

# Wendy Shaker Talks 'Are You My Guru?'



By Veronica LaRoque

What do medicine, meditation and Madonna all have in common? For author [Wendy Shanker](#), they were all supposed to be cures for a rare autoimmune disease that struck her right when she was at the top of her game. Shanker, who had given advice to thousands of women in her hugely successful first book [The Fat Girl's Guide to Life](#), was now searching for someone to help her with the difficulties of dealing with a chronic illness.

In her new book, [Are You My Guru? How Medicine, Meditation and Madonna Saved My Life](#), Shanker tells the story of her disease. With humor and hope, she chronicles her search to find one person who has all the answers not knowing if that person even exists.

**What can you do when life takes a turn for the worse?**

**Cupid's Advice:**

We all know what it's like to be on top of the world one evening, and under mountains of stress the next morning. But Cupid got tons of advice on how to deal with life's letdowns from Wendy Shanker. Check out the author's thoughts on taking life's lemons and turning them into one hilarious and good-for-you lemonade.

**How would you describe your journey, and how does it compare to "The Fat Girl's Guide to Life?"**

The journey in *Are You My Guru?* is much different than the

story of the first book. "The Fat Girl's Guide" was almost a manifesto – a way to fight back against the pressure to lose weight and look a certain way. I really thought I had it all figured out – I could be fit, fat and healthy, and still feel good about myself! Just as that book was published, the "healthy" part got knocked out of the equation. I got so sick with this rare autoimmune disease, Wegener's granulomatosis.

I'd actually been diagnosed years before, but it wasn't until "The Fat Girl's Guide" was published that it really invaded my life – actually pulled me out of my life. That was in 2004.

So the story of "Guru" is about being in this happy place, feeling secure in my body, looking forward to whatever was next in work, love, life...and then...buh-bye. A whole new body battle to fight.

**How have you maintained a sense of humor and a universality throughout both of these books?**

I don't know any other way to do it. I couldn't help but find the funny, even in the worst of it. You know, I'd gotten bad news from doctors who unfortunately had limited resources to treat me. So I started exploring alternative methods of treatment...and I'm like, "Someone is dripping oil on my forehead and rolling me in chickpea flour like an enchilada!

Someone is shining colored lights on my body and poking needles all over me! Someone is telling me to dialogue with my liver!" How could I not find it hilarious? That's just my coping mechanism, but I find that it's a really good way to help other people relate to my situation. Even if you don't have my problems, or haven't tried this particular treatment, there's sort of a universality feeling exposed in these ways.

**Over the course of writing both these books, what have you discovered about romantic relationships?**

In the first book, I spent so much time feeling insecure about my body that I really held myself back from relationships.

There were some good ones, some bad ones, but I didn't feel

like I could handle real intimacy until I figured out how to love and respect myself. So voila, I'm ready! And that's right when I got sick. Bad timing, because it meant going through the worst of the worst on my own. I'm really lucky that I have a lot of amazing friends and family, and there was no shortage of people around when I wanted them there (I'm one of those people who tends to shoo everyone away when I don't feel well). But during those long dark nights, there are these moments of "Where the f#\*k is he? The guy who is supposed to be stroking my hair right now?" Um, well, he wasn't there. In a way, it's kind of empowering to go through a challenge like that as a single person. It makes you realize you can get through anything as long as you have some support in your life; it doesn't have to be romantic love. There's no reason to settle. But now that I'm feeling strong and healthy again, I'm excited to meet someone special.

### **How has your illness affected your body image and your idea of yourself**

Aside from the physical, that's the biggest challenge I faced. This disease, and the treatment of this disease (chemo, steroids), dramatically changed my body. Weight gain, weight loss, hair loss, skin damage, scars from procedures and surgeries. I lost all the cartilage in my nose and had to have surgical reconstruction. This amazing surgeon took a rib out of my ribcage (just like Cher!) and used it to create a new nose for me. You'd never even know by looking. That's a helluva lot for a body to go through, and there are plenty of people who've gone through a lot worse. I have to give my body a lot of respect. Literally think about it, organ by organ, and say, "Hey, skin, it's amazing the way you regenerated. Thank you. Hey kidneys, it takes a lot of effort to filter all that, but you're doing a great job. Much appreciated." You have to offer lots of props to your body when it takes a licking and keeps on kicking.

### **What do you feel is the most important thing you learned on**

## **your journey?**

I was so sure that I was going to find the The Guy who was going to fix me. The guru with the treatment or doctor with a trick up his sleeve who would say, "Take this pill and see you never." Not the case. I learned that there is no one person with all the answers. If anything, the closest person who fits that bill is you. You are the expert on you. No one knows your body better than you do. Your job is to find the collaborators who are willing to pool their expertise with yours to help you feel better. In other words, you are your own guru.

Cupid sincerely thanks [Wendy Shanker](#) for her time! To purchase *Are You My Guru?*, follow Cupid to [Amazon.com](#).