

Relationships tougher in P.C. world

By BEN HAMRICK

Recently, at a large family gathering of relatives celebrating my aunt and uncle's 50th wedding anniversary, I was reminded, perhaps no more than six or seven thousand times, that I am still single.

Single? I remarked. How politically incorrect! In no way did I consider myself single — simply matrimonially challenged.

Clearly, the scowling horde of octogenarians within hearing aid range had no clue what I was talking about, which is probably just as well, because if their generation had been subjected to the vast new guidelines dominating the current Nineties dating scene, many of us may not have been born.

The year was 1944, and my uncle pursued my aunt with absolute determination at the local defense plant. Whenever she

Much in life escapes any recognition

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Then I sat through Honors Convocation, applauding so often that my hands sang with genuine enthusiasm. As we congratulated our best and brightest, I couldn't help but remember my friend's stamina and Sinatra's endurance and Mayfield's dignity and the people who made movies that I enjoyed but aren't recognized by their peers.

So I began to think about students. I admire many of you who re-think, re-read, re-write, and accept evaluation. I'm no Pollyanna; I know many of you don't try. But to those of you who do and who weren't invited to Convocation: I lift my red pen for a moment and tip my hat in admiration and thanks.

And my garden? At this time of year it changes almost momentarily. A clematis grows an inch; the shimmering green of new growth on a rose plant dazzles; plants that I thought our winter had killed pole through the mulch; daffodils and hyacinths and pansies nod with the breeze and spill rainbows into the world; some buds are appearing, some are bursting with color juices.

Those are some of my awards that no one rewards me for.

wasn't looking, he planted one rose after another in her rivet gun. Obviously his persistence paid off.

But by today's standards of conduct in the workplace, he might have been brought up on charges of sexual harassment, disgraced, ultimately dismissed, and perhaps, even more terrifying, made to repent before 50 million viewers on Geraldo or Sally Jesse Cortez Brown Garner O'Brien Rafael.

There is an entirely new "etiquette" for dating in the Nineties, and men and women alike are recreating their relationships to reflect the revolutionary change in their respective roles. Take, for example, the simple matter of paying a restaurant bill. Because no one knows who is supposed to pick up the tab anymore, most waiters (oh, excuse me, Food Service Professionals) these days put the check precisely between the male and female diner, creating a remarkably awkward moment to see who will reach for it first.

My accountant, Trish, suggests a system whereby even before the first appetizers arrive, a man and woman reveal their 1040 forms to each other. Then they would proceed to divide the check along income-based lines. For example, if she netted about \$60,000 annually and he took home only \$40,000 (a miracle of biblical proportions at Wesleyan), then she would pay 60 percent of the bill and he would pick up the rest, and vice versa.

This system would greatly reduce the social pressures of the evening unless, of course, there were some residual squabbling because one party ordered Norwegian goose pate and cherries

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jubilee, while the other, as her entire meal, ate only a small dinner salad and some tap water.

It's not that I mind picking up the check. In fact, I was trained to do it. But this once-simple act, like every other traditional dating ritual, has become a mess of complication. If I pick up the tab, am I a dominant, patronizing male? And if I don't, am I an inconsiderate cheapskate?

But the check is just the beginning. In fact, I admit it, the sad part is that the mixed signals in today's social scene have me totally confused.

For instance, in my own desire to fit into today's blurred-role dating world, I have done the food shopping and attempted to cook a romantic dinner. The only problem being that, on several occasions, my efforts to successfully produce an edible dish of linguine with clam sauce resulted in a large portion of pasta being permanently affixed to the kitchen ceiling.

Elaine (not her real name), the senior editor of a major feminist magazine and also my ex-fiancee, frequently wrote that the "gender-based" roles of men and women, which have persisted since the dawn of time, are finally obsolete, and therefore, couples should now share equally in all of life's experiences.

Except at 3 a.m., when she would wake up and suspect a prowler in the house. Then, equally, schmality, I would be the one invariably elected to venture down-stairs to confront the

heavily armed escapee from a maximum security prison.

Nevertheless, the problem Elaine and I confronted were not unlike those of other engaged couples we knew. Maybe it's because a commitment that's supposed to last through richer and poorer, in sickness and health, as well as beyond at least one car warranty, is a lot longer than most people can endure in this increasingly fast-paced, ever-changing world.

Wouldn't it just be better to eliminate the marriage contract altogether and replace it with a short-term agreement — perhaps renewable every six months? That would do away with the stigma of divorce completely. Many lawyers (sorry Fred), and formerly married persons could simply explain to potential partners, without a shred of guilt, that the option on their last relationship merely wasn't picked up.

Of course, first you have to

find a potential partner, and that's gotten to be a major chore in itself. Indeed, identifying and filling that need, the personal ads in the Nineties have taken a high-tech turn to facilitate the process. No longer do folks seeking true romance take time to write ten-page letters to anonymous magazine box numbers.

Instead, through the miracle of 900 marketing, they now choose from a whole menu of prerecorded eligibles by conveniently making a phone call to their local "dateline." Of course, at \$3.99 a minute, you better find that special someone pretty fast, otherwise you might spend your entire first date gazing longingly at each other over a small fry from Hot 'n Now at City Lake Park.

While choices appear to abound, I've discovered that being the average American leaves me at a distinct disadvantage. There's just no national association for people like me.

Top ten politically correct terms

10. Bald People — Follicly Deprived
9. Short People — Vertically challenged
8. Fat People — Horizontally Challenged
7. Trash Men — Waste-Removal Technician
6. Dumb People — Cranially Deprived
5. Truck Driver — Long Distance Transport Specialist
4. Hunter — Animal Population Control Technician
3. Cashier — Product Tabulation Expert
2. Bartender — Liquid Distribution Specialist
1. College Professor — Mind Control Craftsman

Clinton health plan has value

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of the century will see federal spending for health care rise to 25 percent of the budget without price controls. This rise in cost would make the federal deficit unmanageable.

While 80 percent of Americans currently have some coverage, the rising cost of health care could cause up to half of those citizens to lose coverage by the 21st century. The solution is clearly the Clinton plan's effort

to cap health care spending at 17.2 percent by 1997 through the use of HMOs, PPOs, and traditional fee for service plans.

These plans would allow individuals to join the group for a fee and in turn set limits on how much could be spent on care. Doctors could not bankrupt the system because each person's fee would cover the expense of their care.

The plan's success hinges on responsibility from the medical community and the consumer. Doctors would be responsible for

not prescribing unnecessary procedures and the consumer would be asked not overuse the system.

The Clinton plan is not a free ride. Employers would be asked to pay 80 percent of health premiums for employees, while all consumers would be responsible for some form of co-payment or 15 cents to 34 cents per wage hour. The limits on overall spending would allow employers to eventually raise wages. The much maligned cigarette tax would be increased 75 cents per pack, but

in relation to large manufacturer price increases over the last five years this increase is small in comparison.

The Clinton health plan is the best method to bring this problem system under control. The result of ignoring this problem is sky rocketing costs, lost insurance coverage, and an uncontrollable federal deficit.

The price for security may seem high, as Americans witnessed during the Cold War, but the benefits of such security are well worth the costs.