

THE SINGLE BRIDE

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Introduction

There is an indescribable freedom and rich joy found within the single life. Freedom and joy full of adventures and celebrations, deep friendships, great conversations, time and space. How tragic it would be to become so focused on 'escaping' being single that you miss the gold that's currently being gifted to you.

With this in mind, I want to take the time to acknowledge the pain that is felt with being single. To give a voice to the way it marks some of us and stains our identity. To consider the root causes for this pain and to finally consider our options for how we will allow being single to shape our lives and our perspectives.

The Single Bride is specifically for girls over 25 who have experienced the heartbreak and disillusion associated with being single longer than they ever thought they would be. I don't mean a short break between boyfriends, I mean years and years of looking at their future and wondering if this is it.

My intention isn't to solve any great mysteries. But that's not the point really. This is a collection of my experiences, thoughts and observations which I'm offering as a conversation starter to help those on a similar journey.

I feel that although many are travelling along this solo road it is still a lonely place to be at times. I deeply hope that as you pray and invite the Holy Spirit to read these words with you that you will feel his peace and healing warmth entwine around your heart. If only we knew how deeply we are already loved by him, perhaps we would long for someone else's love a little less.

Acknowledge The Pain

Let's stop and take the armour off for a minute and acknowledge the pain.

Let's first acknowledge that we all agree that our value as women isn't determined by our marital status and the goal in life isn't to get married.

But if you want to get married and if no one wants to marry you - and if this scenario continues for years and years - there is pain. And, in my experience, the longer the scenario continues the deeper the pain and the thicker the armour. Because you're beginning to believe that no one is coming, 'I'm on my own and I need to look out for me and my future'.

I'm going to be upfront and tell you that you that I'm married. I've been married for 6 months and it feels a little hypocritical writing about being single when you're married. It even feels a little bit cruel, sharing my story from the other side.

I'm aware that there is a 'I'm Single Grief Cycle' and at times, even hearing about other people's relationships can be painful. So with that in mind I'll be as brief as I possibly can.

I met Dave in September 2014. We officially started dating in January 2015, got engaged in October and married in February 2016.

Before I met Dave I had never been on a date, I'd never been kissed, I'd never held hands, I'd never had anyone show any expression of interest in me what-so-ever. I was remarkably single. So single in fact that I have actually witnessed people praying that God wouldn't allow them to stay single like me.

So yes, there is a wedding ring on my finger - but my heart bears the deep scars that were left after 10,785 days of waiting - of waiting for God to come through for me, of praying and questioning everything. I cannot even begin to tell you the tears I've cried and the heart tearing pain I've felt during those 10,785 days - but I'm going to try.

I'm going to try because I feel like someone needs to acknowledge how cruel it feels to be dealt a single life long after you thought you'd be married.

It feels like the church doesn't seem to know what to say, your friends can't relate to you, your parents don't understand, society doesn't get it. I've often felt like there's this black hole where all the single girls are shoved and told to shut up and pray and I think your hearts need to hear something real and raw and true.

I truly believe that being single long term and not wanting to be is one of the cruelest hands life can deal you. For me it was cruel because it excluded me from more than just getting married, it excluded me from having children and a family of my own. It excluded me from joining my friends as they transitioned from single to dating to married life. It can be difficult to maintain relationships on the same level when one of you is married and expecting their first child and the other is working full time and still trying to figure out how to pay the rent and find someone to go to the movies with.

It's like you all started out together and then one by one your friends were invited to get in an elevator and go to the floor above and enjoy the next stage of life and you're left on the ground floor. More friends get in the elevator and the loneliness begins to creep in.

I found being single to be cruel because it shattered my illusions about life. It shattered my illusions about myself. I thought I had something to offer, I didn't think I was the best but I thought life would open up to me easily...and it didn't. I marched up to that elevator expecting the doors to smoothly glide open for me and they didn't. Then it begins, the 'what's wrong with me?' hunt. I'd analyse everyone I knew who got a boyfriend - measuring her against me, was she funnier than me? Skinnier than me? Smarter than me? More popular? More beautiful?

And I think the issue gets harder the older you get. You become more alone, more isolated - life feels more and more barren.

Barren is a strong word. Suggesting single girls are shoved in the dark is a strong phrase. Saying being single is a cruel hand is strong, perhaps even over the top. I imagine mixed reactions when people read these words, some feel angry or offended and others would feel that finally someone is expressing how they truly feel.

Personally, these are words that I feel brought some form of comfort to my heart, because sometimes acknowledging pain is the first step towards healing it.

We've all felt the gut wrenching twist when we hear someone else is engaged, or the plunging struggle to smile our way through a friend's wedding where every moment feels like it's tearing strips off our heart.

Most days are wonderful and being single is a gift we treasure and other days we wish that someone would acknowledge the pain. Acknowledge how unfair life feels and how daunting the future can look from this solo road we walk. Our steps a mix of hope, joy, sorrow and pain.

The Root Causes

I've spent years considering why this season of singleness is longer for some than others. Why are some girls swept off their feet and married in their early twenties, with no waiting or worrying and other girls are single for years, even decades?

I don't think that there is a firm definitive answer - but I do think there are some things to consider. At the end of the day it's a mystery. Like many other things that happen in life, the sense of unfairness will remain a mystery until we get to heaven.

I'm also going to try to write these in a non-cliche, non-condescending way - but I'm aware that there's really no way to say this without sounding cliché or condescending. Even when something is true, it can sound painful and harsh to someone whose heart is already bruised.

I think that our society sets us up with an expectation that we are all guaranteed love and it will happen in a Hollywood-happy way. We are raised with the constant phrase 'when you get married', as if it's a guarantee for everyone. It's something we expect our future will include, we almost expect to be able to order it off a menu. We plan where we'll study, where we'll live, where we'll work and who and when we'll marry. There's not a single moment where we even consider the possibility of not getting married - we expect it.

And that's not necessarily a bad thing - but unmet expectations will cause disappointment, a loss of trust and pain.

We expect so much from our futures that when it's not delivered we are

crushed by the unfairness of it all.

I was a youth leader for over 9 years, not once did I meet a girl expecting to wait 10 or 15 years to get married. They all had the expectation that they would get married in their timing. And many of them did. But some of us have a 10 or 15 or even a 20 year wait ahead of us and I personally think it wouldn't sting so much if we were expecting it or open to it - instead we feel short changed and ripped off. A long wait isn't what we ordered and we were told it wouldn't be like this.

Then there's church. At 25 years old, I was a spinster in my church. Decaying on the shelf of single-dom. Within church world we're raised with marriage as one of the highest life-goals, a close second to being in full time ministry. In my experience the real power combo is to be married (young of course) and in full time ministry - that's where the sweet spot is. If you're not married then give full time ministry a go but you may find you can only access so many doors of opportunities without that golden wedding-ring-shaped key wrapped around your ring finger.

As a single woman in church, I was constantly reminded in numerous subtle ways that I was waiting to get married. You could constantly feel people coming over to pray-away-the-single from your life. It's understandable to a point, getting married and starting a family are two huge milestones and for most Christians, those milestones are the center of their lives. As Christians we are quick to recognise the eternal significance that comes in meaningful relationships and also quick to recognise the temporary and earthly value of working, entertainment, holidays and pursuing your hobbies and interests.

We all know that on their deathbeds, no one wishes they spent more time at

the office. We know that so many of our holidays and dinners out, our expensive purchases and Saturday movie nights at home will fade in the light of eternity. We volunteer and give our time to others, but at the end of the day we, the single, live lives that may appear to be selfish...because we don't have a family to spend our lives on, and that's a scenario that can be awkward for church to deal with...or rather it's a scenario that can make you feel awkward in church.

It's not that the church culture is right or wrong - rather I suspect that the church is often unsure how to deal with all of these unmarried girls running around, especially if they have ambitions in life outside of marriage. Sometimes it feels like your non-marriage ambitions aren't taken seriously and even if you're not throwing yourself a pity party for still being single - someone else will be eager to throw one for you.

I didn't realise how big a deal me being single was until I finally got myself into a relationship - people would hug me, hold me and shed tears of relief, they would tell me how thankful they were that I'd finally found someone. I'm not trying to sound mean, I was very grateful and thankful for their prayers and support, but the relief that I was no longer single was something that swept over them more than it did over me.

Even when I made peace with my single-ness it felt like the church somehow still couldn't let it go.

Like I said - being single can keep you self-centered...which is fine...there's only you to focus on! But I did have a moment one day, much later in life than I'd like to admit, where it really began to occur to me that 'the guy' I'd been waiting for was indeed an actual living, breathing human somewhere.

That sounds dumb. Let me try to explain - when you've been single a long time 'the guy' becomes more and more of a myth. He's in your imagination and he becomes this weird accessory in your life. You spend hours and hours with your friends talking about him, thinking about him, dreaming up all of the romantic and wonderful things he'll do for you. I imagine this happens to anyone who is waiting a long time for things - I would think if you spent years trying to fall pregnant that this baby you're trying to conceive would begin to feel like a myth - something that you make Pinterest boards for but will never happen. Or if you are a scriptwriter and you spend decades trying to get a film made, you believe on some level that the film isn't really going to get made - this is just a hobby of yours now - the trying, the dreaming, the waiting becomes the hobby.

So I'd arrived in that space. 'The guy' was becoming a myth. Then I remembered that he was a real person....

But...if he's a real person then where is he right now?

Wait - If God has someone for me what does his life look like? Is he single too? Is he ready to meet me now? Perhaps this waiting isn't all about me and my life *shock horror* maybe there are two of us in this equation and maybe he's on a journey and a magical mystery tour with God too...

When I met Dave this became real for me. As we compared our separate journeys through our 20's it became clear that if we had met 5 or 10 years earlier our relationship would have not worked. There's no way. We were such different people at 20 than we were at 29 - we both needed to spend our 20's apart to get ready for one another. Some how in Christian Girl Land we see a lot of ourselves in our future marriage and we forget the journey our futures husbands may need to take to be ready to meet us also.

Trust me - there's benefit in meeting him at 29 when you've both experienced some life, made some big mistakes, than to meet him at 20 and go through all the heartache together.

I think we can't ignore the fact that the wait gives us time to discover who we are and to become more self aware and God-centered. I know this is frustrating when you feel like you've already got that down pat (hello this is what we did in the first 5 years of our twenties) but it's also something I had to remind myself about a lot - because it's easy to do a lot of work on yourself and then become comfortable and to stop challenging yourself to become more and more like Jesus.

Let the wait make you a better person. Be aware of how your expectations are being shaped and who is shaping them. Challenge your perspective on being single. One thought would be that perhaps it's not you waiting for this guy but rather this guy is waiting for you. Or perhaps this wait is for him. Maybe by allowing your meeting to be delayed you are giving him time he needs to make the journey towards you. Maybe God doesn't think that being married in your 20's is as big a deal as you do and he's happy to take you on other adventures. Perhaps God isn't stressed about your future and he's got it all under control.

Either way, my advice would be to learn from the waiting, think and look around you and live your life open to the possibility of a relationship but also find all the life there is to live outside of a relationship and don't hesitate for a moment - live it fully.

Consider Your Options

I once heard a preacher say something like, 'if you believe you're in God's will for your life, if you're listening to him and following him, and if you find yourself single then perhaps it's God's perfect will for you to be single right now and why do you want something that's outside of God's timing for you'...well that's what I took away from what she said, and for me it was an anchor for so many years.

It redirected me back to God, back to his heart and back to his plan for me. When I'm running off with my perfect life plan I'm reminded that I handed my life over to Jesus and it's his decision now to add and subtract from my life. So why am I so against his perfect plan? Think about it. Here you are living life with the people that God intended you to live and enjoy life with and you're convinced God is wrong and his timing is wrong. You're not trusting or relying on him - you're struggling through desperate to push him away.

That was always a big challenge in my heart. I've given my life to Jesus, I've said that he has control, I surrender it all over to him...and here I am living as though he's ripped me off because he didn't meet all of my expectations.

God once showed this to me - he showed me my apartment which I owned and he showed me that when Jesus knocked on my door I let him in, like we do when Jesus offers us salvation, I let him into my life and we started living together, like flatmates, sharing things, making decisions together. And then over time I handed the apartment over to him more and more, I handed my life over to him, I trusted him to fix things and take care of things. Finally, I signed my home over to him. Put everything in his name and then I handed him the keys and I stepped outside. Closed the door

behind me. I'd given Jesus my life, fully and wholly to do with as he saw fit. But I was still standing outside the window looking in, clutching this perfect picture for my life in one hand. I'd given him the house but I still had conditions attached. He couldn't take pictures down, he couldn't rearrange furniture, he had to fulfil my vision for my house. I had conditions, I had to be married, I had to have kids, I had to have a full time job close to home, I had to earn a certain amount and have certain friends and life had to look a certain way. So here I am, standing outside my house, standing outside my life, with no control, and I'm smashing on the glass screaming because Jesus isn't following my plan. He's taking pictures down and he's moving furniture, he's messing everything up and I'm outraged, heartbroken, scared and distraught.

It sounds intense but I lived like that for most of my 20's. Giving my life to God and then crumbling when he didn't follow my instructions.

God showed me that I had blueprints for my life and I was trying to walk through my life with a megaphone directing and controlling everything so my plan would come to pass. God spoke to me so clearly, he said 'you are a designer, but you are not the designer of your life. Step away from the blueprints and the megaphone. I will orchestrate your life and you will not be disappointed.'

Those words became my compass. I will orchestrate your life and you will not be disappointed.

It was a lesson in gratitude and surrender. As Melody Beattie says, 'gratitude turns what we have into enough'. I learnt to surrender my life to God, to allow him to add and subtract from it as he desired. I then learnt to be grateful for what we gave and what he withheld.

“Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today and creates a vision for tomorrow.”

Melody Beattie

I'd ask myself often what could be better than a God orchestrated life? Isn't a life single and orchestrated by God, who created you, knows you and loves you, better than a life orchestrated by you? We've all seen people orchestrate their own lives and they may seem successful to a point but inevitably there's some fall out, because we're not designed to play God in our own lives.

I'm not saying we sit back, don't have ambition, don't try things...I'm saying we plunge into life and follow God with all our hearts, and we trust him to orchestrate things, we trust that he's adding and subtracting from our lives according to his perfect plan.

This might not help everyone, but it helped me to keep perspective. My priority, my calling, my purpose is to follow God above all else. To pursue him first and foremost. Many times God won't feel like enough. He'll feel far away and you'll feel more alone than ever, but in refusing to let go of his hand you'll find he carries you, he will give you seasons of unbelievable peace. He will give you a faith and assurance that will allow you to enjoy not endure life.

In all of this journey I eventually swung from 'I have to get married' to 'I'm never getting married'. In letting go, I started shutting out. It went from something I held tightly to something I let go to something I refused to pick

up ever again. I'd cleansed my heart and mind of the need to get married and I was never walking near that heartbreaking fire pit ever again. But nothing had really changed, I was still standing outside my life, smashing on the glass, now telling God that marriage was off the table, he wasn't allowed to reintroduce it. I thought I'd surrender my life to him, I thought I'd let it all go but I'd just flipped my rules and conditions around...

Then my life became conditional. I went from 'when I get married' to 'if I get married'. It felt safer to say 'if'. I had to embrace the possibility that it might not happen for me. I had to make peace with the fact that life might just be me, it was time to be realistic and let go of the fairytale. Also if I was really going to give my life and future to God I had to change marriage to an 'if' because it was his choice now, not mine. But there's two kinds of 'if'. There's a humble 'if' that comes from a surrender heart, the Daniel 3:18 'if', where your heart declares 'but even if he doesn't, it wouldn't make a bit of difference', he is God and your 'if' is surrounded to him.

Then there's the 'if' that's an armour. It's trying to hide all your disappointment and brokenness. It's shielding your heart from being vulnerable. It's placing a bet both ways. It's a condition you're placed on your life, because it's easier to make marriage conditional on your own terms than to trust God with your surrender 'if'. It's an 'if' that's really saying 'why wait around for him to break your heart? Break your own heart before God can do any further damage...'

At times I felt being single was like being trapped on a desert island, with all of your single friends, at first it's a fun party and then, one by one, boats would arrive and take one of your friends. They'd get married and sail away. The girls were all on the island waiting to be rescued, waiting for their cruise ship to pick them up and sail into the sunset. Over time most of my

friends had moved off the island, and new girls had joined me in the single-waiting-room. But after awhile I found I started to feel at home on the island. I understood how to be single, I knew the island inside out. I felt like this island was my kingdom, I was a queen in that place. The idea of leaving the island became something that struck a subtle and silent fear in my heart. The very thought of leaving behind this lifestyle and rhythm I knew so well was terrifying.

I felt like by the time I'd reached my late twenties that, although being single was still painful, it was also a pain I had become comfortable with. It begun to become clear to me that a shift had occurred and I was now more terrified of being in a relationship that I was of missing out completely. The transition of single life to being in a relationship was terrifying for me, I didn't want to leave the island. I felt freaked out. Completely freaked out. I had to leave my 'home' and transition to this ship, on seas where everything felt uncertain and overwhelming. But I believed that God was orchestrating my life, and if I'm honest, saying yes to a relationship with Dave took as much surrender in my heart, to let go of my life, as anything I'd experienced. It was only because I'd surrender being in a relationship again and again that I was finally able to surrender being single.

Which sounds crazy. But I had no idea how much fear had built up in my heart.

Who Is Orchestrating Your Life?

I'd love to wrap this all up for you in an easy to understand package with a big beautiful bow and tell you that now everything will be ok – but I think we both know that's not possible and also not really the solution.

The tough truth is that it's this struggle through all of the unanswered questions and undefinable pain that carves us out and builds us. Brick upon brick, we are stronger and more courageous because of this solo road we've walked.

The more you unpack the pain, the root causes and the options you have to respond the more you realize that this is about much more than being single. It's about shattered expectations, a wrestle of faith and trust with God. Is his word true? Will he orchestrate my life or will he let me down? Am I missing the 99 wonderful things in my life because I can't stop focusing on the 1 thing I don't have?

This is just the first stop on the 'shattered expectations' train ride through life. You're going to feel this again. Even if you get married, you will feel this pain again.

Because some of the pain is coming from being single, but most of it is coming from this tension over who is orchestrating your life. Is it you? Or is it Jesus?

The one thing I can promise you is that if you allow him, God will orchestrate your life and you will not be disappointed.

Our Story

I'd been single my whole life. I had never been on a date, I'd never been kissed, I'd never held hands, I'd never had anyone show any expression of interest in me what-so-ever. At 28 years of age, I was remarkably single.

Of course everyone's natural solution to my singleness was to try online dating. Fueled by a mix of exasperation and curiosity I took out my Visa card and signed up for a three-month subscription on three different dating sites. I decided I'd challenge myself to 12 weeks online and when it was over I could prove to everyone, once and for all, that online dating doesn't work and don't you dare suggest I try it ever again.

I signed up to eHarmony, RSVP and Christian Connection. I spent a few hours setting up my profiles, I wanted to give it my best effort – I wasn't going to leave myself open to any criticism suggesting I didn't give it a decent shot.

Before I go any further there are two things you need to understand about online dating.

1. Online dating is like starring in your own personal season of *The Bachelorette*. You need to tell your friends that you're doing it – because if for nothing else you will have a new hysterical, drama soaked story to share with them every time you catch up and it is ridiculously fun.
2. And it's way easier (and, let's face it, more fun) to give the guys nicknames to save yourself explaining which one is Mark every time you update someone...

Moments after my profile went live I started chatting to 'The Seventh Day

Adventist'. I spent the next day trying to politely say 'we're clearly not compatible but it was nice to meet you' but sadly our ability to connect was so poor even that message wasn't getting across. Within 48 hours we were arguing and in the end I asked him to stop contacting me.

Then there was 'The Widower'. We quickly realized we had nothing in common and I was out of my depth with all the emotional baggage.

I was in that online dating zone where you're scared to judge anyone, turn anyone down, make any assumptions because you're trying to be hopeful and optimistic. You keep thinking 'what if'. What if I scroll past the love of my life because I didn't like his profile picture. What if I'm being too shallow and picky.

Well after two days chatting to these two guys it became clear to me that I needed to give this to God. I needed to trust God to orchestrate my life, I needed to trust God to orchestrate my online dating experience.

So I prayed - I asked God to only let the right guys respond to my messages. I told him that I wouldn't end any interactions; I'd let God decide who I'd talk to and for how long. I know my prayer worked because from then on hardly any of the messages I sent out received a response but the responses I did receive, turned into genuine conversations.

About a 5 weeks into this experiment one of the guys I'd been chatting to had asked if we could meet up. This was huge, bigger than I can describe, it was a full scale freak out. I'd never been on a date let alone a date with a complete stranger I met on the internet. This was so far out of my comfort zone it was ridiculous. It was as if I was a forest that had been set on fire and it was causing every living fear in me to run for the hills.

It was a huge emotional roller-coaster for a girl who had been single her whole life, rejected by every romantic interest up until that point. And now someone wanted to meet up with me. After nearly three decades of being overlooked and pushed aside, finally someone wanted to spend time getting to know me.

We planned to meet up in two weeks' time – so I had plenty of time for the nerves to build, and about a week before we were meant to meet up he messaged me and cancelled.

It's pathetic really to describe it as a heartbreak – to be honest I wasn't even that keen on the guy, but I'd lived my whole life in the dark, waiting for the dawn, and for this brief glimpse of time there was light on my horizon and all the hope in me that had been sent away for all those years started to rise. And then, with one swift SMS it was over. I felt pushed aside once again. The familiar hand of rejection hit me as I watched the darkness chase the light away.

It was heartbreaking because for the first time in a very long time I was taking a brave step forward and my fears felt like there were coming to life.

I had a week off from all the dating sites. I felt crushed. I knew I had to get back on the horse but it was beginning to all feel too hard. In that 5 week time period I'd introduced myself to so many people. It felt like I was standing in a shop window trying to sell myself as 'The World's Best Girlfriend/Wife' and no one was buying it.

After my break I decided to try again. This time I logged onto Christian Connection. Until that point I'd received notifications for all three sites but

I'd only been using eHarmony – mainly because it's easily the best dating site, let's face it, Christian Connection just sounds so cheesy.

It was a get in, get out mission. I did a nationwide search for all the guys in my age bracket, I then spent a few hours compiling a list of my top ten matches. Next I sent a personal message to each one introducing myself and trying to start a conversation.

The following morning, I fell off my bike on my way to work. It was more embarrassing than anything, but it makes that day much more distinctive in my mind – especially when I had to hobble around to a quiet spot in the office to read the one and only response I received from my Christian Connection mission.

Now the thing with online dating is that you can have either a free account or a paid account. A paid account will allow you to write your own messages. A free account will receive messages but you can only send pre-templated responses.

So this was a template response saying he'd like to get to know me more but he didn't have a paid account.

I remember so clearly sitting there during some combination of an exasperated sigh and an eye roll. I thought 'this guy is so tight; he's not even prepared to pay the \$30 subscription fee – clearly he's not that serious about this.'

But then I remembered my prayer and promise to God that I wouldn't end any interaction – so I replied to his message and sent him my email address. I thought if he does turn out to be a freak I can always block him.

I had spent 10,785 days of my life waiting and then suddenly there he was. Monday, the 29th September 2014. My 10,786th day. A template email sitting in my inbox.

We started madly writing emails to each other, it was like a spark that quickly burst into a fire. Within two weeks we planning our first Skype.

For the first time in my life I had a real connection and chemistry with a guy and he felt the same way towards me. It was an overwhelming gift from God and it was also terrifying!

Emails turned into text messages which turned into Skype marathons which turned into letters which turned into creative video challenges which turned into lunchtime phone calls which turned into meeting each other which turned into every second weekend together and a constant conversation through any form of communication we could find.

We were instant friends and then best friends and then it wasn't long until he owned all the real estate in my heart.

Leaving The Island

When Dave and I met we didn't have a single mutual friend. We lived 5 hours apart and were unfamiliar with each other's home towns. We had to learn everything about each other. I'd always assumed that I'd meet someone from my church and we'd already have a shared history before we started a relationship – but that's not the way it worked out.

In some ways a long distance relationship is a gift. It gives you so much time

to talk and listen to each other. I found our communication was intentional and deep because we had to cultivate an intimacy without physical touch or shared experiences.

For a variety of reasons Dave and I were both terrified of getting into a relationship. It was all new to me and it had been a painful past for him. We were brutally honest with each other, mainly because we were both apprehensive so we had a 'this is who I am, if you don't like it leave' approach...the trouble was instead of pushing each other away our sheer honesty was what we found most attractive in each other.

I'm a strong believe that every couple needs to find their own path to build a healthy relationship – at times it was tempting to look at other couples and want to copy or follow what they did – but then I'd remember that Dave and I are two unique people who have a unique path to walk.

With this in mind we made some decisions early on which served us well. We decided that we would first focus on becoming best friends and that we wouldn't kiss for the first six months.

Making decisions like helped us to build trust with each other and with God.

I remember a few months after getting to know each other we started discussing dating and I started feeling more and more anxious. You'd think after all those years of being single I'd be so thrilled to be in a relationship – but oddly enough it wasn't like that.

I felt I lived on an island with all of the other single girls and one by one a boat would come and a girl would sail away with the man of her dreams and

the rest of us were left, waiting, watching the horizon.

But as time had passed I'd stopped watching the horizon and I'd made the island my home. I even had a tribe. I was the Single Girl Island Queen and I knew every rock and tree and grain of sand on our pretty little island.

You could see the boats sail past the island with happy couples and growing families on them – off to explore faraway lands and go to places we couldn't reach...but the island was also a place that was off limits to them – it was my home and after a life time on land by legs had grown fearful of the ocean.

I remember explaining all of this to Dave, how terrified I was to leave my island and get onto a boat with him, how I felt like I had built an empire here and leaving it was almost unthinkable. I'd fought for so long to make this home that I could hardly entertain the thought of abandoning it all now – leaving the solid for this unknown sea life.

The beautiful thing was that after hearing this Dave understood where I was coming from and asked if instead of me getting in a boat with him, if he could come onto the island with me.

It was over a month after that conversation until we actually started officially dating – and even then I was still struggling with the transition – an electric mix of excitement and trepidation.

We got engaged in October 2015 and married in February 2016.

Life As The Single Bride

I've been scared every step of the way – but I've also been brave. The first time I met Dave face to face was 5 weeks after our first email. We'd decided to meet half way, in a tiny town on the Central Coast, around 3 hours' drive for each of us. I hardly slept the night before. I prayed non-stop for the entire drive because it was the only thing that would keep me calm.

But I still went. I put my heart in the game and fought every urge within me to reach in and pull it back to safety.

For most people I'd imagine that anxiety and fear around no longer being single and finally being in a relationship would be foreign.

But when I think about it I realize that everyone had something in their life that will cost them dearly, in fear and anxiety, if they were to let it go and give it to God to orchestrate.

I loved being single. I drank it in, I travelled, ran my own business, bought property, pursued my dreams, cherished rich friendships, pushed my boundaries and had a plan for the future.

It was a tough thing to let go of. But, by the grace of God, I am richer now in life than I have ever been before. Not just because I have a husband who easily surpasses any dream ideal I'd ever conjured but, because I'm with the person who God hand-picked for me, and living a God orchestrated life, whatever it looks like, is the finest way to live.

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