched out for you, and over you, when you were growing up. Those very same brothers who cradled you in their arms when you were a baby and changed you as well as held the bottle. The same brothers who taught you how to ride a bike, or throw and catch a ball.

He might be the person who has been raising his craft, his body and his knowledge to better-than-average standards. He might be the person not willing to let go of his roots and his culture, caring not to associate too much at their functions and listen to their music. He might not have the best bedside manner, nor might he be the consummate diplomat in dealing with people. But in the end, he cares about you. He not only cares about you when you are together, but cares for you when you are by yourself. He might say the things you don't want to hear, but that you may need to hear. He has your best interests at heart.

He might not want to hang around your homosexual friends, nor accept them to be part of his circle because for whatever reasons, he chooses not to have them in his own. He may come under fire from some of your friends and relatives simply because they don't appreciate him telling you things that they would never tell you; some of which might just cause changes in the dynamics between you and them. In some cases, you might want to watch your friends, because as soon as it ends between you and he, they will swoop in to claim the prize that you didn't really know you had in your hands.

The whole phenomenon of the "strong Black man" is very simple and too damned complex if you ask me. I am not lambasting independent women. I am proud of them and like them in my life. I am lambasting the attitudes that we all express when we get to a certain level of

achievement in our lives, that we tend to ignore those who are nowhere near our level of attainment (as deemed by the standards of this society).

The Issues, Actions and Inactions of Black Men

I am going to give the sisters some love right here and talk about the other side of the coin. If we get past the numerical differences in the number of available Black men out there, we still come to the point of dealing with the Black men who are there. I know that the sisters are having a tough go of it, especially in this day and age. They all want their knight in shining armor, just as we men have our fantasies as well.

What happens when a sister finds her a brother? They still have to deal with our issues as much as we have to deal with theirs. This book is not meant to demean, degrade, or debase Black women specifically or women in general, so it won't be used for that. The book that might really get with the sisters will probably have to be written by one. No one is perfect, but we all could use improvement in some area of our lives.

I find some of the requests amusing, though. Some women don't want to deal with a man who has kids, but we as men are continually meeting women with children. I wonder what the percentage is of women who have children, as well as men who either have children, whether they are living with them or not. Those would be some interesting numbers to talk about.

Right now, I would like to look at us as Black men more in general. This originally was text in another book I am working on, but I

decided to include it here. I am not giving women carte blanche to look at us as a bunch of wimps, or quivering boys who all need mothers (hey, what's up with calling us daddy in bed, that kind of makes me feel weird).

We Don't Know Ourselves

John Singleton's *Baby Boy* opened with a very profound message and a very profound image expressing that fact that Black men in America are in an arrested state of development. I don't know about you, but I was the product of a single-parent family headed by a female and know that there are a ton of men who are also. While this was not the norm several generations ago, it has seemed to become that for the last two to three generations of African Americans. Don't misquote me that this is the way our lives are, but that it has become an accepted part of our reality in America. This, coupled with the breakdown of both the community and the family unit, has done much to undermine the progress of Black males (in addition to Black females).

The basis of ignorance is the lack of knowledge, which can be manifested in many ways.

The first is no knowledge of the history of our peoples, and from which peoples we came. This entails knowing your bloodlines in regard to race such as whites can say that they are Irish, Italian and/or something else, or a combination thereof. For this, we see many African Americans making the statements (whether true or not) that they are part Native American. From this comes a pride that people who have it can understand, and those who don't feel more emotionally disenfranchised in the areas of their racial self esteem.

The next level is having no, or not enough, knowledge of your family history. I know that part of my lineage comes from the Gullah and Geechee peoples of the Carolinas and such, but I do not have the ability to trace it directly all the way back. How many of us don't know who are fathers are? How many of us, because of strained family relations, do not know or interact with one major and/or one or many minor branches of our family tree?

In order to even begin to know oneself, one must be able to learn what they can from the recorded history of themselves as a race, creed, or color and from the history of their family lines. There is so much that I have learned about myself, by learning about those who make up the genetic components of who I am.

Beyond this level, we have the level of knowing ourselves as the individuals that we are. This would also entail self-actualization; knowing what we are capable of and achieving it. There are many things in life that will allow us to doubt ourselves if we are not strong-minded enough, or have not received enough encouragement and motivation. No man is an island, and in that, we all need encouragement and reassurance.

As to the current state of affairs, we are a nation of Black men who are trying to figure out what to become and how to express ourselves. We are not only caught up in the belief that we all have to be some tough guy, but for some of us in harsh environments, that we need to become a thug, a baller, a gangster, or some role that expresses a raw, feral aggressiveness. This is one side of the fence. Get some tattoos, get some bling-bling and then spout off as if we are the toughest man alive. Oh, and some cornrows wouldn't hurt the image either. The funny thing is, the women who are attracted to this are so one-dimensional that it is funny. They are only interested in what they perceive to be raw sexual energy as well as someone who can smack someone up or down whenever and wherever applicable. This person must also have a kind of less than desirable ability to express themselves eloquently and cannot show that they are more book smart than the average cat.

Unfortunately, it's not that society as a whole has bought into these images, but that they allow outlets on a mass scale for this. For them it's business, and until it hurts their own communities, why should they care. Think about the fact that when they interview people on the news for something that happened in a neighborhood, they always seem to pick the worst representative both in issues of appearance and communication to be on the camera.

You also have those who want to be the pretty boy, also known as the ladies man, and get all the women (and possibly milk them for their

hard-earned dollars). For this, you can look like Maxwell or one of the DeBarges.

We Don't Know You

Contrary to popular belief, men don't really understand women all that well, and women really don't understand men. While we may be able to identify the things that each other want and need, we still each have a hard time of accepting and acting upon it. There are those of us who can figure it out and either become the most successful players in the game, or actually find and foster a relationship that the rest of us are not only happy to see, but are also jealous as hell of.

What works on some women doesn't work for others, whether in bed, in conversation, or just in general. Throw me a woman who I have been fantasizing about all night, and I most likely don't know what to do with her when she is presented to me. I can try, but each woman is a different being.. Can you at least throw me her user manual as well?

Do We Know How to Love?

In order to love, there are a number of things that we need as well as need to know. One of these is how love is "properly" or "correctly" manifested. I often tell women that if men were to read romance novels and attempt to duplicate what is written in those books (and would be interpreted as what was wanted by women), then there would be a huge increase in the numbers of sexual assaults, attempted rape and date rape cases.

Men are men and women are women, and for the most part, we will always be inherently different. There is no manual for women and even when you start to understand one, that doesn't translate to the next one. For most of us men, we learn more and more over time and unfortunately by the time we know what we need to do, how to do it, and that we should do it, we are going to need a steady diet of Viagra. There are some younger men who actually are blessed to learn everything they need to know about women, but usually in those cases, that is all that they know.

Knowing how to love first comes from seeing other loving, or love-filled, relationships. The first place where you see this is in your own home. If you have both parents at home and they are in a loving

relationship, then this is the first and foremost imprinter of how to love a member of the opposite sex. If that home relationship isn't good, then that starts to make it difficult for one to define what should be the right ways to love.

I myself, like a huge number of the past two generations, was raised in a single-parent home headed by my mother. I have an older sister who has a different father than mine. That difference in our fathers can have a huge difference in how we see/saw loving relationships.

In my sister's case:

I don't know how long my mother and my sister's father were together, so I don't know how many of my sister's formative years were spent with her father living at home. I would surmise that it wasn't long, since I am only six years younger than her. In that case, whatever she really caught on to had to be the tail end of a decaying relationship. The next thing she saw was a relationship between my father and our mother through the beginning until the end. I know that had to be a whirlwind of things. In the end, after leaving my mother, my father went on to marry a Korean woman. In all honesty, I believe that she is half Korean and half African America, but everyone (at that point in time) was going to look at her and just see Korean. This of course would not send a good image to my sister of Black men in relationships.

From my point of view/in my case:

My father left when I was about two, and I guess I saw enough in the time spent with him at that point in my life where it had an indelible mark on how I related to him. I never called my father "dad" until I was maybe in college; all before that I called him by his first name, which is also my first name.

Our shared experiences:

After that, my mother wound up with a boyfriend who was a good man. Unfortunately, he had one vice, the use of heroin. He died while shooting up; the needle was meant for someone else (I guess who didn't pay). After that, my mother never dated again and she didn't always have the most positive thing to say about either of our fathers.

After the relationships that you see from your parents, you next look at what you see in your extended family. This consists of grandparents, aunts and uncles. After that comes the relationships that you see that your siblings are part of. Then there are your neighbors and friends. While television has a big impact on what we see in life and gives examples (good, bad and otherwise) of relationships, what we see in our daily lives has more impact on our actions.

In the case of my sister and myself, we witnessed the relationships of her paternal grandparents and her uncles. We also saw the relationship of our next-door neighbors, as well as other families in our neighborhood. In my case, I saw that of my grandfather and his woman, who became like a grandmother to me. I also saw the relationships between other relatives in my family on my father's side. As I grew and started to spend a lot of time with my uncle Charles and aunt Robin, I got to see their interactions as well as the interactions of friends of theirs, and of my uncle Pete and his second wife.

Lastly, I saw the relationships that my sister had, and those that her girlfriends had as well. In most cases, these men received no respect from me because I never saw anything in them that had the right mix of what a good Black man should consist of.

Unfortunately for us as Black people in America, television has not been so empowering of us in looking at relationships. While people like Norman Lear were writing shows that showcased Americana in its many forms, there were not enough positive images of us in relationships as well as successful lives. While shows like *The Cosby Show* did put forth positive images, we must also remember that these shows were essentially comedy quaff; the same fare that most Black network television shows are. Almost every show and movie that came out before the mid 80's always showed the Black man as either not present (*Julia* with Dianne Carroll), a buffoon (Sherman Hemsley on *The Jeffersons*), someone who couldn't hold down a steady job and provide for his family (John Amos' role on *Good Times*), or as someone who was subordinate to a white person, whether man or woman. What many people must understand that this is an overt as well as passive attack on the self-esteem of Black men in America.

Understanding the mentality of women in small to large groups airing their frustrations, whether true or merely perceived, you have to

understand how an improper thought or opinion (especially one with no rational basis) can go on and not only negatively bias Black women against Black men, but also make (some) Black men hesitant about dealing with our women (fearing hearing things that aren't too flattering).

The first things that we need are positive examples. Next we need positive reinforcements. What follows after that is a loving partner.

How Come We Don't Voice Our Emotions?

Some of this might be rehashing, but sometimes it has to be hammered into people's heads until they finally get it: we are raised as men to view emotional outpouring as being a sign of weakness. We get this not only from other men, but also from women, be it our mothers, sisters, aunts or cousins.

I was asked to come and present my book at an event that drew only women, and after much hubbub, one woman finally asked me that question. What was ironic was that the hostess of the event had to check the sister on it; I didn't even need to answer it myself. The fact was that this woman in question was just talking about how much of a punk her young son is and that he is always whining about something. How many times do we confuse being emotional with whining? I rest my case.

We as Black men are raised to be strong, and depending on the environment that we live and grow in, have to be tough as nails and develop a façade, and hopefully the physical, emotional and mental structure to back it up, that will aid in us surviving all of the trials and tribulations that will come our way. There isn't a question of them coming to us, but the reality of the amount, the intensity and the ways that they manifest themselves.

I did not grow up in an isolated suburb or an extremely middle class section of Philadelphia. Hell, I grew up in Philadelphia, a city with more socioeconomic boundaries and racial borderlines than one would care to learn about. You can basically look at a section of the city, and summarize the majority of the population that lives there based not only on economic state, but racial breakdown. There are always exceptions to any rule, but here, and I would surmise in other major

cities, you can clearly generalize the ability of a person coming from different parts of the city to deal with certain situations. That is not to say that there is no rose in Spanish Harlem, but to say that the rose that grows there knows how to handle the weeds and identify them as such wherever their roots may take them.

I believe you can also get a snapshot of a person's mental outlook on life. Those who came from better economic standpoints usually got the chance to be exposed to many more things, which allowed them to dream and see realities that the poor and disenfranchised might only think possible in movies, television, other people's lives, or by becoming a star athlete or musical entertainer.

Let's be real, Black men are brought up to be hardcore, and unfortunately, we have this idea of the rough thug taking hold too damned much. That is seriously going overboard to the point of overcompensation, and damned near total ruination of both the heart and the soul.

I grew up in the poorer part of Wynnefield, a section of West Philly. Though we were not animals, all living creatures establish a set of hierarchies through different ways, and one of them is conflict, or the fear of it.

When you are young, your parents teach you to not let anyone push you around and if someone hits you, hit them back. People will only do what you let them, and the more you let people get away with walking over you, the more your reputation within the community (and other sets and subsets of your microcosm) will be the one of punk. You don't run to an adult and get them to intervene as other cultures teach their children.

Have you noticed that in the Black community, we don't have incidents of kids feeling bullied and taking it out on a number of other people? Why do you think that is?

As you grow up, you not only have to establish yourself on your own block, but also in the surrounding blocks where you travel and interact with other kids. Hey, you get no rep, dap, or respect if you only stay on your block. Thus in expanding your range, you must then establish your position within the social circles there as well. This is just on the

regular level of community involvement; next you have the fact that you also attend school.

School ... what a wonderful thing. In this experience you not only get some students from your immediate "play" range, but also from other parts of your neighborhood. So not only do you have to establish your position, or one of not to be messed with, in your class, but also among different classes in your grade, and also among grades higher than your own.

Let's digress from school for a minute and add traveling to relative's houses. If you have cousins near your age and come over to visit them, not only do you interact with them, but also the kids within their spheres. Note: You also have to establish yourself among your cousins and other relatives as well as your own siblings. See a pattern here?

Okay, back to the idea of school. Not only do you do this from pre-school, but also through kindergarten, elementary school, junior high and high schools. It's one thing if you always go to the neighborhood schools; in that case you really only wind up dealing with others from probably a five to ten square mile area. It's quite another if you wind up traveling to school in another part of the city.

For junior high, I chose to be bussed to another section of the city, a predominantly white section that was two hours away by public transportation. On the bus, I had to interact with other students from a wider swath of West Philadelphia, as well as Southwest Philadelphia, and when we got to the school, had to then interact with kids from all parts of Philadelphia; the financially strapped to the well-to-do. That experience can make or break you.

High school was another endeavor in the fact that just before it started, we moved to a new section of the city and unfortunately, some of the neighbors were nothing more than hoodlums who had no dreams, no aspirations and nothing going on for them (it was with some pleasure to see the mother of one kid who we know robbed us working for tips at a local car wash when I took my car in; maybe it isn't good to see someone down like that, but hey, I am human too).

In this, I had to take public transportation from West Philly to North Philly, where there was another element and I should note that

Philadelphia is a neighborhood city where people have distinct feelings about people who are not from their hood. While Mother Fattah rid the city of gangs in the 60s and early 70s, we still have our own form of unspoken gangs that is akin to what you see in Beirut and Somalia.

Our school was a multicultural high school that, during the time I was a student there, was one of the top three schools in the city. It was based in a kind of borderline area in North Philadelphia; right next to Temple University, but also in a neighborhood that needed some economic recovery. I think that also the reason why neighborhood folks didn't like us so much was that we had a dress code for the school that had all the male students wearing ties, which maybe made some people think that we thought we were better than them.

Some of the folks from the area would harass and rob students who lived in the better parts of the city. It was funny in retrospect because there were some students from the more middle class sections of the city who would talk about how much money their families had, and would be the same ones scared to make the five to six block walk to the subway station. And then, they were only safe when they got to their stop and could then transition to a bus. Some of the Italian and Irish male students from South Philly would try to talk as if they were all Mafia-connected and we should fear them. It never worked, and they really got their clocks cleaned one day by the local homies.

Our school was interesting because it was a magnet high school and you had to be academically gifted enough to make it in there and to stay there. One thing you should not think is that just because you are smart it doesn't mean that you are a geek or a nerd; smart people come in all shapes and sizes as well as degrees of toughness. Because we were gifted, we were given special privileges, including permission to leave school grounds for lunch. This, coupled with walking "the gauntlet" after-school, gave the opportunity for those people with "less than honorable intentions" to besiege students for purpose of looting and just downright taking their aggressions out in the form of beat-downs.

If you didn't have your game-face coupled with a walk that showed you could hold your own, you were a potential target. Sometimes they didn't even have to resort to using force; those who couldn't handle

themselves often were simply asked to remove said items of clothing and money that the assailants wanted. Ever see a teenage kid ride the train in socks?

Take all of this and put it together, coupled with the fact that men who show emotion in the form of poetry or any other artistic medium that shows passion (outside of sports) are ridiculed and possibly bullied or worse by women as well as men. As I said in the first book, it takes a lot of courage to put your feelings out there, whether as a man, or simply as an author. It is even more valiant when you are a Black man, for you are raised in a society where the constant images of you are as a tough guy who really doesn't show any emotions at all. Just look at all the roles that we have had in action movies in the past four decades, as well as other genres of cinema and television.

We only imitate that which is expected of us, which is expressed by our own people as well as hammered into us by society and all its mediums. Who plays the tough police captain who is chewing out his maverick rookie? Who plays the heavy in a war movie outside of the main character? Who is the one guy in a group of five or six who is not the one to be fucked with? Who is the person most likely to be picked first for sports in a multiracial environment? Who are the guys who are feared most in prison movies?

And it doesn't just happen in sports and entertainment. While we as Black men have excelled in a number of areas, our most dominant presence is in sports in a way that the rest of the world, as well as society, looks at all of us having some direct connection and abilities commensurate with what they see on television or in music videos. Not only do we have to wear the mask among ourselves so that we are not assaulted, or tested, but we also have to deal with what Black women "expect a man to be and how to act" and white society gushing over the love-hate relationship with our raw anima. Hell, most rap music is purchased by white teenagers who are looking for a way to channel their frustrations, be cool and also look tough. Hey, buying the music and adopting the culture doesn't make you tough or cool, and we can see right through you ridiculously!

After writing the book, I have heard so many comments that have been made to women about what I must be since I write poetry. Funny thing is, I always tell them to send the brother my way and to try and

make the same incorrect analysis of me once they meet me. Hey, I am not a pussy, a punk or any other weak-ass man, unlike some other cats who can't be true to themselves and hide behind an image that they actually think they can get away with forever.

This is why we as Black men don't express our emotions. On one side, we have to show the world, and each other, not to fuck with us, and on the other side if we show emotion you take it as a sign of weakness and then will challenge us.

I'll tell you this, I remember just about every punk or pushover I have ever come across, and I am sure that others do too.

Where are we going wrong: The Tepid Manifestations of Black Men as Pimp, Player, Gangster, or Thug

I was in the gym one day and while listening to some rap music on my CD player was struck with an interesting thought, "maybe because Black men have been emasculated to the point that many feel powerless in many aspects of American culture, they turn to "power roles" that are resplendent in their own subcultures."

Let me put it this way: look around you at the Black males between the ages of 5 and 40 (I know you are shocked by the breadth of the range expressed) in urban areas. Take a long look, during and after normal business hours. Look at their dress, their movements, their hairstyles, etc. Pay attention to the music they are listening to, look at the books and magazines they read, and look at what types of films and television programming they tune in to. Now, find out what their desires to be are in life, as well as what roads they think that are open to them to succeed.

After taking your survey, you will find more than anything that the bulk of them (that you see) may look at the surefire ways to make it out of the hood is through professional athletics, rap music, or grinding and hustling. Many will not envision success as a white-collar professional, or even success in a blue-collar position, which leaves less desire for professions that aren't deemed as glamorous, as well as the "hustles" that we have defined in our communities over the generations. These hustles have typically been numbers running, drug

selling (and manufacture in some cases), pimping, or the outright basics of criminal activity, robbing and stealing.

In the previous paragraph, I made the distinction to add the phrase in brackets “that you see.” This is because for every one out there (hanging in those urban areas), there are several who are in class, at work, or somewhere else where they are not engaged in that tomfoolery. And for those that you see engaged in it, many of them only need a good sense of direction, which could lead to opening a door here and there. The problem is that the dreams of many have been trampled by parts of the realities they see every day, but that is not to say such a vision will take hold and keep them rooted into an ideology that “resistance is futile.”

I grew up in a nice inner city neighborhood. There was crime, but not like that portrayed on television and the movies. There was never a gun battle when I was growing up, though that changed when I moved away from my original neighborhood. There are many success stories in “tha hood” and not all of them have to be that someone has a mansion, a yacht and a Bentley. Sometimes the success story is that the person has a job, a place to live, isn’t committing crime and is adding to the betterment of society.

There are many of us unfortunately who do need rescuing, but there are more of us who just could use the occasional complement, and maybe a break here or there. I am not making excuses for anyone, I am just stating my opinions on where we are.

One friend said that for things to turn around with Black men, it will be up to Black women (clearly because women are nurturers). I am not saying he’s right, and I am not saying he’s wrong. I am just telling you what he said, which might make you think about it for a while.

Impediments to Loving

There are many impediments to a man loving a woman, and when it comes down to African Americans, we have so many other things that have affected us over the years that also form divisiveness within our own ranks, which is ironic and contrary to us surviving and advancing as a people.

Apart from just the basic issues of things like “yoking uneven oxen,” we have so many other factors that affect us, or shall I say that we let affect us within our interpersonal relationships that we are truly in no position to harbor.

I think I have already spoken/written about things that we as African American men can bring to the situation of a relationship that can have tumultuous results, so please don't behead me with this first subsection of this chapter in the book. I think that in the end, we have both been hard on each other as people (meaning men and women) and somewhere something has to change. I speak frequently to men who want to call their exes bitches and whatnot, just as much as I mention to women that talking about something like they are nothing is really bad when you were just in love with that person in the past. The latter part goes for both sexes. Yes, when we are hurt we tend to reach out, and strike out because of our frustrations and whatnot. Sometimes it is highly justified and sometimes it is not.

I remember being in the gym one day and a couple of guys were there talking with me about the first book. One brother on the periphery said that I should write a book excoriating Black women for their

faults. I merely laughed at him and said that I like being able to go “home,” and so should he. He didn’t understand what I meant by that and as I explained it to him – going home is being able to go back to your community, or any other place populated by African Americans and African descendants, whether it be Africa, Canada, Brazil or the Caribbean – he profoundly stated that he didn’t date sisters and didn’t live near a large population of us. At that point we ribbed him and also tried to give him advice. While he was not one to naturally take it, we simply disregarded his opinions for what they were. I say this to say that while it seems that we tend to dog each other out in conversations when things don’t go our way, I feel as though men get dogged more than the women. That could be because I tend not to gravitate toward men who have no high esteem for Black women specifically, or women in general, as well as the fact that I have spent an inordinate amount of time around women my whole life. Maybe to me when a Black man says something that dogs sisters, I tend to just look at him as some aberrant person who knows no better and didn’t come to the table with the right attitude. Yes, there are a ton of them out there, and at some point, I think we all turn around and feel the need to slight the other person (whether we actively do it or not).

As I said earlier, maybe there needs to be a companion book to this written by an African American woman. I would be happy to collaborate with an “authoress” on that, but this right here is coming from the male perspective and experience.

THINGS THAT WOMEN CAN SAY & ATTITUDES THAT THEY CAN HARBOR

From birth until adulthood and throughout the rest of their lives, there are many things that we as Black men hear from Black women. As most people only remember the negative, those things stand out in our lives. It may not matter what the emotional state of the woman was when words were uttered, but the fact is that they were uttered in the presence of a man, where they can do the most damage. The most devastating is:

Black Men Ain't Shit (or variations thereof)

Since coming out with the book, not only have I dealt with the venomous barbs that leave the tongues of some Black women, but also with this old tried and true saying that really hurts. Note this: you can physically beat the hell out of me, but you can do more damage with emotionally assaulting the fabric of my being.

I have heard this one for years from numerous women I have come in contact with, no matter what the relationship dynamic is or was. I heard this from women in my family, as well as women in the community, and it is a hard piece to swallow as well as stabs pin after pin into the voodoo doll of my psyche and my ego. I am 32 years old, and only about three times in my life have I heard a Black woman say that she walks away from sisters who speak those words. It's even worse when you consider that some of the women who say this grew up in a home where the father was present and loving, or tried to show his love the best way he knew, which was his impediment and not necessarily his fault (see next section).

This is something that is said more times than I care to hear, and it is one thing that closes off the possibility of Black men to approach and love a women. The first time things don't go as planned, you don't want to hear that phrase or any variation of it. We brothers continually open up the chance to find love, and it's like that mentality or idea is somewhere in back of that Black woman's mind. In this case, how are we going to come to the table and freely allow for something positive to happen? You have a preconceived bias against myself and every other brother, and I have the knowledge that you have that, coupled with the fact that the last Black woman I dealt with might have uttered the same thing in anger once or twice.

How does it feel when a supposed white friend or associate slips in a bad argument and either says, or almost says, the "n" word? What would you be ready to do? Now please give us brothers a little more credit for loving our women when we are confronted with that and don't lose control and cross the line.

Here is some news for you ladies, there is an extremely small percentage of Black men who say things like "women ain't shit," and "bitches are no good" or refer to women as bitches. In the case that

the rest of us do, we are simply venting to some other brothers and pouring out our frustrations in a “barbershop” environment. I myself don’t hold what I went through with one woman to front-load and waylay the potential for a harmonious relationship to exist with the next one.

True life story # 1:

Years ago, I was part of an African dance company located in Philadelphia. It was an interesting tale in that this company was the result of the breakup of a prior dance company. At one point, I started learning to play djimbe under an excellent dance teacher who, as well as being a very good drummer, is a Black man. Over time, we got to the point in our friendship where he became like an older brother to me and I got to know his son and to some degree the mother of his son.

While he was not in a marriage, I can’t say that he strayed outside of the relationship, or was happy with what he had and simply made a change, but in any case, he wound up leaving one woman for another. The new woman in his life was someone he actually tried to get me to pursue at first, but I could tell that she was not the type of woman I would be interested in. While there was some brief drama by his relationship changeup, things got back to normal within the company soon. To say that this sister was a good dancer is an understatement, and she had the looks and beauty to go with it, but an attitude that was definitely venomous.

As this woman was talented, he desired for her to become part of the company. The long and short was that the other heads of the company did not want that to happen simply because she would be competing with their skill levels, but also that she would probably straighten out the improprieties concerning his compensation in paid performances. The end result was that damned near everyone in the company ruled against him and left him. While he still had classes, it turned out to be her teaching the classes, and just he and I provided all of the drumming (this is a hard thing to do when you are learning, but I persevered). Over time, things turned out where it seemed like it was her dance company and he was simply a puppet for her to control. Well, the tensions came to a boil and the pressure cooker actually exploded one day.

One Saturday during the summer of 1994, my instructor was making some announcements to the class. While in the midst of one announcement, his significant other broke in and started talking to the class. To the uninitiated, as well as those who hadn't seen enough in life, this looked like no big thing, but for those women who were older and more mature, they saw a big disrespect and started getting prepared to leave.

After all announcements were done, people were milling around too long where they should have been exiting so that rehearsal for the dance company could start. After 10 minutes, my instructor told me to pack up the drums as we were going home. At that moment, his lady came up to him and had a brief conversation with him. In the next minute, he exploded up in a rage and proceeded to wring her around the dance floor and up and down several flights of stairs. During this time there was one male drummer there who used to always mess with me verbally (but knew not to raise his hands) who had at least 100 pounds on my instructor and looked to me to do something. I guess he really showed how much of a man he really wasn't that day.

Back to the story; my instructor shouting, pulling and not doing what was the right thing to do, dragged her back into the main room. At that point, I told him to release her and he did. That was it. No fighting, no arguing, he just did it.

After she left, he was very remorseful and we talked about what happened from start to finish so that I can understand what happened. It was not just her cutting him off during the announcements, it was also what she said to him in the exchange. Her words were this (to the best of my memory):

“We ain't going anywhere. We are going to do rehearsal and that's it. You ain't shit and it don't matter me telling you this because no one else can hear it.”

Well, I know there are some things that were left out as well as forgotten; hey, this happened in 1994. However, I guess my instructor had had enough of women telling him that he wasn't shit and finally reacted in one of the worst possible ways.

True Life Story #2:

As I was inspired to write this book (as explained earlier), I made a stop on the way back from Virginia at my uncle's house in Delaware. While he and I didn't necessarily get along all the time when I was younger (in my teens), we can talk for hours now and see eye to eye on many issues.

As I was relating to him the woe that we Black men face with Black women saying that "we ain't *&^%" and the rest of everything else, he told me a story.

It seems that as my grandfather had felt my grandmother, like any woman, she had some major rage and expressed it by commenting on the character of Black men negatively. Well, my cousin was there and was three years old at the time. At that point, he had to take her to task over what she said and first explained that his son was always going to be a Black man, and couldn't change it even if he wanted to. He went on to say that this is the last thing his son needs to hear, especially at this age and time in his life. The second point he made was that if she cared to continue to speak like that, then she would not be welcome over his house, nor allowed.

I love parts of my family because not only do they have strong wills, but do also make strong decisions.

Why Don't You Act Like A Man!!

One thing that women must understand, they cannot define what a man is, nor unfortunately is not. If that were the case, we would really be in some serious hurt. The problem is that many of us are part of a nation of men who were raised by women, and many of that group were confused and took certain things to excess on one side or another.

For the record, a woman cannot (solely alone and without the child having any positive male influences and role models) raise a man. She can raise a respectful adult male, but him being what other men would consider a man, is just not happening. I know there are a ton of women out there arguing and disagreeing with this point, but that just doesn't change reality.

On the flip side, what happens when a man is raised primarily by men alone? That would also make for some interesting results. I believe that we need a combination of both male and female parental influences to produce a well-balanced grown man. We men carry both x **and** y chromosomes, not one or the other, but both, and in that we need to learn from both components of our makeup.

There are times when a woman expects, or would like, a man to act a certain way in a situation, and it is at that point that they utter those words from their mouth. Usually it is at a point in which they want some physical solution to a problem that we know should not involve a physical aspect.

One bar buddy gave me his opinion that maybe one of the biggest problems between men and women in relationships is that we are so caught up with the definitions and roles of womanhood and manhood.

Arguments and Zings that Kill Relationships

One thing really stands out to me, and that is the arguments. How you resolve a disagreement, or what brings you to arguments can be a pretty powerful thing. Inclusive of that are all of the little “zings” we can throw at one another.

I have learned that when someone is being an ass, you don't have to be a dick. Realize that in anger, sometimes people say things that reveal more of a deficiency or issue within themselves than an issue within you. Be the bigger man/person, and realize what you have to lose if you stoop to the level of hurling insults at the next person. Even if you can heal the relationship, the scars from the wounds may never go away.

PRIOR BAD RELATIONSHIPS AND OTHER SITUATIONS

Everybody has baggage and damned near everyone has skeletons in their closets. Some people have a whole wardrobe, while some have overnight bags. Some people have a small urn for ashes and others have a whole mausoleum. The problem is being able to learn from the past and watching for signs that certain things are about to repeat and not allowing them to.

More often than not, women will let what happened in the past be an impediment to what happens in the future. Men can more easily shed the wounds of the past and just try the next chance. Maybe it is because we are simple creatures and really want some steady sex. However, this is not to say that men don't hurt and that it can't last a long time. Hell, you did not want to meet me as a woman after Nicole had dumped me (see Phase 2 from the first book).

"Baby Momma" Drama

There are those of us who have been burned by the mother of our children. However, there are many men who have children. Not all of them were men who just wanted to knock someone up and mark them as theirs first for life. Some are men whose protection failed. Then there is the last group of men for whose number (for which I can not estimate a percentage or say it is significant or insignificant) is undetermined but were in love with the mother of their child. I will state right here that it really might not have been love, but what they felt was love at that moment.

In either case, if the relationship turns ugly (and ends), there can be some serious repercussions for the man. Usually, an older woman will be less likely to play games that can have a truly negative impact on the father's life (like making false arrests, not allowing the father to see his child, having relatives or friends assault him, etc.) because she knows that in the end, it is the child who suffers the most.

If the father has to endure this, you can be sure he is going to be truly hesitant about dealing with women for some time being, especially those who remind him of the mother of his child.

In some percentage of cases, the child support payments alone will decimate the father. In that, he may not be able to afford health care, let alone a decent place to live and have the ability to properly clothe and feed himself.

"Baby Daddy" Drama

For every true mathematical scenario, especially in geometry, there is a corollary, something that works in reverse or in the inversion. As far as dealing with the issue of having kids as a man and dealing with

“baby momma” drama, you also have the issue of “baby daddy” drama if you deal with a woman who has children.

Some of you men out there know exactly what I am talking about, and it is a crazy situation. The reality is this, there are more single women raising their children than there are single men doing the same, and sometimes you will encounter resistance from the father of their children.

It’s incredible but true that some men believe that sometimes they can “mark” a woman as theirs and always theirs if she has a child by them. And in some cases, the woman does allow this type of bond of possession to exist for some time. My best friend’s mom warns against dealing with a woman with children already, because you are bringing another man into your relationship. In some cases it is true. He might not want her himself, but also might not want her to be happy with anyone else. He might resort to simply always comparing himself to the new man, and it can go crazy in two directions. If he has more than the new guy he might always try to put him down. If he has less he might become more of a problem simply because of jealousy. We have already pointed out that men are easily capable of giving into immature flights of jealousy and rage.

In some case, if his pride and ego are really wounded, he might take to physical forms of harassment against the new guy, if not outright assault. And you know, it would burn him up to see another man taking care of his children better than him. That prior man can also try to turn his children against you, which is something I am sure that single women ([and second wives) dealing with a man who had children from a prior marriage or relationship can all too quickly identify with.

He could easily just do other things to spite your relationship with her, like not canceling out on spending time with his kids the weekend that you and her were planning on going away. There are many other tricks and whatnot, but “baby daddy” drama is something to be considered as well.

Children, Her Children

Remember the movie *Baby Boy*, the scene in which Ving Rhames' character has to knock out Jody? Have you ever been in that situation as a man, or kinda sensed that such a situation could easily happen? Dog, I've been there.

The one major piece I liked about that dynamic was that in the movie, the mother gave this new man a chance, **and** as the son (Jody) started to have to deal with similar problems in his life (and mature through them), he better understood the new person/love interest in his mother's life. Well, that's the movies and the movies can lend some very ideal issues. In the real world, we as single men could only be so fortunate.

According to the last census, there were 9.8 million family households with children headed by a woman. There are 4.751 million households headed by a single African American woman who have children (but not necessarily living with them). Of that number, there are 2.569 million who have children of their own living with them. And of that amount, 1.104 million have only one child. These numbers are for children under 18 and only come into play when they are the only head of the household. These numbers do not come into play when you are looking at "sisters" who might be living with their parents and also have their child under that roof as well.

For us men, we realize additionally that with a male child there are going to be additional dynamics to deal with; boys need strong male role-models, and that's that. Absence of that can bring about a situation in which the woman's son is testing a man who is innocent of any wrongdoings [there]. And then there is the special-ness of the relationship between mothers and their sons.

But let's look at the greater part of the puzzle. We as men normally don't go into meeting a woman and want to spend time with her and her children. We usually want to spend time with her. However, modern society is what it is, and we are definitely going to come across single women with children. Beautiful, attractive, sexy, smart, single women who just happen to have children. So we just deal with it for the most part (or don't if that is your issue). The main piece comes into play when those children have no manners, no training, or

are just too much trouble. Disciplining someone else's children is not an easy minefield to negotiate.

Her Family, Not Her Children

Meet the Parents is a wonderful movie, but I've been there as well, and I am sure a slew of other men have been there before as well. Moreso than dealing with the issues of (her) children, will be (her) family. In that, I would say that time is of the essence. It takes a while for people to get to know each other, and sometimes people make judgments about others too damned soon.

You know that the first times you meet people you are worried about making any guffaws and social gaffes. This is another dynamic that you aren't clued totally in on, and even if she did tell you about them, you have to form your own dynamics with these people. They might tell you about the alcoholic relative, but might leave you in a position with that person where you are desperately trying to find the way to deal with them and still come out smelling like roses. Then there are the family members who might test you to see what you are made of. Above it all, you have to sometimes deal with the duplicity of people, e.g., they open up to you and tell you a ton of stuff, but when you ask them a question they now act as if you have violated a sacred rule and then tell the other members something different. Hey, it's happened to me, dog.

If I look back at all the relationships I have been in, and then factor in the dynamics experienced between me and their relatives, I could have some very interesting stories to tell.

Are Men Looking for Love?

That's the question many women ask these days, and it's a shame they have to ask. I think that most men are looking for love, but some of them got hurt on the way, so they changed the way they relate to women. I come across men all the time who want to be known as a player, or try the role out for a while. I always tell them to find that special person, and give the game a rest. The game is tiresome and grows weary on not only your life in general, but your heart in particular.

I messed up with "her" because from the door I said that I wasn't looking for a relationship. If I knew how she was (as a person, a lover, and a friend), I wouldn't have said that. For the most part, we want happiness as well, though we might not think that the same things that make you women happy are the things that make us happy.

We love our quiet times, sex and eating. Pretty much we are that simple. Everything else is gravy. If you come at us honestly and get to know us (without imposing demands too soon), we just might be the one to take you off the market. Okay, then there are the men who aren't going to do anything until they are pushed, prodded and given an ultimatum. Hey, I am not concerned about those brothers or those situations. I am not in any of those (or maybe I really am and just am too stupid to admit it, even if I realize it).

Life is what you make it, and we all have choices. Sometimes it may take years for that official vow of love and life to happen. I know people who have dealt with each other for years and then got married.

Then you have those who stay around for years and finally move on with their lives individually. What works for some may not work for others.

As a woman, you have to understand the man you are dealing with. If not, you'll be getting nowhere fast, and speaking of that ...

Why do men cheat and are all men dogs?

The answer to the first part of this is actually very simple, and it all boils down to not being satisfied, whether being unsatisfied or dissatisfied, and believe it or not, it always doesn't deal with the woman.

If a person is greedy and eats too much, it is because they aren't satisfied with the fact that they have had enough to eat. It has nothing to do with the quality of the food provided. They are just a greedy ass.

On the flip side, you have those who really are intimidated, or feel inferior, to the other person in the relationship or by what they are bringing to the dynamic. Self-esteem is a pretty powerful thing, and lack of it in a relationship can cause some major issues. I have known of men who cheated with another woman simply because they felt more comfortable with the other woman than they did with their partner.

And no, I don't want to hear any theories about men being wired a certain way and that in the Bible, men had multiple wives and the fact that adultery had nothing to do with sleeping with someone outside of your wife, but with the wife of another man.

While we are still part of the animal kingdom, we have risen above animals, or at least we should have a long time ago. Dogs and cats are domesticated, and for the most part, certain behaviors have either been bred out of them, or suppressed through generations of domestication. You house-train a dog, and if he still continues to shit everywhere in your house, you either discipline him or get rid of him. There is a saying on the flip side that you can't change a hoe into a housewife, so women, if your man won't stop playing the field, find a new one. Men do what you allow them to, and either you will stay and take it, do the same, or cast him aside.

Myself, I love sex, but that doesn't mean I am going to get into a committed monogamous relationship with a woman I claim to love, and then cheat on her. Men talk some of the biggest bullshit and it is only because they are getting away with it. If some women stopped opening their legs to men who they know are already married, maybe some of this behavior could be chilled out in a generation or two. I feel as though if you really love a woman completely, you will not jeopardize it with another woman. If there is something missing, you either find a way to get along without it, come to an agreement about how to get it sated, or walk the hell away, but don't come to me and tell me "you know how it is dog." The answer is "no, I don't." I loved "her" and no matter if I was pissed or whatever would not see myself losing her because I wanted to screw another woman.

Either it's going to work or it is not. If I want you to have my back completely and trust you implicitly, then I have to offer you the same. Hey, there are men who will walk away when you put that down, but it is better to have a man walk away and you not to be disrespected than for you to find out in some real messed up way that he is seeing someone else. The worst-case scenario is that he gives you a disease that can't be cured (I remember the story that a surgeon associate of mine told me about a woman who served her man divorce papers when he came to visit her after she had a knee operation. She has contracted gonorrhea, which had settled in and destroyed her knee, but since she hadn't had sex with anyone else, how do you think that she got that?) You think about it.

If we as men cannot control our sexual urges, then maybe we need to redefine the concept of manhood once more.

And no, all men are not dogs, but if you keep treating us a certain way, don't be surprised if and when we just do what you have been saying that we will do for so long. Don't let words brought about by thoughts of us being less than honorable shape us into doing less than honorable things. I am not saying that we are all weak, but I am not saying that everyone is strong all of the time, and if you give a person an outlet through what you are telling them you accept about them.

What gets me most is the number of women who believe that all men cheat. If this is what you think of us, and we cheat on you, then why be mad. You believed from the door that we couldn't be faithful. You

dated us in turn. It's like the fable in which the guy gives a snake a lift across a river; the snake bites him in the end after he said that he wouldn't. When asked why he did it anyway, the snake replies that it is his nature.

As women (who deal with men) you need to either hold one concept or another; you cannot cross the line or straddle the fence like the vagaries of the seasons. If you want a faithful man, then go and find one and realize that men are not destined to cheat.

One friend and I had this conversation and we came to the conclusion that if I (being a man and knowing men more than she would) said if I say that most men don't cheat, then they are a silent majority and it is the cheating minority who speaks up and stands out. How many times have we seen interviews with rappers and other folks who talk about the only way out of the hood, or to make ends meet, is through selling drugs? If you think about it, the majority of people living in those environments don't sell drugs, but actually go to jobs that they may or may not be proud of religiously. They work, support and raise others and live. Since they don't drive around in flashy cars, wear the latest clothing or are "iced-down" in scads of bling-bling, no one sees them, but they are the majority.

It is the same with faithful men; they are the majority. Don't let those who want to keep some absurd behaviors going fool the lot of you.

One friend said it perfectly when we were talking about this issue and that is "if all men are dogs, then who are they sleeping with?"

0-60: the speed of falling in love

"How quickly do men fall in love?" you women may ask. There is no one answer that will fit the bill, but the reality is that we fall into serious feelings faster than we as men want to admit, and a lot quicker than you women realize. I will say that we usually can figure out pretty quickly where and how we want you to fit in our lives for the time being.

Are Women Really Looking for Love?

While I had started sending some communication via e-mail, and an inebriated phone call as well, I had noticed that after sending a few things, I hadn't received a response. One part of me was very perturbed, while another part of me pulled out of my memory that she was on vacation the same time during the previous year.

In going back through e-mails to verify this, I came across one in which we were talking about relationships. One line of her e-mail said that she didn't want to get hurt. I guess then, I started to remember snippets of conversations she and I had over time, as well as talks I have had with female friends on the issues of relationships.

Pace (my best friend) and I have come across numerous women in our travels who are hesitant to really get to know a man simply because they do not want to get hurt. I can't even begin to count the number of friends I have known who have started to date someone and be happy, only to have this person do something low-down and despicable, and see them retreat from the world.

I can't say that when it comes down to it, one sex is more emotional than the other when it comes to a case of a broken heart. I do know that I go through a major slump when that happens, and I know a lot of other men do the same (we just don't talk about it to you).

DMX rapped about what do you really want from him, with Sisqo crooning in the background. And I have seen numerous cases of women who would rather have, for the most part, an emotionally

detached relationship with a man versus something committed. Sometimes it's a matter of having everything you want in your life just the way it is, and not risk losing any of it in any way, shape, or form.

Sometimes it's just a matter of control, because when it comes down to your heart and the issue of love, it is something that can stop all of us in our tracks.

Ask yourself as a woman:

“If I truly want love, am I really doing the things I need to which will allow it to come into my life, and stay there?”

OR CAN THEY JUST BE COMPLETELY HONEST ABOUT HOW THEY FEEL?

Many of us remember the song by DMX called “What They Really Want” with Sisqo crooning in the background. (Sidebar: if rap is so damned hardcore, then why do they call them rap songs?)

My question is if women can really be honest with themselves about how they feel about us? See, if you love someone, just admit it. What's the worst thing that could happen? If they are the type of person to use your emotional feelings as leverage, then you'll see it very quickly, maybe go through one or two incidents, and then move on. If not, then maybe you should get some good counseling.

I hear more women these days saying how they don't want to get hurt. Love is hurt! It's the good and the bad. Suck it up and deal with it. You can't get love until you are ready to open yourself up to receive it. You can't put a filter around your heart, like its own version of a chastity belt. It won't work, and after a while it will get to you and to the other person.

Still Loving

First off, I must say that this book is almost impossible to finish because just like the whirlwind feelings one gets in regard to love, and the stages we go through during and after the breakup, there are times when you see more in the next minute than you did in the last weeks. I have revised and added so much to this book so many times that it is best I really get a steady outlet for my thoughts and emotions, like a radio show or a television program. While this book was Tonya's idea and I love her for that, it has also led me more on a path of discovery within myself than I ever imagined; maybe that was her intention.

Summarily, I write that I would like her back, and if not her, someone with all her good qualities. Maybe she is right and we just aren't meant to be an "us," and in finishing this book, that might be a realization. However, it is the acceptance of love that is the most important thing for people to understand. Accepting that you love someone, how you love someone, and just how much you love them. It might not be the love that will allow you to enter into a full-blown, no-holds barred relationship, but it still is love.

For everyone who I knew that I loved, in whole or in part, I was still ready to spend more time with them and just see where exactly it would go. The most interesting thing is when you start to question how your life together would be, as well as questioning whether you have been too picky regarding them. Then there are the times that you know you love someone and while you can't be the "one" for them, you still don't want to let them go, and don't want them to let you go

either. Furthermore, there are the times in which you have to deal with the fact that you aren't with that person, and whatever kernel of love you had for them starts to grow more and more; absence makes the heart grow fonder.

I think that as we mature, we get to the point of "still loving." So what if there are things about the other person that rub us the wrong way, our heart has spelled out something totally and entirely different to us, and it is our heart that controls us more than we care to realize. It might not be the smart decision to deal with someone, but that doesn't dull the pain any less. No one said that love was smart, no one said that love made sense, and sometimes it doesn't have to. Why else do opposites attract (and sometimes make the best partnerships)?

I believe that there are a number of men out there, dare say I that they are the majority, who will "still love" past the basic wounds and whatnot that they might go through with a woman. I believe there are more men who are willing to go through the motions and do what it takes to get something to work than there are who are just going to pull away and try somewhere else simply because there might be a few bumps along the avenue of love and happiness. Usually the folks who are quick to jump ship at the earliest events have either been through too much already that they have not healed from, or have gotten to a point where they are too weary from past experiences to try and win this one round.

However, my question in those instances is how the person looking to jump ship has assessed the other person. Have they really looked at them and seen heaven, or something close to it in that person? Or were they just looking for some good times and would have been comfortable with those experiences for the rest of their life? It's like you want the Rolls Royce, but you see a Buick Regal and are just happy with it.

For just about every place I go, I can find at least one man who will get into a conversation with me regarding relationships or past love affairs. In that, we will talk about not only the hurt, but the love and what really mattered above all else, that woman. We might talk about how it hurt after she left and how every time we see the same type of car she drove it sent our emotions flying. If the conversation might not be one about opening up in regard to our hearts, it might simply be

one in which we might explore the reality of what the woman might be going through. Sometimes, we as men need to understand where the woman might be (mentally and otherwise) and not react to things that don't go our way, or when things are said against us, let alone action done the same way.

The worst thing we can do is to call a woman a bitch, especially if it is a woman who we have been emotionally, romantically, or intimately involved in. The person you destroy or hurt today could be the person you might need in the future.

Love, like life in general, has many avenues, expectations and realities. The same mentality it takes to become a "rags-to-riches" story in business and career is the same mentality it will take to find "the greatest love of all." While success can only be truly measured by one's internal happiness level, there are times you have to be exposed to many realities, experiences and paths to understand where you are truly happy. Then when you truly know what you want, put your mind, body and soul behind achieving it. Sometimes, it is the Buick Regal, and a small but comfortable house and a job that you enjoy going to every day that doesn't pay six figures or even a high five figures that truly makes you happy. You are in no worries about going belly-up in debt and can weather any storm that comes your way. At other times, maybe your happiness would be satisfied by having that exotic or import car in a snazzy paint job, with a lovely manse or estate, a room in your house decorated all in white and a stressful job in a high-stakes career where you can lose your shirt any minute and the daily peril makes surviving it all so much more exciting.

Maybe I am ready to explore one of my fantasies, and just be some very attractive and wealthy woman's boy-toy for a while. Hey, all men somewhere have that fantasy going through their head. You meet her at an elegant affair, or at a club, or while away on vacation by yourself. You hit it off, she likes you for you, listens to your ideas and helps you make your dream come true. Why can't someone give me an indecent proposal? I'm good for it!

Maybe after writing all of this, I can look at it and just give up, saying that she will never change certain things and attitudes so it will never be an us. I can look and just marvel at the fact that I went through a lot of drama because I was in love with the heart and soul of that woman, her beauty both internal and external, and was ready to go the distance with her.

Or maybe for now, I just want to deal with myself and go my own solo path. That's the interesting scenario that is usually posed by women, and might be sometimes the smartest thing to do.

But I will never give up on love. I will never become jaded, or look at women derisively or indifferently because of the things I have been through. Of course, I learned my lesson and will not sabotage a new potential relationship by writing off (verbally) the possibility that something may happen when I meet someone new, as I did with her.

Right now, I look back at all of the women I dated, and regret none of it. I look back and see that in each case I was not the man who did them wrong, but had to deal with the men in their lives before me. Those men who some of whom did heinous acts, and others who just in their weaknesses of being human beings, and thus not inured to sin or imperfection, negatively impacted on those women. The charges lobbied against the men, and in some cases women, encompass rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, obsession (and manifested in various forms of assault and harassment), incest and molestation, battery, deceit and infidelity as well as downright doggishness, physical abuse, emotional abuse, theft and fraud.

Maybe that's the reason why many of my relationships, or more aptly worded "dealings," never really panned out. I was already behind the eight ball before I ever lifted a cue stick. Sometimes, no matter what you do, you are already destined to fail. One woman said that one main problem was that she dated many losers before dating me. For each conflict, or spat, I made it clear that I was not one of those in her past, never making comments about them in general conversation, but only referring to them when having to blunt the force of some of her anger when things got heated. I was not anyone before me who got physical with her, or tried to take advantage of her in any way, shape or form. I was not one to expect everything from her and give nothing

in return. I was not the one who showed her infidelity, and really put a scar there.

I was just the one who had to deal with it if I truly expected to love her, and wanted to be in her life, and have her in mine. I had to deal with the legacies of dissatisfaction, anger and unrest that they had left behind in her. I was willing to hold her, hug her, walk through the process of healing with her, and love her unconditionally.

For me, I have dated, if not spent time with women whose husbands had left, beat them, or worse. Women who in turn walked away and had real issues (that even they admitted) with men in general, or their fathers in particular. Women who had it so bad that they poisoned his meals, took the kids and rolled. Women whose significant other either turned into a drug addict or an alcoholic, or had them spend time in some rough prison because they left them holding the bag.

Granted, I am not 100% saint and savior myself, but I will stand by you if I believe in you. And I never looked at them and held their past against them, because for whatever reasons, now I was holding them in my arms and they were blessing my life with their presence.

For me, I will never discount love, or the fact that love can come and go, as long as you give it the opportunity. The person you don't give any attention to today might be the person you grow old with tomorrow. No one knows how it happens (inside of us), or why it strikes when and where it does. Love is everything, and is sometimes not enough.

To me, "she" was a saint and will always be, and while away from her I can look back and reflect everything that I didn't like, my heart (and my consciousness) will always admit that I was more than happy with her than with anyone else.

Maybe the reason for her in my life was to make me think, understand, dissect and rebuild. Maybe there is a future in which we will be together and be the best of friends. Then again, maybe not. Maybe it was just for me to learn a lot and be able to now go back and form a good, meaningful relationship with someone in my past, maybe someone who I never got the chance with before because I didn't feel like I was in the right place.

I believe that sometimes returning to a person is not going back at all, but going further along a path with more to bring to the table, whether it is financially, maturity and wisdom, or in another area. Who knows?

In the end, was the book just about me? The answer for the most part is no. It's about a concept, an ideal that many of us walk away from when faced with. It is the thing that we all talk about and admire on television, film and in books but many of us wouldn't accept it if it entered our own lives. We all want love, but are hypocritical when it is standing right there in our faces, especially when it is the opportunity that is a major image of what we just cheered on in the theater. Granted, not everyone is for everybody, but then again, anything that's worth something probably took a little "oomph" to make it happen.

We usually don't allow us to see the beauty and the potential in someone if they are not damned-near drop-dead looking, dressed to the nines, riding in an expensive vehicle, or on the arms of someone else that makes us take notice. It's only when people somehow make a "statement" to our eyes and our egos that we even give them a second look. I am not saying this is right or wrong, I am just saying that's the way it is. You might know someone who has all the qualities of some celebrity who interests you, but because they are not in the spotlight you never notice them. I can't say who gets it worse, men or women, but I am a man and choose to right now look at it from my point of view.

Do I get mad when women overlook me because they are looking for some Al B. Sure-esque guy? I would be totally bullshitting you if I said that it might not ruffle me a little. But you know what, it's only a little, because I am not on the sidelines in the big game of life. Hey, I am a brown-skinned brother with short hair, brown eyes, and standing less than six feet tall. What I lack up in the not having dreads or "good" hair, not being light-skinned and not being a tall-dark-and-handsome I more than make up with my build, physical abilities, talents and intellect. Don't forget my attitude. Yes, I am arrogant, but anything and everything can be tempered with wisdom.

I remember once I was in D.C. with friends and we went to BET's Soundstage restaurant in Landover (or Largo, I really can't remember).

I entered the mock dating game that they were having and was chosen. What was funny is that the sister wanted the light-skinned guy (who was getting the middle age paunch), but chose me for my answers. When she discovered who it was, she declined the date. It bothered me not in the least because there were some other sisters who were more my style giving me some comfort. Damn, I wanted to stay but my friends were hatin' and trying to leave to hit the club early.

Remember that in the 80's, it was the decade of the light-complected brother and then the 90s was that for the dark chocolate brother, and now we are somewhere where it looks like the all-natural brother is making his stand.

A weak person will makes excuses, but a strong one will make their way despite what is going down. They just have to make it a little harder. I remember talking to a past friend about the shortage of Black men compared to Black women. This friend was female and kept mentioning the numerical disparities in our populations. I basically explained to her that life is just like a sport and like a war. Everybody is a player in the game of life. The divisions come in how much time they get in the game, what positions they play and what league they are in.

Yes, there are less of us than there are Black women, but in the end, if I can easily walk across ten brothers in a day's time, if not an hour's, who are still single, then don't complain to me. The issue is not as much of whether there is an actual shortage, but more of are we actually out there looking for what we want (where it is as well), and if we even are compatible with it. After that, do we want it enough to try to make it work?

I have no hesitation in saying that I wish this/my whole story had an ending like that in *Hav Plenty*. Who would I be kidding if I weren't that honest? Hell, my boy John says that the movie *Love Jones* was essentially my life. We all treasure the good turn of events, and cheer the underdog that we believe in.

Right now, I do feel like Lee Plenty (*Hav Plenty*) in many ways. Right now I am at a point in life where certain ducks aren't in a row. The house should've been paid off several years ago (and I am nowhere close on it). I wrote my first book and the deal that was

supposed to happen didn't; that turned out to just be some bullshit thrown my way from someone who was trying to get into a place and scam for a lot, or at least play along until some major financing came through. Right now, I am revamping two stories to produce a screenplay I want to do, and may act in myself. My financial situation became seriously screwed because of a client who jerked me with payment and now I have to sue. This of course messed me up in other areas of my life because some bills just couldn't get paid.

I have my creative talents (writing, film & video, photography and music) but right now I need some damned good clients and/or a patron.

And lastly, I am in love with a woman who right now I have given up on trying to be with, but I love her just the same. And yes, just like his character, there are certain things I can't stand about her, but if you love a person you make decisions; no one is perfect.

They say it is always darkest before the dawn. Well, I don't know what time of night it is, but don't think I am not stumbling into trees (in the forest of night) and whatnot. Etta said to me that when things seem to get real bad, usually things turn around big time in my life.

Well God, I need that reversal of fortune "STAT!" → You know, like they say in the hospitals, or on the medical shows. "It's your boy hanging on in Philly." But I won't make any false promises to God in exchange for blessings. I am Zach, and as I become enlightened, I will make more changes in my actions. Yes, I need rescuing, but I am not going to be like, "God, I won't sin for the next year."

Well, so now we come to the real end of this book. Who knows what will happen. I could say stay tuned for the movie and see what happens. Maybe it will be someone who I met after her, or maybe it will be another person who bought the first book, or someone who picked up the second. Then again, maybe it will be someone I met years ago. Someone with whom maybe we can get it right this time. Or just someone who I was too shy to talk to, or too broke to go and romance or simply just visit. I can for the most part deduce right now who it is not, but in the end, it is what "He" on high, she (whoever she may be) and me decide.

In the end I will still keep writing (something), and living for love. I will think fondly of the good times I had with people, and not obsess about the bad times, for I was still happy to share space with them.

I will continue to love romance movies and love songs, and hopefully produce a number of each myself. I will still smile when I think of “her” and remember the times we had, though someone else could always replace the ease of which my memory recalls them.

At the end of the road, I will continue to be open to love, and just apply what I have learned so far positively in the next go ‘round, no matter who it might be with. However, in all of this, I have learned a lot from her and in that I am trying to become a better man. With her, and through her, the path to solve some of my karmic lessons has been revealed, and I intend to follow through as best as I can.

Getting Over and Past it – Dealing with the Loss

This section/chapter is kind of weird because in truth, it could've been part of the last section, but I believe it has a different ring to it.

When I produced the first volume in my DVD project *When a Black Man Loves: The Men Speak* based upon the first book *When a Black Man Loves*, one of the most interesting things said by several of the panelists was how I dealt with breakups. For me, I write, for it is one of the only activities I can do by myself which allows me to release my emotions; almost all of my emotions regarding my heart and the situation. I usually can just get out a legal pad and a couple of pens and sit at a bar somewhere and just write while I am taking down some good beer. If I am home, I can switch to wine and listen to some good music at the time. Sometimes just hopping in the car and driving helps, and I swear that if at several times I had more money in the pocket and in the bank, then I would've made it either to Florida, the West coast or somewhere up in Canada; talk about the definition of a "ridda."

No matter which of the activities that I do/did, it had to be done along with music. While I was working on the bulk of this book, Erykah Badu and Outkast reigned supreme, but for the parts written in 2004, I have to give a lot of credit to Musiq and his third album. As I listen to certain songs, it takes me back to the happier times in my life, when "we" were together, and sometimes that helps in the process. Sometimes, you can lose yourself in the notes, the rhythms and the

melodies and your mind can replay all of the things that you saw but didn't notice as well, most being the physical but some others consisting of giving you a second insight into what transpired; the half which you didn't understand because you were looking through your eyes. Sometimes the music brings back memories of conversations had on drives, whether short or long. At other times, it might make you remember meals shared out, or in. It might make you think of the individual patterns in the curtains in someone's house, or the arrangement of flowers and shrubbery in their front and back yard.

I believe that it is always the pure music that brings you around. I say pure music, meaning that music which has a great lyrical quality to it, but sometimes it just could be those songs that played while you were together. And above all, it is the music that will more than anything make you rehash the past and come to grips with where everything is. You can't control the music, for if you listen to the radio while traveling, some disc jockey is going to play some song that stirs memories. And in this day and age, with people constantly using the melodies of yesteryear, some "new" song will in fact bring you back to the original, which will bring you back humbly to past memories and experiences.

I'll tell you, I still remember when I broke in certain CDs; I mean the exact times of the year and the stretches of road that I was on. Sometimes I had to play music upon going to see someone, or leaving someone because it kept me together. Lenny Williams got some major time during the last quarter of 2003. Sometimes, music is what you can send to even make someone think about things another way; I so badly want to send a CD that starts off with *Sorry* by Rueben Stoddard. I could also dig up the Norman Connors rendition of *Good Love* with vocals by Spencer Harrison; Spencer could sing his ass off and could move you more than even Luther Vandross.

Getting over and past it, and dealing with the loss. Frankie Beverly wrote *Before I Let Go* simply because he had found someone else, but still had a true love for the woman he was moving on, or away from. For every relationship that we move on from, it is both a loss and a gain. Sometimes, it is the loss (for a while) of someone we can use in our lives. Sometimes it is also the gain of lessons learned that will make us better people and advance us in our future endeavors.

Sometimes we are fated to go our own ways for a while, and cross as well at join paths again in the future when we are at better places in our own development.

I firmly believe that we never know what the last card is going to be, that we always have another chance or opportunity until we reach death. Other people look at it as once it is over, it is over. I believe that what happens only happens at this juncture in time, and being that none of us can truly divine the future concretely, we never know what is intended. I remember the scene in *Hav Plenty* where Havilland's grandmother is telling her that the man in the living room, Lee, is the man she is going to marry. She can do it the hard way or the easy way, but that is the man that she is going to marry.

There are times when we can hate someone, or in which they could loathe us. However, sometimes given time, some attitudes can soften and the opportunity can present itself. I know of one close friend who didn't speak to a man for two years; he stayed persistent and they have their friendship/relationship again. I guess sometimes that's what it takes. Sometimes you have to really stick it out to show a person how much you care, and how much they mean to you, even if it takes years. In the end, you can only be thankful for the time you have together, no matter how long or how short, and make the most of it. I think that if we all realize this, then relationships would go a lot farther.

LETTING GO (EVEN TEMPORARILY)

At what point do you through in the towel?

For each and every one of us the answer is different and becomes (hopefully) different for each individual person we deal with, because each person we deal with is unique. Consequently, if we keep choosing the same type of people then we either are making bad decisions or (I believe) are subconsciously choosing people who are really going to teach us some things in our lives, whether or not our conscious mind sees and recognizes that.

At what point does it become easier?

I think it is easier to accept (defeat, and that) presently that you have gone as far as you could've with someone. But what makes it easier?

I think that once you have exhausted yourself in a respectful way, and still get no change in the other person, you can easily accept what you need to accept to move on. After you have called, talked, e-mailed, wrote letters and even composed original music and/or put some CDs or mix-tapes together to convey your feelings to the one you care about, you can easily just accept what you need to move on. It is of course easiest when after being the nice guy for so long, and you still receive venom and vitriol from the other person, you can say what the hell. It is best and easiest when you have become the lamb, and they still are the asshole. Hey, I am just speaking the truth and some of us know this scenario only too well.

Not everyone has it in them to see past themselves, or their own frustrations with all the things that might not be caused by you, and might've been there before you came in the picture. Sometimes, we see/saw the signs all along, but understood that the times people share together can move them forward and heal some of the wounds of the past.

As long as you were honest, and really put yourself out there heart and soul, who can be mad at you? And of course, you can't be upset with yourself; you gave your all. You didn't choke, your message just wasn't received. Note to readers: I am not giving an out to people who really had some issues like domestic abuse or infidelity, and wound up trying to buy the other person everything to get them back.

There are no concrete equations to love, and there are no surefire ways to get other people to see what you want them to see. That is just life. Sometimes we have to take the loss for whatever reasons, and maybe we will be granted another chance with the person down the road, or maybe not. I loved Erykah Badu's *Next Lifetime* because it really makes you think about things.

It seems that in today's society, many people have no faith in things coming back around to a better place, or no (romantic) vision. Is it that we have all been so jaded by situations in which both parties were at fault, or that one party truly had no idea of the full scenario and

truth? I have heard many true-life tales from friends, family, associates and people that I have come across regarding romances coming back around again, and people forgiving and moving beyond the past. For me, it is something that I seek with that special person; that if we blew it the first time around, and maybe even a couple more times, but that we truly have some honest feelings between us, we can get past it. Maybe that's just the true romantic in me, and the fact that I fall hard and fast. It's not everyone's milieu in life and it can't be.

Who knows what will happen? I have separated from people for months, if not years, on end only to be able to come into each other's lives again and more or less pick up from where we left off before.

LETTING THE PAIN OUT

I think for every one of us, we have to find nondestructive ways of getting past the relationships that didn't work, or just accepting that they didn't work at that juncture in time. It might be something such as a spiritual discipline, exercise, travel, writing, music, dancing, or something that just lets it all out (listen to *I Want You* on Worldwide Underground by Badu). Some of the best writing and works of art and music are created out of the frustration of heartbreak. I know what I can do with my poetry, but I wonder what would happen if I started to draw again. Take note: there are times when crying isn't a bad outlet. Get you up some of whatever gets you plastered, seal yourself in a room and put that music on. We all know there are times when we feel that way and sometimes a good cry is what we really need.

I remember the times when I had to let the pain out, and the outlet wasn't writing. Sometimes, it amounted to stepping in the gym and trying to go further than I have ever gone before. One time, I played my drum for a West African dance class so hard that I split my finger. There are times I just had to take a drive and roll up the windows and yell my ass off. Or there was driving down Kelly Drive in Philly with *If You Don't Want My Love* by Lenny Williams playing, and having the windows down while it was cold as hell outside; hey, I won't kid you but will be honest enough to tell you I rocked that song until the CD got too dang scratched up.

Then sometimes for us brothers you've got to get away from the love music entirely and throw back to rap. Tupac, the Lox, Project Pat, Eightball, Yukmouth, the Luniz, Digital Underground, Ras Kass, Busta Rhymes; I've rocked them all. Or hit the arcade, threw on the discman and rock some good house music or some drum and bass. Hey, dancing until you sweat so much that your drawers are soaking is also a good one. Flirting with new women also is a great thing too.

HARNESSING THE HURT

Sometimes it is the loss of that person that makes you get up and start to change. Oh yes, it was one thing for me to say to her that being with her and losing her caused me to start changing, but it was/is quite another thing to keep looking for the answers and finding things in myself and making those changes. Change doesn't come overnight, but accepting and understanding the changes to come and making those steps small and large are what matters. "Old habits die hard," but that saying doesn't say that they don't meet their doom.

One friend cussed me out to say that I should be working on where I needed to be just in case "she" walked back into my life. Sometimes, it is the loss of someone from our life that shakes us the hell up and makes us get our acts together.

You might hit the gym, the track and the pool. You might hit the book. Or you just might start to become Charlie Hustle. Go on out and bring your sh&* to the next level byaaatch!! Shoot for the moon; if you miss you'll be among the stars. Hey, you might get to a point where you eclipse that person that you loved before. Would that be so bad?

DEALING WITH THE FUTURE

Maybe some things were never about the two of you, but about the lessons that person was to teach you inadvertently. For me, I have several to say the least, and hope that one day we can have the chance for another go round; that's just the feeling of true love.

In the end, you have to be able to have something so that if you run into that person again, there is no animosity, and only respect; if the

opportunity presents itself, you have to be in a position to either instigate that happening or be receptive to it happening and make it work this time if it does. It might take you a while to get over them, maybe a few years of pining. And you just might always have a soft spot in your heart for that person; there is nothing wrong with that at all.

It's interesting the admissions that people have made to me about losing the person they thought, or felt, was the one for them, only to run into them years later. Sometimes they would like a second chance and sometimes they are not in a position for that to happen. Sometimes they have just completely moved on with their own lives, whether it is happier or sadder without that person in their lives. Sometimes the other person is not in a position for the relationship to work either; they might be married or in a relationship themselves. And sometimes, just meeting sparks the beginning of a new path between people.

Last Word

FOR THE LADIES:

Maybe this book will inspire you as a woman in general, and as a Black woman in particular, to look at the next man as an unfinished painting with which he might need your color, or your brush, if not both. We are all around you, and in some cases waiting for you to make the first move. We have been shut down so many times by women in trying to ask them out or get to know them that many of us are too shell-shocked to even try. Some others of us are too scared to feel the sting of the slap of rejection anymore.

I can't be the only one. Hey, there's my boy Pace, the men I know who are married and were somewhere near where I am at in their past. There are the men who I come into constant contact with no matter where I go, and who I have deep conversations with about life and love.

Ladies, we are here! You don't have to go looking for a brother who is on lockdown, or going after the same man that ten other women are going after. Find you that diamond in the rough and apply the drills, the sanders and the polishing cloths! Hey, we as men aren't all on the ball in every aspects of our lives, and there ain't nothing wrong with upgrading a man, just make sure that it is the right man to spend time and energy with.

Stay away from the cats whom you know are up to no good! If he is a two-bit hustler selling fake anything, then he probably isn't someone who you are going to build a good future with.

FOR THE GENTLEMEN:

Maybe this book will make you feel better as a man who has played the fool for love, and allow you to easily open up to the next woman. We have loads of songs to sit back and rehab ourselves with. Brother, you are not alone, but you also play a part in your future.

Hey, you can give it to your someone special and let them hear another side of the equation. This book is not going along with all the psycho-and emotional babble that network television and women's magazines pander to female audiences. This is not a title on the cover that gives you a bullshit story once you actually read the article.

I read my horoscope forecast for the next month and am wondering what will transpire. Will it be her, someone else I now know, or even someone I just met or even haven't met as of yet. I have reassessed myself through both astrology and numerology and now know exactly the challenges for me in this lifetime and hope that I can get them right, because I am suffering as long as I have not learned those lessons.

At some point, I wish that she and I will get back together again. There is one friend who always gives me the pleasant vision and inspiration that maybe she will look back and give me another look and see what I really have to offer her. The reality is that she did it once, and in my life people have done that with me on more than one occasion. It's just that this time, I want to get it right and not go through this seesaw anymore, whether it is with her or with someone else.

I thank my friends for being there as they have, and the prayers that if it is not meant for her to be the one for me, that God send me that person. I have loved and lost, and believe that I want her back, but in now putting this book out, the next person might come along who might be really the one. Honestly, I am willing to be there for "her"

through whatever it takes to heal the scars and wounds left by other men, but if God deems that I am meant to be with someone else, then maybe that will happen.

Hey, I need my own network of angels, and would gladly like to start a network of angels for men in love. Ladies, we have not given up on you, but we too have our days where we feel low and need to be stroked, if not uplifted.

So for those of you who are definitely in need, let's start forming some support groups and start having cookouts and parties where we can all talk and move things forward. Let's start trying to heal the wounds and whatnot. But in the interim, pour yourself a nice long hot bath, get out your favorite beverages, candles and/or incense, put on some music, soak, give yourself a body scrub and a body smoother (or give it to someone else) and just be real.

Myself, I am going to be listening to both *I Want You* by Miss Badu over and over, as well as *The Love Below* by Andre "Ice-Cold" 3000 of Outkast. I might watch *Hav Plenty* a couple more times, and I might watch *Antwoine Fisher* so that I can start another emotional release (actually, I just finished reading *A Date Late and a Dollar Short* and highly recommend it).

Right now I am thinking of a warm shower in Ocean City, Maryland. I am thinking of a class reunion in northern New Jersey. A Memorial Day cookout in Maplewood, New Jersey. A carriage ride in Cape May. Watching a movie snuggled up. A ferry ride across a bay. A kiss shared on New Year's Eve. A snowball fight on Christmas. A drink shared for my birthday. Dinner at Jack's Firehouse. Drinks at CopaToo. Several concerts. Holding hands. The warm embraces. Giving and receiving massages. Swedish fish and a six-pack of beer. Sharing bottles of wine and champagne. Champagne brunches at the Seaview Inn. Belated Valentine's Day celebrations. A ride coming back from a wedding.

Of course, there are older memories that surface.

A night in Zanzibar Blue when I was invited up to play the congas. The day that we were over at Nana Korantemma's and she really got to see me play. The last time that we got back together. That birthday

with the eight-plus pound lobster. That night of passion where she cried out her love.

A New Year's Eve in 1998 when I picked her up from her performance; she was radiant in that gown. A Valentine's Day performance in which she had me blushing at the table and my "brother" jibing me over it. That fateful day in the river where we got the car mired in mud. That day trip to New York City where I first played my "Natural Blaze" CD.

I am thinking about the day we met, and our first night out. I am looking at all the text messages that I saved that she sent me, which is one reason I will always keep this cell phone. A conversation shared by the two of us on Christmas. A conversation shared by the two of us that last time. I am thinking about her possibly walking back into my life. I am thinking about my past, my present, and the future.

After the Storm

Okay, there is always a cliffhanger, or perhaps another story waiting to be told. I want to know what really happened in the end between the two main characters in *Hav Plenty*. Did they live together happily ever after, or did they go separate ways? Come on, inquiring minds want to know!

Was there another go-round between “her” and I? Of course, it always seems to happen in my life. Okay, not always, but it has happened repeatedly in my last five years and somehow I seek to break the cycle and just one day make it permanent. But in the end, I was able to really see some things I didn’t see before and that made it oh so much easier for me. However, I guess I owe it to you to tell you how it started.

Well, as I was on a quest for self-analysis, there were some questions in which I asked her (in an e-mail) as well as some resolutions and some discoveries that I put forth. You could more or less call it something like a step in a twelve-step program for recovery. That e-mail was around October 18th. Five days later I was at an event for a museum that I am affiliated with. I wound up getting nice and “soused” at said event, and those who know me closely know that when I start to get “lubricated” my heart starts pouring out.

Anyway, I composed this poem, minus the syntax errors caused by my drunken state and that time, and deleted everything but her name.

*Call me a fool,
because I have had a little too much too drink and my feelings come
all out*

*Call me a fool,
because I know that I had not the perfect woman,
but the woman who was right for me
Call me a fool,
because I had the chance with someone who could be the other half
that I needed all along and I fucked up*

*Call me a fool,
because I wasn't smart enough to understand what she went through in
dealing with me*

*Call me a fool,
because we too late I learned what I needed to know about myself and
might have lost my queen*

*Call me a fool,
because I am hurting so bad and if I knew better I would be in her
arms*

*Call me a fool,
because life aint shit without her for me*

*Call me a fool,
because I want to run away but I really need he*

*Call me a fool,
because {she} is the woman I need in my life and I have fucked that up*

*Call me a fool,
because I need to undo the damage and I don't know how*

*call me a fool,
but I have already accepted it within myself*

As you can see, I was sufficiently “there” but I knew I had something to let her know. Well, this kind of opened the door somewhat again, which ultimately led us to a few more enjoyable moments together; she always said that my writings could touch her.

There were of course others who also bowed out of my life as well during this year, and in some cases, I was really cool with it, there was nothing really there anyway. Some of them I had known for months, some for years.

Sometimes, in the end you learn more about how you are and with whom you were dealing. As I made changes to the book and let her know that I was, I just received the same venom she produced when she was mad at someone. Sometimes we have to be careful what we say, write, or e-mail in anger, because what happens if our feelings change for whatever reasons we cannot control? That damage might not be something we can ever truly apologize for, and in that we might lose a lot. I made a mistake with the first version of this book, and I sought to correct it. I apologized and placed my feelings of sorrow out there and asked for forgiveness. You cannot change the past, but you can atone, try to amend and also make a difference in the future.

It’s amazing what comes out after the fact, the attacks that people can lob at you. I remember one person I know who was talking diligently about how the father of their child was a screw-up. My reply was that no matter what, she saw something in him and that reflected either on her bad or good analytical skills or a combination of the two. Saying something to someone after the fact doesn’t change what transpired between the two of you. If you loved them, or liked them enough to spend time with them, then that is it. They were good enough for you, or you lied to them. One makes you look good, the other makes you look bad. How do you really want to be seen? What really crossed my mind was the fact that maybe things were said, and others thought what they did because maybe two things were being projected, or two lives lived. There were the times with me, times she might not have told her family about, and the position that she wanted her family to think.

What’s more interesting is that in the past weeks I had two dreams about her. The first had us together in a casino, and everywhere she went with me, I won. The second had me doing a favor bodyguarding

someone I knew, and them working for the same company in the same office. She was dressed professionally wearing an outfit and a hairstyle that I found her totally gorgeous in. And in the end she asked to be invited to an event that we were all going to go to. As I was signaling him no, she had changed jackets and then sat down in front of me and went to explain something to him. I don't know if she caught my signals to him to nix the invitation or not, but at that moment I woke up. I accept love and being in love, even when the other person is not in a place to do the same.

She might get upset with this book because in opening up myself, I reveal certain things that transpired between us. In some ways, the truth hurts and we all don't want to deal with it. It's sometimes a lot easier to sweep things under the carpet and walk away acting like nothing ever happened. As I said in the preface, I made some significant changes in this book to not offend, insult, defame or otherwise harm but also keep the book intact enough to get the total message across. Sometimes, seeing something in black and white can make us deal with ourselves, and at times some of us don't really want to deal with it.

For anything I write, I have to be confronted by my readers, who will undoubtedly ask me loads of questions. Sometimes they will see something I didn't, and in that allow me to grow from what they have brought to my attention. However, I really won't be going into detail about anything but the good experiences, because that is how you want to remember a person, by the good ones. You never know when it will be the last time that you will see someone, and the last memory you want them to have of you is a good one. For me, she can have this book.

Love is a motherfucker, and the love demon is its unholy bitch. It is an uncontrollable disease that many people think they understand and/or have the cure for. It is a unique form of cancer on the soul, the mind and the body. Sometimes love is something that both people feel, but everything else between them comes in the middle of it from properly happening.

Love hurts and true love hurts completely, truly and absolutely. If you feel it, and if things have devolved, you would readily subject yourself to running the hardest emotional gauntlet that you could just to change

the tide and let the other person see what you are made of, and how much you feel. There are mistakes and then there are mistakes, and above all there is forgiveness. The power to forgive is one of the strongest powers to wield, and few people have the ability to do it ably.

I don't know if there is ever a better time in the future (for her and I). I can't and won't hold my breath, but I do know that anything is possible if two people care enough.

As my "shero" said to me, sometimes we have to lose certain things to make space for new things to come in; it's almost like we have a box only so big to put things in, and if it is already full, then there is not the opportunity for other things to be held, if not acquired. Right now, I guess I have a lot of space for new things to come into my life, as a lot has left it during 2003. If I look at what I have given up, as well as what has walked away, then my future has great potential ahead; it is just up to me at this point to start making it happen. There will be many things to bring back in order, but once it is done, the sky is the limit, if not the stars. What strengthens me in this time is that I have known others who lost everything, and then gained more in life than they had before. Now, I guess it is my turn. If you don't like the positions and attitudes of people, then put yourself in a position in which it will not affect you and you can choose to leave them alone, but also to have their decisions reversed about you.

I guess right now, that will be part, a huge central part, of the next steps in my journey. It's time to let some other things go, spend a little time in focusing everything, gaining the resources to properly support and implement my ideas, and then launch my implementations and executions. The more that I have to do without the assistance of others in this endeavor, the stronger I grow in my knowledge and applications thereof, as well as my independence. This builds confidence, and with confidence and persistence, who can say what is possible.

For the record, I don't think that my story is so unique. Change the age differences and where it took place, and I am sure that there are a ton of men who have gone through this, race being inconsequential.

And of course, there are a ton of women who have been that other half. Understanding what it takes to live and love can be simple and it can be complex. You can look at a movie, a television show, or a comedy special and gain insight. In fact, we learn to deal with people by what we see anyway. The problem is that much out there plays into the base mentality of the animal we call homo sapiens, and we have to be mature enough to filter out what is there just to sell a product, service or lifestyle ideal. I was watching “Latham Entertainment Presents” and between all the comedic routines, you could basically write the core of this book, especially if you explored the love lives of every performer on stage. Life and love are no secrets, but they are equally mysteries in their own right. You either have the answers or you go about making solutions. Not all people are destined to be together, but we have more similarities than we care to see everyday.

Some problems actually arise, or I should say that some dynamics in the relationship are actually a factor of issues like age, economics, race, education, religion and upbringing. I believe that how much they are a factor are also a matter of the sum total of each person’s experiences independently of each other and how they see themselves together and walk that path. I could not see myself with a Muslim woman simply because my religion is not Islam. That is not to say that I wouldn’t want to make some exceptions should the right woman come along. Then there are factors in who we are spiritually, which transcends all of those aspects previously mentioned.

At some points, it’s about what you can accept and what you can enjoy, and what you can get outside of the relationship that you aren’t getting in the relationship. These things, I believe, determine what can happen. Some differences, or unfulfilled things, are too much for the relationship. Some are not. We all have the capacity to deal without certain things, and when we don’t have that capacity, that problem might lie within ourselves.

Yes, love is something that is strong and something that can overcome a lot. Sometimes we are not ready for love and there are things that need to happen. The reality is that now, I understand her more than I did before and I still am me. Oh yes, I love her and whatever will happen will happen. I don’t hold anything that was said out of anger (too much) because it was said out of that.

The time might not be now, and else, it might not be her. But in your case, live and love and be happy with what you have. Open up your heart completely and honestly. If it doesn't work now, don't write it off that it will never happen or work out. Just do the damn thing!

Zachary Jones? – The “Afterlude”

As I said before, I had to go and watch all of the mainstream Black love movies that we have enjoyed over the past two decades, and I end this book with the movie *Love Jones*. This is the “afterlude,” not an interlude and not a last word, but the thing that stays on your mind while you are getting up and leaving the theater while the credits are rolling.

One friend once said that my life (at that time) mirrored this movie when it came out; he might be right. As my life takes certain twists and turns, and I deal not only with trials and tribulations, but changes that are caused by emotional development as well as career transitions, I am coming to grips with many things. One might be rectifying my relationship with my father, another is improving my relationship with my mother, and the last is dealing with this “jones” that I am feeling. I have my mother’s last name, while my father’s last name is Jones, and right now I have a tremendous “love jones.”

I am thinking about the last scene in which Nina comes to the club and recites a poem for Darius. Before that, Darius mentions about how he wrote a ton of letters but didn’t send them. I was able to reconnect with her in my writing, and at this point don’t feel the need to write directly to her; I don’t know if it will make a point. I recall the argument they had when he decided to end the relationship; about trust. And I look at the issues that we faced. I remember the last scene where he tells her how much he cares, and that what was the past was the past, and that it should be forgotten. And then she talks about how he wants what he wants when he wants it. I have heard those words come from her mouth on more than one occasion.

Why am I so impatient? I found that person, and while we might not be the best fit in each other’s life, we had a great vibe together; all the frictions were just differences in life’s experiences. I still love her, even though. And I would welcome any chance to just try it one more time. My tomorrows are not promised, and I would love to spend them with a person who made me feel as special as she did. I still love her, and have a “jones” for her. I accept that.

Right now I have some pretty big things to pull off, and would love to have her in my corner, and by my side as I attempt them. Damn the bullshit in the past, for that's exactly where it lies.

It takes a strong person to open up again and again, just to face the possibility of being struck down again and again. But as they say, "pride comes before a fall." My strength in this is my weakness; my love for her is strong but also is the weakness of my heart.

Maybe I will see her at a premier of a film of mine, at a musical performance I am part of, or at the next book party. I'll forever look for her in the crowd for the rest of my life, just hoping for that one day that provides that one chance to love her once more.

SBM seeks Isis, Athena, Yemanja, Oya, Hildegard, Circe; the Yin to his Yang. 30s something single Black male, no kids, D&D free looking for his better half, or someone to share several miles in the path of life with. Maybe you'll join me for my journey of 1000 steps, become my alter ego, or my partner in crime. I am not looking for a "good Christian woman" but a freak who believes in God (not too freaky though, we all have our limits). Never married, strong-willed. A diehard romantic. A true renaissance man with passions and talents in the arts as well as the sciences. I am a cross between the nutty professor, Leonardo da Vinci, and Nimrod the Great. Author, writer, poet, musician, artist, photographer, sometimes "mad scientist," warrior, lover, philosopher. It's been said that I was either born 30 years too early or 30 years too late. A beer connoisseur and wine aficionado. Athletic physique, broad shoulders and tapered waist. A mental juggernaut, hence a force to be reckoned with.

You:

All the teeth in your mouth (except for extraction of compacted wisdoms) and can hold a good conversation and have an understanding of what my experiences could be like (Black male from a single-parent household headed by a woman who is into his culture). Must have a good command of the English language, both written and verbal. Please no loudmouths.

Eager to try new things/not closed-minded, except in the right areas.

Doesn't look at white zinfandel as a fine wine and doesn't smoke. Has experiences dealing with different levels of society. I can take you out to a formal affair or chill with you in a local dive.

Age is unimportant but sophistication is a must.

Can deal with my attitudes and not only tame me, but also offer me suggestions and guidance where you see something I don't, because Lord knows I don't know everything, though others might have you believe otherwise. Will communicate with me and doesn't expect me to always know what to say or do, because I can't read minds.

Willing to take me at face value and not assume I must be like other men who you have known who might have had a problem with commitment or fidelity.

Knows how to cheer me up when I am down and allows me to make mistakes and apologize for them without holding it against me for all eternity. Will occasionally bring me some flowers (and possibly a bottle of wine or a good six-pack)

Not overly materialistic (not trying to keep up with the Joneses) or chasing name-brand items. Keeps jewelry to a moderate level. Not gold or platinum fronts, obnoxiously big earrings and doesn't believe in wearing a sweatsuit to go out. Realizes that not everything expensive is necessarily the best.

I'll take talented, but the purity of your heart is the most important thing. Must be willing to give me emotional faith and be my rock when I am tired and need the strength. You aren't afraid of falling in love, and thus won't hold back your emotions, but will open up and allow for whatever magic to happen and have a free and unimpeded path.

P.S. If you have a friend like yourself, I know a couple other brothers looking for the same.

End of the Road Afterthoughts

I was once again trying to close this book and to make a long story short, “everything happens for a reason.” It was Sunday, February 29th, a day that only occurs once every four years, when I received a call. The situation was that an older associate’s mother had passed the previous week (which I had already known) but that he was seeing if I was available to come along and assist with the driving. I did have several things to do, but it was his mother and he needed the assistance. He offered to pay, but that really didn’t matter to me; what would you have done in that situation ... probably pretty much the same as me. I told him I could be ready in an hour and we wound up leaving a couple of hours later.

It was interesting that my horoscope for the day said that I would be doing some traveling soon, and I figured that this was it.

Since my car was down with a case of “needing another engine” bad, we took his “friend’s” car, which was a small four-door Chevrolet compact. I am not one into small cars and unfortunately, the steering wheel vibrated once I got to around 75 mph, which is just warming up for me.

To do this ride, we had to travel to Norfolk, Virginia to pick up his Aunt Willie. I’ll just say that she is one of the most fun older ladies I know, and she cut up with us for most of the trip. The weather was great; we were having an unusual warm spell during this cold winter. After Norfolk, we had to travel to Lumberton, North Carolina. Did I mention that no one had packed any maps for Virginia or North

Carolina, and that I didn't have any complete Mapquest directions; okay, on the latter there were partial directions, but I had to ask for them and by then, we were past the point in needing them.

Well, the ride there was a long one, and I had to take a break and let someone else drive for about an hour so I could rest my eyes. We finally got in around 2 AM and then got up around 8:30 and made it to the funeral at the exact time it was supposed to start. It was small one; his mother had lived to 104 years.

On the way back, I made a wrong turn and when asking for information, I was given the wrong information, so our return trip was extended by at least two hours. The whole trip in itself was a journey of the soul in which I looked at family and some things that "she" saw that I didn't grasp.

During the whole trip I thought about her. I thought about the things she saw and experienced. I thought about the connections of family that I didn't have. I thought about how things transpired between us where she had that connection and I didn't. I thought about living the rest of my life with her, and wishing for a better day.

Everything happens for a reason, and while a friend needed me to help him with his journey, I needed that trip and all the experiences to help me get a better grasp on my own journey. It opened me up in certain ways and showed me things that I needed to see.

On the return from the trip, I went to the Floetry/Erykah Badu concert. I did get a chance to meet Floetry (I got them to sign my arm) but my heart was with the person who I wanted to attend with. Of course, Marsha (the songstress) kicked it and my "sister" Ashabi who I took with me could see my attraction to her. Sometimes things happen for a reason, and Badu's show focused on the evolution of the self via the route of the chakras. When she got to the fifth level and sang a song for the ladies, some things became relevant.

I did write one last e-mail and post something in the City Paper here. Love is a truly splended thing and going through the low points until the highs can be reached is a hard thing that many people aren't willing to endure. As I go through old business cards, and even my phone book, I do wonder what could have transpired between people I met before her, as well as those who I met after her.

No matter what happened between us, and whatever we didn't bring to the table individually, or for each other, I will never look down on her, but always know that she won my heart and held it better than anyone who has ever graced my life. Yes, I wish that we could just as easily start over again, resetting the emotional scorecard between us. Or maybe just taking the best things, and forgetting about the worst things.

This whole experience brought out some more creative energies in me, but it also allowed me to look at myself. Not every match-up is perfect, but then everyone doesn't have to be. What matters is that if you truly love someone, how far are you willing to go, or I should say endure and accept, to have their love. As Andre 3000 sang, she might not be the one, but she sure is the prototype. Sometimes, love is not easy and you might have to go through rough seas for 40 days and 40 nights, but when you come out of it the world might just be yours for whatever you deem. Well, we had some rough swells, and endured some storms, and I believe that we wouldn't have gone as far as we had unless we had some strong feelings on each side for the other person. I am willing, because I still love ...

The one major thing I ponder is that when you have found someone and for whatever reasons it doesn't work out the way that you want it (at that juncture in time), when you start to learn the lessons you need, isn't it more fortuitous to take the new you back to them and now chart a better course and experience for the both of you? Maybe it was just the right person, but at the wrong time for the both of you.

Still loving ...

Also by Zachary M.C. Harris

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