

IMPACT FACTOR: 7.86

ISSN 0976 - 8165



THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

12th Year of Open Access

Bi-Monthly Refereed and Peer-Reviewed
Open Access e-Journal

Vol. 12, Issue - 6 (December 2021)

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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
www.galaxyimrj.com

Single Again

Frank Zahn

I got married because people of my generation were expected to do the nesting thing with children, a mortgage, PTA, and work, work, work. And more importantly, I got married because I believed it increased the probability of getting laid more often than if I remained single.

As it turned out, the latter was a pipedream. Someone once said that if a man put a bean in a jar each time, he got laid during the first year of marriage, he'd spend the rest of the marriage taking a bean out of the jar each time he got laid. That's no big surprise, of course, because the benefits of most activities, including marriage, are subject to diminishing returns.

But that aside, my children grew up, the marriage ended, and I entered the uncertain years of being single again, middle-aged, and wondering what the hell to do next. After the first couple of months of staying at home nights and watching television, I decided it might be a good idea to start thinking about finding my next wife. I was still tied to the traditions of the past, in which the natural and normal state of an adult male was marriage, even when the nesting thing had run its course and he rarely, if ever, got laid.

Of course, my next wife would have to have at least some of the qualities I admired in my ex-wife, who was well educated, well read, and attractive. In addition, she would have to have a sense of humor, genuinely enjoy intimacy, and not suffer from low self-esteem or acute premenstrual syndrome.

But finding a next wife was a long-term goal. My short-term goal was to get laid—and soon. So, I went out looking for a woman who was willing to relieve her sexual frustration by using me. I hit the bars and dance halls, of course, and a couple of singles club get-togethers for cocktails, chatter, and a chance pairing for at least an overnighter.

Believe it or not, my favorite places to meet willing women were churches. I was amazed at how many of them frequented the social hours after Sunday worship services and Wednesday night prayer meetings. The Lord does indeed provide! I found the women who were the most willing were Presbyterians and Methodists or what my Southern Baptist mother referred to as lukewarm Christians.

I will never forget my first experience at a singles club get-together. It was a dance in a spacious, unadorned, and dimly-lit ballroom. On three sides of the dance floor were tables with folding chairs, and on the remaining side was a raised bandstand. Women milled around with anxious eyes and guarded smiles and chatted with the short supply of men. At least a dozen of them in all shapes and sizes hurried over to me the minute I entered the ballroom, introduced themselves, welcomed me, and asked me to save a dance for them when the music started.

The music was vintage 1940s and 1950s, and I danced almost every dance with a different woman. I didn't have to ask them to dance. They asked me.

While dancing and during breaks, the women-initiated exchanges of information. They revealed their circumstances and intentions and questioned me about mine. Some attempted to be subtle and indirect while others were straightforward and unabashed.

Their disclosures were amazingly similar. They sprinkled them with "he don't" and "I seen", and pronounced words like "wash" and "asked" as "worsh" and "asted". Each one had graduated from high school, married young, and had children—some of the children dependent and living at home, and others grown and living on their own. And it was as if the women had been married to the same man, one that was insensitive, self-centered, abusive, unfaithful, and unappreciative of their love and devotion.

For the women who received child support and alimony, payments from their ex-husbands had become few and far between. Many of those women and most of the others lacked the skills and work experiences outside the home to obtain jobs that paid enough to make ends meet. They had to settle for minimum wage jobs as waitresses, receptionists, nurse's aides, and positions in retail sales. Although cloaked in the language of love and

devotion, it was clear they were desperately in need of the emotional support that had eluded them in their marriages. And more importantly, they wanted to quickly regain the financial support they had lost when their marriages ended.

The most memorable dance of the evening was with a blonde, happy-faced woman in a turquoise, double-nit pantsuit. As we came together, she raised her impressive breasts by arching her back, planted them on my chest, and struggled to lead as I struggled to keep in step to a rumba. She held me so close I could feel those impressive breasts getting warmer as we danced. And all the while, her slightly protruding tummy massaged my slightly protruding paunch to the quick-quick-slow of the music. When she asked me to be her partner in the Paul Jones, a dance I had never heard of, I declined. I had to ask her three times to let go of my arm so I could leave and head for the bar.

As the night progressed, I came to understand why single again people call the singles world a meat market. I felt as if I were a piece of meat being passed from one she-wolf to another and on the verge of being dragged back to one of their lairs. The sex aspect of it was appealing, but the manipulation and control aspect of it was unsettling. It was awkward and embarrassing because a man of my vintage was not used to feeling that way in his relationships with women.

In the singles world that existed before my marriage, women were the meat and men were the wolves, but at that dance, it was clear that times had changed. A couple of reasons crossed my mind. With women's liberation and a ratio of eight women or more to every man in the middle-aged singles world of Omaha, Nebraska, the mostly divorced women had to compete for men more aggressively if they wanted to end up with one. Certainly, the women at the dance acted that way. Moreover, they acted as if they could care less what other women thought about it. In fact, some women became quite hostile toward their competitors, usually with catty remarks but occasionally with subtle threats of violence.

I never attended another of the club's dances or any of their other get-togethers. I wanted the company of a woman who was not so needy and displayed more sophistication and finesse. And I was not interested in the trash talk about ex-husbands, especially the

parts that applied to me. As far as I was concerned, a woman who tolerated a rotten ex-husband long term was as much, if not more, responsible than he for what he did to her, or stated correctly, what she let him do to her.

I did, however, date the secretary of the club. She was my first date after becoming single again. It didn't last long. Her desperation to recouple with marriage in mind began to show within a week, which was too fast for me. But I did learn some important things from the relationship and subsequent relationships with single again women—mostly divorcees.

I learned that single again women, at least those of my generation, had become much freer with their favors as a means of getting single again guys like me to recouple with marriage in mind. And their primary motive for the marriage add-on was to restore the emotional and especially the financial security they lost when they became single again—primarily through divorce.

I also learned that when you get married young and grow or mature with one person in a long-term marriage, it's difficult to recouple and build a relationship with another person who grew or matured in a long-term marriage with someone else. This is true even if your long-term marriage turned out to be a disaster.

And more importantly for me at least, I learned that the longer I stayed single again the more recoupling with marriage in mind lost its appeal. The recoupling is great, but the add-on of “with marriage in mind” made me feel uncomfortable and obligated—like there's something I may not want hanging over my head. That notwithstanding, I've managed to remain single again, recoupling when necessary and loving it.