



LOVING THE GAP

Don't let being single make you miserable. Grab hold of opportunities, live in the now and have fun – use this time to become irresistibly you.
By Amanda Killick

We've all seen those girls who float effortlessly from man to man in a symphony of 'This is The One'. For them, finding love – and keeping it – appears to be as easy as breathing but for the rest of us things are a little trickier. And in reality, sometimes the 'gap' between guys can feel like the longest, loneliest period of our lives – a veritable romance ghost town where a couple of tumbleweeds and a tangle of cobwebs growing on our favourite clubbing shoes are all we have for company.

'Stuff that!' says Nikiwa Morepo, a 28-year-old art director at a Jo'burg advertising agency. 'My biggest fear as a single girl was that I'd never find anyone else after Madi* and I called it a day. I was suddenly insecure and depressed all the time – and pretty unpleasant to be around. And then came those damn pep talks that everyone thinks are helping but the trite advice just made me madder: "There are lots of fish in the sea" and "Every pot has a lid" and "Someone else will come along."

'The turning point came when I went to a friend's house-warming. I was about three months into my wallow. I had really let myself go and wasn't at all prepared to see Madi there, let alone with his new love. But he was. And I went to pieces in the kitchen. He'd certainly not wasted any time in finding someone else. That's when the real me came back – and I was very angry with myself because I'd wasted so much time being miserable. If he could move on, so could I. And that's when "Operation Find the Gap" was born.'

Morepo made it her focus to better herself in the interim (the gap) and by concentrating on living in the now and having as much fun as possible, she became virtually irresistible.

ONE DAY WHEN...

'Just because one chapter of your love life has ended doesn't mean you have to put the rest of your life into a holding pattern,' says Hanlie Raath, a relationship expert and author of *The New Paradise: Making Intimacy Real* (Red Nolan). 'I've counselled so many gorgeous, strong

single girls who have literally opted out of life after a break-up,' she says. 'They seem to subscribe to the mind-set that you can only really get full enjoyment out of life if you are with someone. But that "one day when" mentality is very limiting. Mr Right doesn't really exist – but Mr Right Now does. And how are you going to find him if you never get out of your pyjamas and leave the house?'

Raath advises you to treat your time between men in the same way you'd treat a gap year. 'During a gap year, students travel, meet new people and have as much fun as they possibly can before coming back home and taking on the responsibilities of life. And love is no different. A gap between flings is actually vital for a girl to get back in touch with the person she really is and to nurture herself back to feeling fantastic.'

Thuli Bottoman, a social worker at the Family and Marriage Society of South Africa (Famsa) in Johannesburg, agrees. We're not made to 'wait around for things to improve, especially when it comes to our relationships, because we'll never really know exactly what it is we're waiting for. That's one of life's secrets. There are so many other things in life that can fulfil us, so why hand our happiness over to someone else?'

IT'S ALL ABOUT YOU

Bottoman goes on to say that before you embark on a relationship you 'have to be 100% okay with the person you are. Don't wait for someone else to come along and complete you because you'll be setting yourself up for disappointment. You're going into the new relationship as a whole person, not as a half to make up the whole. In the meantime you need to balance your life with other interests and make time for every aspect of your life.' Make time to see your friends and family, says Bottoman. 'And love yourself first.'

Raath feels the same way. 'A well-developed self-esteem is the key to being complete.' Work out what you enjoy and pursue these things. Spend time investing in yourself, your interests and your needs. Allow yourself to ►



'10 YEARS FROM NOW, WILL I BE HAPPY I DID THE LAUNDRY INSTEAD OF ACCEPTING AN INVITATION FOR A SPONTANEOUS DAY AT THE BEACH?'

enjoy being you and you'll become more confident, fun and at ease – a more attractive you.

NOW, NOW, NOW!

But if you're already in possession of a top-notch self-esteem, how do you live more in the now? According to Julie Clark Robinson, author of *Live In The Moment* (Beyond Words Publishing), you simply need to lighten up.

'Living for the future is a colossal waste of what today can hold for you,' she says. 'It's destructive and ultimately ends up short-changing us. I've learnt to live in the moment by asking myself, for example: 10 years from now, will I be happy I did the laundry instead of accepting an invitation for a spontaneous day at the beach? Make your life full of joy by putting yourself first. And believe me, the single years are the only time in your life when you can do that. The days I wallowed in loneliness I now see as the ones I got to lounge around, take all day to read the Sunday paper and meet friends for coffee and croissants.'

So, don't wait for hindsight to show you how good things can be now – look for the good stuff.

'Next time you get that gnawing feeling that you may never find someone to love, snuff it out. Challenge yourself by asking what you can do to make sure that today is a good one. Then do it. Day after day, month after month, year after year if need be. One day you'll be thrilled you made the most of your time,' says Clark Robinson.

EAU DE DESPERATION

'My friends all say that men can sense if a girl is out on the prowl,' says Thembi Mkachwa, 25, a nursing sister in Durban. She finds it difficult to go out and not think about the possibility of hooking up with someone.

But 'men can pick up that you've got an agenda. When you go out and really aren't making a concerted effort to look for love, you're more likely to be yourself, be spontaneous and make the best of your evening,' says Bottoman.

A woman waiting for love is utterly inflexible, says Raath. 'By focusing too much on one goal, you're limiting your choices. What you should be asking yourself is: what experiences can I get out of tonight? Vivacious girls stop concentrating on the outcome and have as much fun in the moment as they can.'

It's time to grab hold of the gap (year or month). Use the time well: get out there, try new things (go tandem skydiving – the instructor might actually be fun to be with) and visit new places (don't just stick to the club you and your ex liked; grab a bunch of mates and find a new place to tear up the dance floor). Besides, love usually turns up when you're busy doing other things, like loving who you are and having too much fun to notice who else is in the room! □

* NAME HAS BEEN CHANGED

NOW KNOW-HOW

Julie Clark Robinson lists these tactics in her book *Live In The Moment* (Beyond Words Publishing) as instant happiness boosters:

- 1 Find a happy retail place such as a shoe shop or a book shop and spend at least half an hour there when you're feeling blue – try on some sex-on-legs stilettos or browse through a magazine (the latest COSMO ought to do the trick) while sipping a latte.
- 2 Is there a friend, relative or colleague who makes you feel fantastic in their company? Spend time with them ... and do it often!
- 3 Find a mantra: a poem, song lyric or even a cliché will do. If it helps you 'snap out of it' and love yourself first, great!
- 4 Nurture your sense of humour to help you lighten up – wear an Elvis fan club bracelet or keep a dumb (yet guaranteed-to-make-you-giggle) cartoon in your wallet.

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