

'Wedding Cake for Breakfast': A Love Letter to Marriage



By Whitney Baker

Wedding Cake for Breakfast: Essays on the Unforgettable First Year of Marriage, edited by New York literary agents Kim Perel and Wendy Sherman, offers an intimate peek into the first year of marriage, as experienced by twenty-three critically acclaimed female writers. This collection of essays explores the unexpected and often difficult moments – from a surprise pregnancy to ghosts of husbands past to blending families – that brides fail to plan for as they prepare for their “big day,” and the 365 days that follow.

We had the pleasure of chatting with Perel and Sherman about the inspiration for, and evolution of this book, as well as what they learned about their own relationships and what they hope that their readers take away from these stories:

1. The stories shared in this collection are so diverse. What is the unifying theme that links these essays?

Perel: They're all fraught with concerns, questions and exploration, but the tone is still one of “we're going to be okay.” Ultimately, it has this uplifting message, but another aspect of the book is that there are bumps along the way, and that's okay. It's not going to be perfect as you figure out how to be together.

Sherman: To expand on what Kim just said, there were definitely the stories that focused on the way in which women suddenly saw themselves in the role of “new wife.” You know, you wake up one day, and you're a wife. What did you think

that was going to feel like? It often doesn't feel anything like you thought. So I think that the journey these women shared with us, some of it has to do with filling that role and playing the part.

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2. Wendy, you've been married for 25 years. Do you have any words of wisdom that you learned in your first year of marriage or even in the years since?

Sherman: I think expectation is the theme that I keep coming back to when I think about my first year of marriage. I was actually cleaning out my attic recently, and I came across my wedding album. I was looking at the pictures and wondering what was going on in my mind at the time. You know, you put so much energy into going through the process: you find the guy, you get the ring, you think that you have your whole life planned, and that it's all done.

And then you're married, and now, you're living your life. I think I was young and naïve to think I was done, because you're never done; you're always in the process of evolving and growing and changing. You have to learn to redirect yourself, your life, your expectations.

But that's the beauty of it. When you look at that first year, how can you ever think that it's the end of something? It's not- it's absolutely the beginning. What lies ahead is so completely unknown, and that's such a big part of the excitement.

3. Do you feel like you learned anything about your own relationships from reading these essays?

Perel: You so rarely get an intimate and well-articulated glimpse into other people's lives and relationships, so how can you not look at your own life after reading some of these stories? I think what struck me the most was how they worked

together as a team. It was always about the teamwork and the give-and-take. That was a beautiful and interesting thing to read- how in every situation, no matter how terrible, they always pulled together.

Sherman: Another thing that we noticed throughout the collection, is how many women wrote about this underlying friendship that existed with their partners. Some relationships start off as a friendship and evolve into something more passionate and romantic, while others later develop into a friendship. At the core, that deep friendship is probably what holds marriages together over the long haul.

Joshilyn Jackson talks about friendship in, "The Marry Boy." She started off as best friends with the man who later became her husband. That story really touched me because I thought it was beautiful that a relationship could start off one way and turn out another.

Perel: I like when she writes, "It is an odd transition, to see one's best friend's head perched atop of [a] lovely, naked male body." That's the moment where they truly shift from best friends to something romantic. I think anyone who's ever moved from a best friendship to a romantic relationship would identify with that moment of strange and wonderful.

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4. What do you most hope that readers takeaway from the book?

Sherman: I think that there's an illumination of what a matrimony can be. Some of the writers talk about the adjustment period. Ann Hood, for instance, talks about getting used to the way in which her new husband arranges their furniture.

There are so many adjustments and realignments that take place in a marriage, especially in the beginning. Your marriage is going to happen; it's going to change and evolve. It just gets

better and better if you can be flexible.

Perel: In Sarah Pekkanen's essay, they're blending their families. It's one thing to blend your furniture, but when you get married, there's a whole family element to consider. I think that the takeaway would be to roll with it. Also, you're not expected to have figured things out before getting married; people think that they can mitigate problems by living together or just knowing the person really well, but it's okay that marriage still changes things.

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