On Dating

01/29/2001:
Disney California Adventure

Like you Maria, I was rather shy about boys in my early teens. They were interesting; something I wanted to know about…I just wasn't quite sure what to do with them. I remember my first date. My mother set it up, which normally isn't cool, but he was really cute. It was the summer I turned sixteen and I was just getting ready to go to Brazil for a year. He picked me up in his car. I wore a yellow and white blouse and yellow shorts. We went to Mc Donald's and then to a movie. I don't remember what the movie was. The entire date I was sweating the good night kiss. You see, at sixteen, I'd never been kissed! I was terrified. Somehow I managed to duck the goodnight kiss with a handshake and he continued to ask me out for the next three weeks. I was so nervous, I kept making excuses as to why I couldn't go. It's one of the regrets I have. He really was sweet and nice and I did want to date him. I just wasn't ready for the intimacy and had no idea how to deal with it. Frankly, I was scared. He finally gave up.

Early on in school I got a reputation for being prude. It started one night when I was fourteen and I went to my first teen party. It was small, only fourteen of us, and it was the first time I ever saw drugs or alcohol. My reputation first began because I was the only one who didn't drink or take the pills. There were drugs I'd never seen before or heard of. Something called hearts, robin's eggs and cross tops. Later, all of the boys and girls paired up and started making out. The boy I ended up with looked at me and I at him. I didn't want him to be my first kiss. I didn't even know him! When I asked him if we could just talk, he seemed as relieved as me. So we spent the evening talking while everyone else made out around us.

Repercussions came Monday morning. You see, I was cheerleader and high profile in the school. One of the girls at the party wrote in lipstick in all the bathrooms "Laura Lewis is a prude." I had to ask what prude meant. That made it worse. Throughout high school I was branded prude and no guy would ask me out. I never went to the prom and I never dated anyone I went to school with. While in high school I thought I was doomed to be alone and it scared me!

This is what I looked like at 14 during my Freshman Year in High School.

At the time I thought I was fat and ugly.

By Laura Dawn Lewis, excerpt from the Book
"What I Wish I'd Known: Your pocket size Mentor".
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Happy 14th Birthday Maria!
We went to see Lion King!
November 2001

I also thought everyone else had boyfriends. If you listened to the other students talk, you would think every student was having sex at fourteen, fifteen or sixteen and you are the only one left out. I didn't discover the truth until ten years later. Most of the talk, the stories and the innuendo remained just that, fiction. The fact is, even the popular girls felt lonely, ugly and confused. The truth is, even though they act like they are, very few teens were sexually active at fourteen, fifteen and sixteen. Those that were, most were dealing with major psychological issues from divorces, incest, statutory rape or drug problems. Promiscuity was how they hid it. And the girl that felt it was necessary to make fun of me? She was dealing with low self-esteem. By belittling me for doing something she wished she'd done, she felt powerful and better than me. I wish I could have understood this at the time. I took it to mean I was inferior. I found out many years later that she was jealous of me because she saw me as smart, pretty and talented. The truth would have saved me much grief.

At my ten-year high school reunion, I discovered more truths I wish I'd known at sixteen. The truth was, everyone was not having sex, making out, dating or involved in relationships. You hear the talk, watch the movies and it seemed everyone was. Lesson number two: Movies show extremes. The sexual activity described is meant to entertain and people are entertained by exceptions, not the norm. Ten years after high school I discovered most of the students were just like me. Most were virgins and remain virgins until after they graduated from high school. Of course, when you're in high school, nobody will admit to it until much later.

It's part of the façade and image. Those that do involve themselves in sex during high school, especially the early years usually have serious self-esteem issues they are dealing with. A majority use sex to obtain the love they aren't getting at home. Years later they realize, sex is not love. It is simply sex without the relationship and it makes you even more lonely and desperate.

At the reunion, several of the boys came up to me and told me how they had wanted to ask me out in high school, but were afraid to. That was really important because high school really hurt. As men they told me they saw me as unattainable and lets face it, at 5'10" tall, I towered above most of them in school. By age 27, many were taller than me and most looked pretty good! Too bad I had a boyfriend at the time.

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What do you do when you start dating?

Laura: Thanksgiving 2001

You'll never forget your first date and you'll probably forget what you did because you'll be nervous. The most important thing is to realize that boys and men, (whether 15 or 50…they never grow up!) will push the envelope as far as possible to try to get you to do things you're not ready for. The truth is men want you to set the ground rules. You have the power and it's up to you to use it. This is how they respect you. It's game to see how far they have to push you and they will use intimidation, alcohol, lies, guilt and any other psychological tool at their disposal to try to convince you. When the games start, smile to yourself and know this is a game. These are a few of the tactics they will use:

1) **If you love me you'll have sex with me.**

How to Respond: "If I love you I'll have sex with you? If you love me, you'll respect my wishes and not force the issue. You're trying to manipulate me and people that love each other don't do that."

2) **Let's go someplace quieter where we can be alone.**

How to Respond: "I'm not comfortable with that idea at this time."

3) **You're the only virgin in school, what's your problem?** Or "Everyone is doing it"

How to respond: That's an interesting fact considering only 20% of those under 14 are sexually active and nearly 60% of girls graduate high school with their virginity in tact. Who's your source? If I were you, I wouldn't quote them.

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4) It's the third date; if we don't have sex tonight I'm not seeing you again.
How to respond: "I'm sorry you feel that way. If that is your expectation, please take me home."

January 2001 at the ABC Soap Opera Café: Port Charles Set

Future (College and Beyond) Guidance: I hope you don't run into this one until you're in college. I'm not sure where the 3rd date=sex idea comes from, but it is part of popular culture and the men love to hold this one over you. The fact is, less than 20% of adult women will have sex on the third date within their lifetime, and most realize this isn't the best idea and don't repeat it again. If the 3rd date pressure comes up, these are the two strategies that have worked for me:
If you're a virgin, just say "I don't believe in having sex before marriage and I'm not going to throw that away on an arbitrary idea like a third date. If that is your expectation, please take me home."

My way of dealing with this false benchmark as an adult is my 90-day rule. At sixteen this would not have been useful, but if you marry, divorce or find yourself single in your late twenties and thirties, this rule can be a Godsend.

I learned the hard way through my late teens and early twenties the devastating effects having sex too soon has on your self-esteem and how it limits your ability to find long-term relationships. I followed the 3rd date idea and all it got me was a bunch of 3-6 week relationships, no security and never love. I was used and trapped in a cycle I couldn't get out of. I realized that in order to get what I wanted, a loving relationship, sex must be postponed. Since I'm not looking for men interested in something superficial, I tell them upfront on the first date to set the ground rules. It generally goes something like this.

"I really enjoyed this evening and I hope I will see you again. There is something I want to make clear though, because I don't want to waste your time. I don't believe in superficial relationships and I don't want one. I like to get to know a man first, who he is, what he's about, how he thinks. I've found the best way to do this is to keep sexuality out of the relationship for at least three months. I'm very adamant on this issue, and I hope you'll respect my wishes. If you cannot, I don't see any reason for us to see each other again."

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With this statement, I'll lose 50% of the men I'm dating. This is fine. This tells me all they were looking for was a fling or an affair. I'm not. Good ridden. I also tend to keep 50%. Most never make it to 90 days because one of us decides the relationship isn't worth pursuing. That's fine too. But those that have made it have resulted in close, caring and loving relationships lasting months and sometimes years. The 90-day rule has been very effective for me eliminating the men who don't care about me and just want sex and keeping the men who are interested. One more thing about the 90-day rule. It doesn't mean I'll become sexually involved on the ninetieth day. It just means nothing is happening before then. Be true to yourself and don't do anything, kissing, hugging or anything until you are ready. If he loves you, he will want you to be comfortable and he will wait for you to be ready. If he doesn't, he'll leave and though it hurts, this is the best thing. He didn't love you or care about you.

5) **We're not going to have sex; I just want to go down on you. Don't you want to feel good?**

How to respond: "You've been speaking with former President Clinton lately. Since when does going down on you not constitute sex?" (Clinton told the press that oral sex isn't sex. This what you call embellishing, which is a fancy word for making up your own truth or lying). When you get older, men use this tactic a lot!

6) **I've got some beer, (or anything else that might interest you) in the car, you want to share one?**

How to respond (over 21): "We can share it just as easily here. Why don't you bring me one?"
How to respond (under 21): "No thank you."

7) **Let's go back to my place.**

How to respond: "I'm not comfortable with that idea."

May 2000: Maria's first hiking trip with Darren, Cindy and their nephew and niece!

Personally, when I get in a situation where the man is applying pressure and I don't know what to do, I stick with ***"I'm not comfortable with that idea."*** It's a graceful way out. Many times they will ask why. You don't have to answer this question or justify your response. All you have to say is "Because that is the way I feel." If they keep pushing you, leave. Simply saying "No thank you," also gets the point across. The last thing you want is to get into a discussion about your reasons because if he is any good at manipulating, he'll find a way to make you feel rotten, inexperienced and immature. The fact is you're not. You are actually acting very mature by setting boundaries. He's being childish by not respecting them.

The other option: It sounds simple, leave, but it often doesn't occur to women when they are in an uncomfortable situation. It took me ten years to figure this out. Today I always carry my cell phone and thirty dollars cash with me on dates: the cell phone to call for a cab and the thirty to pay for it.

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8) **You're so immature** *(or you're a tease/bitch/baby or any other derogatory comment*). **Why don't act like an adult. Sex is no big deal.**

How to respond: "You must desperate. Is your self-esteem so low you have to resort to belittling me to get what you want? That's what I call immature. This issue is closed."

General Dating Considerations:

Maria, some of these are future-looking and address situations you may encounter in college and as an adult. I'm including them now because I think it's important that you have tools to deal with the situations later if they occur and I may not be around. These are some of simple rules I follow when dating. Many I had to develop after learning the consequences of not using them, the hard way. Trust me, you don't want to learn these the hard way! My hope is you won't have to go through what I did.

Remember when we got lost in the corn maze? It took 2 ½ hours to get out!

1) **Always introduce your date to a friend** or family member first before you go out with them alone.
2) **A first date should never be more than three hours.** Most men you date won't be future material and a three-hour limit gets you out of the situation if he's boring or if it becomes bad (and you will have your share of bum dates). Alternately, if it's going good, 3-hours gives him just enough about you to want to see you again.
3) **Anytime you date someone new, give his phone number, place of employment (or school) information and name to someone else.** Check in with this person before you leave, (let him hear you do this) and call this person when you return. A man is less likely to take advantage of you if he knows others know about him and where to find him.
4) **Never leave a club, party or bar with someone you've just met, even to go out to his car.** When you start going to clubs, this is a guy favorite, asking you to come out to his car for some reason. Not a good idea. You don't know him and you don't know what he's got in that car. It could be nothing or he could have handcuffs, guns, knives, drugs and any number of other convenient weapons that can quickly disable you. Just say "No thank you," or "I'm not comfortable with that idea." If he really wants to see more of you, he'll call and set up a date. If it's dark outside and I'm leaving alone from a club, I ask a bouncer to walk me to my car and I always have my ignition key in my hand ready to use whenever I leave any building, day or night.
5) **Cinderella rule:** If out with the girls or on your own, set your own curfew for midnight. What's left in the bars, at parties and in clubs after midnight isn't worth sticking around for and most are usually drunk. The incidents of drunk drivers, assaults and rapes increase significantly after midnight. Any flirting or meeting you can do well before midnight. Keeping Cinderella in mind will keep

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you out of a lot of trouble and head off hangovers, DUI's or waking up with a stranger. Besides, it makes a cute exit and endears you to any man your speaking with, "Oops, almost midnight. I forgot to tell you I turn into a pumpkin. I've really enjoyed meeting you! Have a great evening, okay!" If he's interested, he'll ask for your phone number before you go away. I try to only give out my work number, (once you're working in an office this is your best bet) and usually don't give out my home number unless I know him well. In college you won't have this option, but you will roommates that can screen your calls if he becomes a problem.

6) **Leave with whom you came with.** Discuss this ahead of time, before you go out for the evening with your friends and make sure everyone agrees that you all leave together. If you go out alone, leave alone.
7) **Always have cab fare with you in case you get stuck.** I've had people leave me in strange places a few times where I had no way home. It's degrading, scary and places you in perilous situations, many times wandering through city streets alone in the dark. If any of your friends or coworkers leaves without you after they've taken you to a party or club, do not ever go out with them again. Friends look out for each other. People that behave this way are not your friends and do not deserve to be around you.
8) **Watch the Alcohol.** Men use alcohol to their advantage and if he's buying it is very easy to lose track of how much you are drinking. It's amazing how that glass is always full! Men know that if you get a girl buzzed, she's much more likely to let down her guard and get intimate. Men are bigger than us and usually can drink 50% more than we can before feeling the same effects. I handle this by alternating a drink with a cup of tea so that every other drink is alcohol and every other is tea.
9) **You do not have to give a man your phone number.** If I'm not interested, I will generally tell the man "I'm involved with someone" whether I am or not. If he still asks for my phone number, I'll generally say. "I'm not comfortable giving that out." That's all you need to say. Then thank him for asking and leave.
10) **Ask yourself at the end of the date if *you* want to go out with him again.** This sounds simple but often women worry about whether their date likes them. The idea of dating is to find someone you like. Most women forget to ask themselves if they liked him!

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11) **Watch the "mentally walking him down the aisle" syndrome.** I can't tell how many times by the second or third date I'm already planning a wedding in my head. This takes all the fun out of dating and distracts you from date's real purpose: spending time with someone and getting to know him so you can decided if he is someone you really want in your life. When I do it today, I laugh at myself!

12) **Give men a chance.** Personally, if a man has enough courage to ask me out on a date, I will go out with him even if I'm attracted to him. In general, I give a man two dates unless he does or says something on the first date that is against my core values and beliefs. Men are just as nervous as you are and some have a really hard time being themselves on a first date. This is why I will give them two. Even if you're not interested, you can learn something from each person. I make this my mission on first dates, to find something out that is interesting about him. It's also possible that if he isn't your relationship material, he probably has friends that may be. Many of my male friends I met when they asked me out. Also, some men you don't find attractive at first will really grow on you as you get to know them. Suddenly they become extremely handsome.

Try not to worry about having a boyfriend. This is Steve and I'm 25 in this picture. We met when I was 23 and he 21 in college. He was my first real boyfriend and we almost got married. Most women have their first real relationships between 21 and 25. My sister was 27 before she met her first true boyfriend. Relationships are not about quantity. They are about quality. Quality is worth waiting for! And when you're ready, they do find you☺

Maria, women fall in love with a man's mind, drive, talent and personality, not his physique. If you focus only on looks, chances are you'll not attract the man who truly will enhance your life. Chances are, you'll attract a man who's focus is also only on the superficial and dating this type of man over time is extremely degrading. You'll never be pretty enough, thin enough, smart enough or sexy enough because this type lives his life by how others perceive him, not by values. He worships material things and doesn't know anything about a soul, his own or how to cherish yours.

13) **Be gracious.** Dating is hard, frustrating and can really set someone spinning. Men are people too, but a lot of women forget this. Unless he tries to assault you or harm you, always treat him with dignity and respect. Too many women are cruel and jaded toward men and say or do things that hurt. Be above this and always treat him the way you want him to treat you. Most of all have fun. After all, that is why you date in the first place!

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