

Author Ellen McCarthy Discusses ‘The Real Thing’ About Relationships and Love: Find “Someone Who Appreciates Your Whole, Quirky, Imperfect, Wonderful Self”



By [Sarah Batcheller](#)

The day a bride walks down the aisle is magical not only for the lovebirds but for all those in attendance. Family and friends gather to gaze upon this unforgettable event. Weddings make us all ponder the intricate weaving of a lasting relationship and love and what it takes to create one. Having covered over 200 ceremonies as a wedding reporter for *The Washington Post*, relationship author Ellen McCarthy has crafted a warm, insightful book based on the couples she has had the privilege of interviewing. In her new book about love, titled *The Real Thing: Lessons on Love and Life From a Wedding Reporter's Notebook*, she shares her findings on what it takes to reach this ever-magical day and make it last forever and always.

Love Advice From Wedding Reporter and Relationship Author

What did you want to capture in this book about love that you couldn't have in an article?

The articles I wrote during my time on *The Washington Post*

weddings beat were really about each couple's story – how they met, fell in love, and decided to walk down the aisle. But during so many interviews, I came away with little gems of relationship wisdom that didn't seem to fit into the story. These were the things I found myself thinking about later and relating to my friends over drinks. I wanted to collect all of those insights into a single book so that they could be passed on to others.

Related Link: [Celebrity Interview: Event Producer Cheryl Cecchetto Says, "Nothing is Traditional Anymore" at Weddings](#)

How did your break-up on the day you began as the wedding reporter for *The Washington Post* impact your views on relationships and love? How did it affect your work?

Ha! I wasn't sure how that was going to work out – interviewing happy couples who were about to walk down the aisle as I was licking my wounds from a break-up. In the beginning, it was just surreal. But as I did interview after interview, I found that the reporting gave me a great deal of hope. It was a reminder that people find love all the time, in all kinds of ways. So in that regard, it had a really positive effect on my life.

I'm not sure that being newly single affected my work, but it did create some awkward moments when couples would ask about my relationship status after I'd learned everything about theirs. Then, the nice ones would usually try to set me up!

What would you say is the most powerful piece of love advice you learned by reporting on weddings?

The most important thing I learned is that you actually *can* learn to be good at love. You can give yourself tools and skills and perspectives that will increase your chances of finding and maintaining a successful relationship. A lot of people don't want to hear this because they think it takes away from the magic of love. But you know what really takes

away the magic of love? Divorce.

In your story about Lynne and Jud, you discuss how meaningful it is to find someone who is “wholly and transparently good.” What do you think makes it so difficult for women to separate the good guys from the not-so-good?

All of life is a learning experience. I’m not looking forward to it, but someday, my 14-month-old daughter will touch something hot – a stove, a curling iron, a heater – and she will learn what it feels like to get burned. Hopefully, she won’t do it again. I think the same thing can happen in relationships. It takes getting burned before we realize we don’t want to go through that again. And we learn to protect ourselves. The trick is being willing to honestly look at what happened in the past and ingest the lesson from that experience, so we don’t just repeat it again.

Ellen McCarthy Dishes on Relationships and Love in New Book

Do you think that, because of the daunting divorce statistics, people are believing in marriage less and less?

I realize that the statistics show that marriage is on the decline, and I know there are some people who choose not to marry, but I think, as a society, we believe in it as much as ever. There’s a reason people have fought so hard for same-sex marriage. Civil unions don’t quite cut it. We still think of marriage as the ideal. And if anything, we expect more from it than ever before. I think that’s why people are waiting longer to get married today. They want to have all their ducks in a row – a career, finances, a road-tested relationship and love – *before* they walk down the aisle.

Related Link: [Single in Stilettos Show: What Makes a Man See You as Marriage Material](#)

Finally, what is your best dating advice for a first date with a longtime crush?

Be yourself. Be yourself. Be yourself. It can be tempting to put on a façade with a crush or any first date, but it's not worth it. If this person isn't into the real you, then it's not worth pursuing. Order another drink; enjoy the conversation; and then go forth in search of someone who appreciates your whole, quirky, imperfect, wonderful self.

Check out The Real Thing on Amazon! For more from Ellen, follow her on Twitter @EllenMcCarthy and be on the lookout for her feature in The Washington Post titled This Life.