



**D a v i d
S e d a r i s
L o o k s
a t
D a v i d
S e d a r i s
page 6**



**Look
Inside!**

**Tough Love
for Writers
by
Vera Caccioppoli
(Page 1)**

**The WORD
Events Calendar!
(Page 4)**

**An American
Teacher's Journey
by
Kennette Harrison
(Page 5)**

**Exclusive
Interview:
David Sedaris
by
Bonnie
Vandewater
(Page 6)**

**Inside PAGES:
The Magazine for
People Who
Love Books
by
David Boyne
(Page 7)**

**Writing Games:
Computer Age
Narrative
by
Kristina Meek
(Page 9)**

**911
by
David Boyne
(Page 12)**

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PAGES



**San Diego's
National
Magazine for
PEOPLE WHO
LOVE BOOKS
page 7**



Writers! Save Your Love Life! Tough Love, from Ms. Point O'View

The following events are true. Names or identifying deviant behaviors have been changed in order to preserve privacy, and ensure I will still have clients after this article is published.

Dear Ms. Point O'View,

I showed my newly completed short story to my girlfriend Debra. Prior to this the only writing of mine she'd read was a collection of published pieces that I typeset, had professionally printed, assembled in a leather binder, and prominently displayed on my coffee table. When Debra finished reading my new story, she handed it back to me and said, "Thank you for letting me read this."

I waited for her to continue. But, shockingly, "Thank you for letting me read this," was all she intended to say! I was in the painful position of having to ask, "Well, what did you think of the story?"

She said, "Nice."

Nice. Nice? When I asked her to elaborate, she finally mumbled, "I found it...interesting."

Completely frustrated but trying desperately to salvage the situation, I asked Debra to give me some specifics. After a prolonged silence she said, "I'm not sure I understood."

"Not sure you understood what?"

"The point."

I stormed out of the apartment. And damn, it's my apartment!

Can this relationship be saved?

Homeless in Hillcrest

Dear Homeless,

Oh, but you omitted the juiciest scene: I'm left to imagine how you returned to your own apartment with any semblance of dignity!

I don't know if your relationship can be saved, but given your synopsis, it's clear that Debra has more reason to walk than you do. Debra was a saint. You were demanding, ungrateful and rude.

Nor are you a quick study. Debra gave you at least three opportunities to end the conversation with your writer's ego intact. The problem was you engaged in "Risky Reading Behavior." Your expectations were unclear and unstated. Examine your motives. Why did you ask her to read your story? What did you want from her? Praise? An honest non-writer's response? Or a full critique? Or did you simply want to show

and share what you've been up to all those nights and weekends you haven't been spending with Debra? (I like this the best!)

If it's purely praise you're after, don't burden the poor girl with another story. Let her read your work when—if—you ever publish it.

If it's a reader's honest response you're after, do the two of you a favor and "Practice Safe Critiquing."

Make the parameters clear. Remember, Debra's a non-writer, not a skilled professional like yourself, so she's unaware of the parlance and buzz words we use.

Be polite and ask her if she'd be willing to do you the favor of reading your work. This gives her a choice to opt out of the assignment. And she might. She's already proven to be savvy—and may have (correctly) suspected she was caught in a lose-lose situation. The ramifications of which would surely spill over into the bedroom.

If you want a full critical evaluation, join a writer's group or buddy up with another writer. Expecting such expertise from a lover who is not a writer is as crazy as those characters we meet at parties who declare they have a great novel in their head and if they only had a free week or two they'd write it and it would become a best-seller.

Dear Ms. Point O'View,

Help! I'm a computer programmer by day, a novelist by night. Three months ago I married Harold, an engineer. Harold is wonderful in every single way...except one.

He doesn't take my writing pursuit as seriously as he should. On the nights I plan to write he tempts me by coming home with a great video and a bottle of wine and the next thing I know

we're ensconced on the sofa. After the movie I'm tipsy from the wine, Harold's horny, and we're off to the bedroom. In the morning I wake up angry and hurt, with another writing session blown, just so he could be.

I finally confronted Harold last week and demanded he honor my writing time and not tempt with other activities. And now Harold still comes home with a video and a bottle of wine—but he goes into our bedroom and closes the door. I don't find this helpful. The noise of the video (and Harold slurping wine) disturbs my concentration. I think he's doing this to make me feel guilty. This makes me angry....and unable to write. I feel deceived; Harold didn't act like this when we were dating!

Pageless in Poway

Dear Pageless (or should I address you as Clueless?),

There's nothing less becoming than a whiny writer who blames her lack of new pages on someone else. Makes me think you're an Unreliable Narrator.

Hit the delete key on the dating years, and recognize the truth: being married is a whole new plot development. Marriage is a legal joining and public announcement (and sometimes a tacky display) of your intention to be lifetime mates.

Be grateful that your husband loves you and actually wants to spend time with you. Your demand for respect is oxymoronic: Respect must be earned and reciprocated. But you're so busy counting the number of pages you're NOT writing each night to inquire about Harold's feelings or needs. You insisted he not lure you away from your writing and he appears to be honoring that....but you're still angry because he's entertaining himself in another part of the house. (What's a non-writer to do?)

Just what would make you happy? The reality is you devote much of your free time to writing. That's beautiful, but recognize Harold has a

Continued on Page 3!

Writers In Love

WORD

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No animals or writers were mistreated in the production of this magazine. All stunts were performed using OSHA-approved safety harnesses and under controlled conditions. But hey, kids, go ahead and grab a pen and some paper—**DO** try this at home!

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Writers! Save Your Love Life!

by
Vera Caccioppoli

life too. Instead of demanding respect, talk with him. Listen to how he might want to spend his evenings when you're writing. Build in structure and plan "date nights" so it's clear to Harold what nights you'll have together. And on your writing nights, if Harold wants to participate in a basketball league or take a class or have a beer with friends, give him your support. So what if the class is "The Art of Male Stripping?" You'll get time to write and maybe he'll give you a sexy performance!

Dear Ms. Point O'View,
My wife Angela just completed her first non-fiction book. She asked me to read it, and I did so, making appropriate corrections—of which I regret to say were quite numerous. When Angela saw "all the bloody pages" (perhaps using a red pen was not my wisest choice) she freaked out. I tried to convince her of the necessity of these changes before sending it to her publisher. She agreed to only a few changes. I reiterated the

importance of making ALL the changes, but now Angela won't speak to me and is sleeping on the sofa. How can I get through to her?

Lonely in Leucadia

Dear Lonely,
Who wrote this book? When published, whose name will be on the cover?

If the answer to both questions ain't "Lonely," cease and desist immediately, retreat to neutral ground, surrender your red pens, and beg Angela's forgiveness.

P.S. to Angela: Make it clear to this bozo that you heard his criticism and revised as you saw fit. Don't be forced to explain or defend your choices. End of discussion.

Dear Ms. Point O'View,

Please! I'm desperately awaiting your reply. Months ago I wrote and said I thought I was falling in love with a great guy. Jimmy is a writer. I'm a writer. Well, it happened: Jimmy and I are now like

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She has a MFA in creative writing from George Mason University, where she was awarded a full fellowship and taught literature, creative writing, and composition for

many years. She is a winner of the PEN/Faulkner Award.

Her fiction and non-fiction work has been published in literary and consumer magazines, in newspapers, including The Washington Post, and has been broadcast on National Public Radio. She has won numerous screenwriting awards and has optioned or

A Note from Ms. Point O'View

I'm not a psychologist (but I've spent my life studying characters and analyzing their motivations), and I'm not Dear Abby (although I once wrote a short story about an advice columnist who stalked her letter-writers). I'm a writer who feels compelled to help other writer's keep from sabotaging their love life.

My credentials: 15 years teaching and coaching writers. Roughly two-thirds of the hundreds of writers I've worked with have voluntarily (sometimes inexplicably) shared with me the romantic woes their writing has caused them. I've dealt with this issue (my own problems included) for so long that I've coined a term for it: **Writer's Love Triangle**.

No, I'm not talking about a ménage-a-trois, not a human one anyway. The W.L.T. is: You. Your Significant Other. Your Writing. The flames of this combustible trio have scorched many romances.

We've all suffered from a response to our writing—or a lack of one—from the person we love most in the world. To increase the odds of writers having a happy long term relationship, I've devised three rules to manage the W.L.T.

1. **Avoid Risky Reading Behavior**
2. **Practice Safe Critiquing**
3. **Carefully Scrutinize Your Motives**

But, if you're looking for a foolproof solution to avoid a mange a trios—your only choice is celibacy.

so totally way in love! But instead of being happy for me, my friends study me with grave concern or tell me horror stories of doomed writer-writer relationships. But I figure who can understand me more, love me better, than another writer? Right? I mean, isn't it a blessing for two writers to be in love? We'll read and critique each other's work and be supportive!. I know all relationships have chal-

lenges, Ms. Point O'View, but could my cynical friends be right? Is it impossible for two writers to live happily ever after? Please reply quickly—our two-month anniversary is next week!

Love-Crazed in Carlsbad

Dear Love-Crazed,
Thank you for letting me read this.

Ms. Point O'View

sold two screenplays to Hollywood producers.

Ms. Point O'View's advice column is excerpted from a chapter of the book *How to Be Your Own Writing Coach* by Vera Caccioppoli. Other excerpts from the book will be published on VeraCaccioppoli.com in October.

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