

The Single Love-Guru: Author Devan Sipher Discusses Relationships and 'The Wedding Beat'



By Joseph Weissgold

Dating and searching for “the one” is an imperfect art. Gavin Green, the protagonist from Devan Sipher’s debut novel *The Wedding Beat* (New American Library), knows this better than anyone. As a sentimental, neurotic, middle-aged, Jewish man, he tries to use his profession as a wedding columnist to find a strategy to fix his own miserable love life.

The author, Devan Sipher, is also a single, Jewish wedding-columnist at the *New York Times*. But thanks to his years of romantic journalism, this book can be read as a dating guide for sensitive men as well as for its witty prose and fast-paced story.

We had a chance to speak with Sipher, and he revealed some of the conclusions he’s drawn about love, relationships and marriage based on the many interviews he’s done with happy couples on their road to tying the knot.

Why are some singles so anxious to get married?

I could say it’s cheaper to be married, but that’s not a very romantic response. Really, most people crave love. As a journalist who focuses on weddings, I learned how true that is for both sexes. On the other hand, people also aspire to show

that their relationship is real, and somehow, marriage, that ceremony, the license, the certificate, it's proof that it's not illusory. It's not easy to be in a relationship, but making the vow in front of a community means there are people supporting you and ultimately supporting your relationship.

Have you ever been hired to cover a wedding where people ended up asking you advice?

Yes, people ask me, but I try not to give it. I would never give someone advice in terms of whether they should or should not get married. Usually, that's just jitters, and I have to reassure them that it isn't unusual to get scared. I let people talk, and I listen to what they have to say. By asking questions about their relationship, I get what I need for the story, but it also gives them what they need. When they focus on the relationship rather than the big wedding or even the marriage, everything becomes a little less frightening.

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In *The Wedding Beat*, your protagonist Gavin struggles with a lot of advice that he receives. Is the problem the formulaic advice or just the way Gavin applies it?

Gavin's biggest issue is that he has problems making choices, which I may or may not have in common with him. My favorite line of my book is, "Everything in life is a choice, and I'm choosing to be happy." The dating-guru in the book tells Gavin to "be the bee," referring to the idea that a woman is a flower and a man is a bee. The bee goes to the flower; the flower doesn't go to the bee. It sounds cliché and somewhat ridiculous, and yet, there's a certain logic there. And actually, there are women I've talked to who agree. You can analyze entire relationships with that one sentence. Things become cliché for a reason.

Having heard so many successful love stories, are there any common themes that you've come to recognize?

Yes. Love is not something that hits you over the head with a choir singing in the background. What you get is a spark, and then it's up to you to decide what to do with that. That spark can happen at any time. I've done stories of people who met just passing each other on the street. I've done stories where they met when they were six years old. I did a story about a woman, who was an MIT professor; she fell in love for the first time when she was like sixty years old. It really is different times for different people. Another true saying is love is blind. People often describe their [partner](#) as very good looking or incredibly funny; sometimes they're right, and sometimes they're wrong, but it's beautiful because in each other's eyes, they really are that way.

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Are there any red flags, that you've seen, that can determine if a marriage is doomed before it even begins?

Putting people on a pedestal is the biggest danger. If they can't say anything specific about what they like about the person or they just say that they like the way they are treated, well, that doesn't seem like enough to sustain itself for a long-term relationship. A lot of times, it has to do with falling in love with the *idea* of the person instead of who they really are.

What's the final verdict: love comes when you give 110 percent or love comes when you stop trying?

The spark comes when you're open to the experience. It can be a focused openness, but more often than not, the challenge is to not become obsessed. Instead, choose to relax, and just let things happen. On the other hand, when it does happen, it does take effort. So to say, "I'm just going to count on fate to make it happen" – I don't think that works either. Like in my book, Gavin meets Melinda, but then she gets away. The trick is to not let that person slip away. In short, relationships

require effort, but feelings should not.

Visit Amazon to pick up your copy of Devan Sipher's new novel The Wedding Beat. You can also meet Devan at the Writing About Love & Passion Panel on June 20th from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. EST at the NYU Bookstore. To keep up with him, follow him on Twitter or Facebook.