

MARRY YOUR BEST FRIEND – By Danielle Coulanges

# *Marry* Your Best Friend



How to Successfully Date, Connect  
with Your Life Mate and Keep it Going Forever

**DANIELLE COULANGES**

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EXCERPT

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## MARRY YOUR BEST FRIEND



Dating and romantic relationships can sometimes feel like a scary zipline run. You jump off with great trepidation, but if you can conquer your fear, adopt the required posture, and hang on, it is an exhilarating experience!

In 2022, this adventurous sixty-something senior ziplined in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic.

## FOREWORD

### **My Why**

This book was inspired by all those who have fulfilled the role of “my children” in my life, including my former students, but most particularly, my nieces and nephews, my daughters-in-love, and my godchildren. You have allowed me to love you, counsel you, guide you, create beautiful memories with you and on occasions, even admonish you, or spoil you, just like a parent would their child. You have trusted me with your secret dreams and sought my help with practical direction, counsel, and prayers when you encountered life challenges. Most importantly, you embraced me as your wise elder and have shown me so much love in expression and in deeds. My heart expanded and created a new, dedicated chamber for each one of you that is forever yours.

I have prayed over your health, your finances, your careers, your crises, and your successes. What I’ve never acknowledged to you until now, is that I continuously pray over your love life as well. I ask God to prepare you for the companion He has designed for you, so that when you meet at the proper time, everything will fall into place. I’ve asked Him to bless the relationships that are already in place, to protect and guide you. I want to see you all in a loving, fulfilling partnership where the awesome individual you are is fully appreciated and cherished. I wish to see you and your significant other gathered around my dinner table, feasting on meals I’ve joyfully whipped up to celebrate you. I am looking forward to having young ones putter around the garden with me or invite me to attend their concerts or games.

I hope Henri and I demonstrated by our own example what marriage and a successful domestic partnership look like. I pray that disclosing the recipes for our success will provide you the guidance to make your dream of a partnership a reality or strengthen the relationship you are now in. I dedicate this book to you.



One of my greatest blessings has been to live up to the title you affectionately bestow upon me, that of Auntie. For that, I thank you and love you forever!

“God bless you and keep you... God lift up his face toward you and give you peace.” – (Numbers 6:24-26) But most of all, may The Lord grant you a perfect LOVE!

Aunt D.

### WHAT THE BELOVED ARE SAYING

Danielle wrote this book with the very best of intentions and wishes. She truly wants these things for everyone; love and happiness, not for a moment, but for always. *"Marry your best friend"* is a testament to her well lived life, her beliefs, and her love of others. **The practicality of this book will ground you and may put the happily ever after you've been seeking within your reach.**

I highly recommend it.

**Karen A., age 54 – 1<sup>st</sup> Niece – Managing Director of HR**

**Becoming a better version of yourself should be a continuous life objective**, whether you are in a relationship or not.

When you lose sight of that, you leave an open space for someone else to define who you are or what you should become and that in a relationship, is the beginning of the end. Key insights from this book for me!

**Jeffrey K., age 45 – nephew – Finance Manager**

Your partner will never see things precisely the same way you do. And that won't and shouldn't change throughout your journey with them. You have to be humble enough, curious enough, open minded enough, to welcome and **consider this divergent point of view in order to grow and be a better human being.**

**Nadia K., age 43 – niece – Attorney**

Aunt Danielle's book intrigued me from the cover design. The image beautifully captures the parallel between the complexities of mazes and the intricacies of relationships. Mazes can be tricky, in that they pose challenges and are designed with several ways in and out and multiple paths to the center, just like relationships. Just as each maze presents a different experience to those who enter it, every relationship offers a distinctive path towards a common goal. You are likely to meet someone who has a different way of doing things, comes from a different background and upbringing, **but so long as you are both trying to get to same place (the center) how you get there doesn't necessarily matter.** Your path is unique just like the other person's. There isn't a "wrong way," only diverse approaches.

**Danielle I., age 39 – niece/goddaughter  
– Marketing Specialist**

This is what the cover of this book conveys to me: You do not fall in love. **Love is not something you "fall" into. Love is something that you "grow" into.** A relationship is not a destination but rather a journey with your best friend. Going through trials and tribulations (the maze) but doing it together through thick and thin. Not just during good times.

**Camille J., age 31 – niece – Make-up Artist/Entrepreneur**

First off, I love the symbolism on the cover. To me, it symbolizes that the journey of finding your soulmate is not linear. There are twist and turns, but ultimately in the end, if you stick to it, you find each other. And in the shape of a heart; how appropriate: the heart is at the center of it all!

I am excited to continue reading the book. I do think that it's important to evaluate myself, because like you said somewhere in a passage, **you find the person that you're energetically connected to!** Which is so true. Dating is not at the forefront of my mind, but I am excited to start putting more thought into it and being more intentional and strategic when it comes to finding my person.

If I could describe the previewed passage in two words, it would be **“thought provoking”** ...

**Jade J., age 25 – niece – Aesthetician/Entrepreneur**

My relationship with Aunt Danielle operates highest on a spiritual level. My aunt could see early on that while I possessed good morals and integrity, I struggled a great deal with having faith. Faith in others, faith in myself, and faith in the higher power. When we would have our talks about life and pursuit of career goals, she made it clear to me that until I can surrender myself to the higher power, things won't manifest or come to fruition. **You have to believe in things you can't see or hear while understanding you can talk to and build your own relationship with God.** Aunt Danielle does a great job of not being preachy but more so offering a perspective from her past experiences.

Learning my aunt had booty call situations makes me realize your elders had many lives before they became the evolved version you got to know and love. Would have never thought Aunt Danielle tried casual dating. She's always seemed like a woman who always required and deserved commitment. I guess at some point, **everybody has to experience something they don't want, so they know exactly how to pursue something they desire.** - I love you and I'm so proud to have you as my Auntie.

**Nick Alexander, 32 – grand-nephew – Comedian/Actor**

The book captured me from the cover. To me the maze symbolizes the complex and interconnected journey of relationships, experiences, and navigating personal challenges.

As a daughter of immigrant parents, your reflection on balancing cultural expectations with personal aspirations deeply resonated with me, highlighting the struggle I and others like me face in relationships.

**I learned about the significant impact of the importance of finding a balance between personal desires and expectations** and your candid sharing of personal experiences and growth made me want to delve deeper to learn more about your insights.

This book is **insightful and relatable!** The reading was **engaging and thought-provoking.**

**Bathsheba L., age 38 – daughter-in-love – Educator**

My aunt has always been there for me as a mentor. But she is also an auntie who makes you breakfast and takes you on fun activities around the city whenever I am in town. She demonstrates love and makes you feel loved.

**Watching my uncle and my aunt in their marriage, I understood the benefits of a united front and the importance of knowing your mate.**

Those two are the best example of a loving couple I've ever seen.

I am excited to read my aunt's book. The title and the picture both convey love, peace, and make you curious to read the book and find out more. And I really love my aunt!

**Emmanuel B. age 47 – nephew-in-love – IT Entrepreneur**

My dearest mother-in-love! Congratulations on this exciting chapter in your life. I am so happy to see **you attract the love you deserve.** I am a better woman because of the example of strength, beauty, and love you demonstrated while I was growing up and now the world is going to be a better place if they embrace **“auntie's wisdom!”** **Embracing this wisdom will definitely help many to attract a healthy relationship and marry their best friend.** Wish you love!

**Camille S. age 56 – daughter-in-love**  
*– “The Healthy Love Coach”*

## INTRODUCTION

Dating. Relationships! Ugh! The frustration and confusion are overwhelming. This process has always been challenging, even when I was single decades ago. Today however, finding a life partner feels like a perilous journey of misadventures, where only a few manage to achieve the coveted status of being coupled or married.

This auntie is here to help you.

In 2010 I published *Cads, Princes and Best Friends*, a memoir in which I shared the journey of self-discovery that followed the break-up of a decade long love relationship when I was in my mid-thirties, and my subsequent attempts to find love again.

During the time expressed in that story, I had been inexperienced at dating even as an adult. I had a lot of questions and made a lot of mistakes. My interactions with men while searching for a mate were “learn by trial and error.” After falling off the bike too many times and left with numerous bruises, I eventually found my road partner and we successfully rode off into the sunset together.

I wish there had been a sage or wise elder to counsel me through and explain how to go about gaining a healthy relationship, and further, how to keep it going strong when I did get one. This book, *Marry Your Best Friend*, is that wise elder. It is about how you can find, successfully date, and connect with a life partner and maintain a forever love relationship in the era of disposable everything, currently 2024.

It is based on life lessons learned from my personal experiences, interviews with other individuals, celebrity quotes, and research done using an online survey I conducted in October 2023, *Dating & Relationships in the 2020s*. The survey provided insights from 110 respondents, that included 30 single men, 40 single women and 42 married or committed couples of various age groups ranging from 25 to 55+.

## What this book offers:

This book is not intended to be an extensive manual for everything dating or marriage. What it does offer is:

- An informative and realistic guide on the full story.
- A “reel” on how to do this relationship thing right, at all the various phases:
  - from dating
  - to courtship
  - and eventually a committed, partnered, or married life.

## Who should read this book:

### A must-read for:

- **Men and women**
- **between the ages of 25 and 55 plus.**
- If you are single and seeking a committed relationship.
- If you are in a serious relationship and contemplating taking the next step.
- If you are married and seek to secure the health of your relationship and keep things exciting and vibrant.

The situations analyzed in this book and my observations are based on romantic relationships between men and women, because that is what I know, believe in, and wish to speak about. Nevertheless, the premise of human relationships carries universal truths that apply to all personal interactions and connection between people.

*Marry Your Best Friend* provides practical advice to support the guidance given and offers various tools you can use to:

- Know what a relationship is.
- Understand the current dating climate.
- Examine your true self to know who you are and what you want.
- Do the necessary work to prepare yourself for a shared life.
- Determine what you want in a relationship and have the courage to claim it.

- Recognize that there are challenges to surmount and how to equip yourself accordingly.
- And once you are connected to your dream partner, how to maintain the vibrancy of an ongoing successful partnership.

The views expressed in this text are my personal beliefs and where noted, those of the individuals interviewed. I presented the facts as objectively as I could. However, I am a born-again Christian, and that perspective is often reflected in my discussions. In every case, my opinions are shared to inform, not to impose.

This is an open conversation, where secular terms, expressions, and experiences taken from contemporary culture, as well as the occasional biblical references make appearances. This is real life as best expressed by someone who has lived, and continues to live a full life and is not afraid to talk about it.

Read this book with an open mind. Do not miss the opportunity to reap the benefits of the wisdom and lessons offered here.

Mothers and fathers, aunties and uncles, grandmas, and grandpas, share this book with the younger generation who are of dating age. Let it be a conversation starter to tell them your story and add your own wisdom to the relationship narrative.

I am a hope filled romantic who loves the concept of true love. I have been blessed it found me, I claimed it, and have maintained my love story going strong for 26 years, counting the years of pre-marital dating. My wish is that everyone would find their person and pair up for a happy, productive, long life together.

If it is true that love conquers all, then LET THERE BE LOVE!

Enjoy this explorative journey. May it strengthen your spirit and leave you confidently equipped to navigate the dating and relationship waters, ultimately leading you to a marvelous destination!

Blessings! Danielle – aka D' Auntie

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Fall 1996 photo shoot – I was “Dee La Cool” fashion designer. Modeling one of my creations with the New York City skyline in the background.

I appear confident, don't I? And why shouldn't I be? I am beautiful, glamorous, and talented. But yet...



This tongue-in-cheek picture taken with one of my male models in a way depicts my true state of mind at that time.

On the dating front, I was insecure and needy. I was desperate for somebody to love me.



## **PART I**

### **WHAT IS A RELATIONSHIP?**

*Regardless of how much perceptions and beliefs have changed over time, one universal truth remains: human connection, especially the romantic kind, helps us move from the “not good” of being alone to the “very good.”*

## RELATIONSHIP - WHAT IS IT?

Relationship is one of those topics that prompts most people's ears to perk up and listen. Humans are wired to desire relationships with others, starting with the familial, then with friends and business associates and ultimately, with a romantic partner.

Most single people profess to want to be in a romantic relationship of their own, and preferably a long lasting, fulfilling one. People are looking for genuine connections. The survey, *Dating & Relationships in the 2020s*, revealed some interesting facts, as shown by the responses from single men and women:

- 72% of women and 90% of men said they were ready for a serious long-term partnership or marriage.
- 73% of women and 43% of men based their readiness on their desire for a long-term partnership.
- 66% of women and 47% of men wanted personal connection.

Respondents were also asked of their preference, given a choice of dating situations for the rest of their life.

- 46% of women and 22% of men chose casual dating with different people.
- 89% of women and 79% of men picked serious long-term relationship with a life mate.

It is to be noted that some people were open to both casual and serious dating, although most respondents felt ready for a serious relationship, fueled by the desire to achieve long-term partnership or marriage. A big surprise for me was that the percentages for men on those items were as high as they were.

Does this reveal an underlying misconception or a commonly uninformed assumption that men are non-committal and just want to remain casual? These answers seem to suggest otherwise.

**We've discovered a common ground between men and women: irrespective of gender, individuals seek long-term relationships that offer personal fulfillment.**



How can you acquire that coveted treasure known as a relationship? Is it merely luck, where the perfect one falls in your lap, or is there a method to improve your chances of attaining and sustaining a joyful and fulfilling partnership with a significant other?

While the pathways and the approaches used may be different for everyone, there are some basic and fundamental strategies that universally ensure success for a love relationship.

## **What is a relationship?**

The first thing to know about anything you want to get involved in is, what is it? What are you getting into? What, exactly is a “relationship?”

There seems to be a serious lack of knowledge among the younger generation as to what that is. During a conversation about the upcoming book with my good friend Charles F\* <sup>1</sup> a married man in his fifties, he found this generation “cognitively challenged” when it came to understanding true relationships. - I used my own euphemism instead of repeating the real (R) word he used, to be politically correct. In any case, a good number of people, especially millennials, who are used to adjusting their ubiquitous selfies to desired effect, fail to realize a few things:

- Life and people are not perfect.
- You cannot edit people or situations to your liking in a relationship.
- It’s not all about you. There are two souls involved in a relationship.
- You may not get the perfect shot for your reel, but you choose the best picture among the lot that is suitable for the situation.

I wrote a blog in October of 2023, when I came back from a vacation in Cancun, Mexico, titled, “*Look At me! – The Perils of Self-Absorption.*” In it I discussed what I saw as an alarming trend of people so absorbed in taking selfies that they paid no attention to the beautiful scenery that surrounded

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<sup>1</sup> \* The names with an asterisk throughout the book are aliases used for publication purposes.

them. Their objective was solely to find a spot that *showcased* them. A background that made them look good. Mother Nature got no flowers for her works. God received no glory for his creation. The gorgeous views were not even acknowledged with a second glance.

A lot of that self-absorption goes on in relationships today. The partner is overlooked and viewed solely as a backdrop to make one look good. People fail to see that a relationship is an exchange of emotions with everything that it entails. The self-analysis, the give and take, the compromises, the what is best for us, and the occasional “you come first.”

In the dating phase, there is the discovery of each other that is fundamental in determining whether a relationship is viable or not. Some people are so focused on themselves that they sabotage any chances of something developing between them and the prospect.

When I was working on this section of the book, in October 2023, news of a TikTok post by an Atlanta influencer flooded the internet. This woman being pursued by a suitor had finally agreed to meet him for drinks. But once at the restaurant, she proceeded to order 48 oysters that she slurped down while filming herself. By the time she ordered an additional potatoes and crab cakes entree, the date had left the building under the guise of going to the restroom. When she texted him later, offended that she was left stuck with the high bill, he offered to Cashapp her the total for the drinks he had originally offered.

The whole thing went viral: her post voicing her outrage at the date for walking out on her and the public reposting the incident in crowded discussion threads. As expected, the comments from men were mostly derogatory toward her, with some feeling it was outrageous to even eat that much of anything, to exhibit bad manners for slurping or act that way on a first date. There were the women who felt that a guy should never walk out on a bill.

I have a few issues with this whole scenario.

- Being an influencer can be a good thing when someone uses their platform to promote a cause: save the whales, abolish genital

mutilation, save the planet; share inspiring or meaningful messages. However, too many employ their position of influence to showcase themselves, even when it is in bad taste. “See me here. See me there.”

- What are you doing filming yourself during a first date when you should be engaging the other person to get to know each other? This is that self-absorbed malady I referred to in my blog *Look at Me!* The date became a backdrop to showcase herself, instead of an exercise in making a genuine connection.
- If your objective is to make this man spend on you when you don't even know his financial capabilities, how do you think that projects? Are you going to spend the bills money on designer shoes and expect him to just deal with it?
- If you cannot give this person your full attention for the few minutes that you are on a date, how can he depend on you for conversations, for togetherness, for support?

I could go on about what was wrong with that picture. Public opinion was vocal about it. A man wanting some arm candy or a chance to showcase himself might associate with such a woman to be in the limelight with her. But if one is looking for genuine connection and a true relationship, they will do like that guy.

Skedaddle. Skip out. Get out of town. RUN!

Let me put on my teacher hat for a minute.

To get a better understanding of a word meaning or application, it is helpful to look at its given definition. The *Merriam Webster Dictionary* has several definitions for the word “relationship.”

1. *The state of being related or interrelated* – as in a relationship between weather patterns and global warming.
2. *The relation connecting or binding participants in a relationship* – such as kinship or familial connections.

3. *A state of affairs existing between those having relations or dealings* – a business connection or diplomatic interaction between countries, for example.
4. *A romantic or passionate attachment* – the kind that most people associate with the word relationship.

When it comes to dating or marriage, the default definition is commonly number four: a romantic attachment. However, all of *Webster's* definitions fit the premise of a romantic relationship, as all those elements come into play.

Indulge me if you will, while I break it down a bit.

1. *The state of being related or interrelated* – In a relationship, what happens to one affects the other. For example, if one snores, the other risks having a sleepless night! Believe me, I know. I have woken up to my husband upside down on the bed because I was snoring in his face. Go figure! The man will chance a foot kicking his chest, but at least he might get some sleep that night.

**Real Talk: Seriously now, being in a relationship means that everything about one person has a reaction on the other. This could be a positive effect or a negative one. Relationships do not exist in a vacuum.**

2. *The relation connecting or binding participants in a relationship* – In a familial relationship you know exactly where character traits come from and everyone is accepted as kin even when their name is prefaced with the word “crazy.”

**Real Talk: A romantic relationship inherently requires that two people accept each other as is and adopt each other as kin.**

3. *A state of affairs existing between those having relations or dealings* – A lot of dealings goes on in a love relationship, as in “deal with it.” In dating and in marriage there is a lot of give and take that most people do not foresee or choose to ignore. The expression “state of affairs” could not be more

appropriate to describe the status or process. Dating and marriage are akin to a business endeavor!

Since when is romance a business, you may ask?

Yes, it is! A romantic relationship should be looked at as a merger of two individuals, with the expectations, discussions, and compromises that come with establishing the ground work for the successful joining of separate entities.

**Dating, marriage, and business have a lot in common.** Stay with me for a minute and you'll see how all three situations have similar components.

When you are seeking a job, you are the suitor. You prepare a resume that lists your qualifications and education, your experiences and what you are looking for. The employer (the pursued) prepares their own list of what they are looking for and what they are offering (salary, benefits, growth, etc.)

...

This excerpt ends on page 7 of the published book.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Danielle Coulanges, born in Haiti and a longtime New Yorker before relocating to Houston, Texas, is a multi-talented writer known for her vibrant presence in various fields. With a background as a former model and fashion designer, the quintessential diva penned several published articles and short stories. She made her mark in the literary world with her memoir, *Cads, Princes & Best Friends: A Tale of Lust, Love & Redemption*. Her engaging blog, "One Aging Diva," and the entertaining "D'Auntie Podcast" on YouTube showcase her insights on life, faith, and relationships.

Danielle's diverse experiences enrich her work: a degree in Economics and English Literature from New Jersey City University, a brief music career, a fashion design business, a compliance role on Wall Street, and teaching French to teenagers at a Houston high school, where daily she got to be teacher, mentor, counselor, and auntie. She also realized her dream of recording music with her album "I Live by Faith," reflecting her life motto.

Now, living with her husband in Houston, Texas, she balances her busy life with gardening, crossword puzzles, karaoke, and romantic movies on Netflix.

For updates on her projects and to participate in monthly giveaways, readers can join her mailing list through her website.

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Other book by Danielle Coulanges:

*Cads, Princes and Best Friends, A Tale of Lust, Love & Redemption, 2010*