

A Literary Magazine for the Maternally Inclined

LITERARY
Mama

Columns Creative Nonfiction Fiction Literary Reflections Poetry Profiles & Reviews OpEd Blog

Reviews

« Uniquely Alike: A Review of *Great with Child: On Becoming a Mother* | Back to Reviews

Single Mom Seeking: A Review of *Single Mom Seeking: Play Dates, Blind Dates, and Other Dispatches from the Dating World*

By Rachel Sarah (Seal Press, 2006; \$14.95)

Review by Suzanne LaFetra

Rachel Sarah begins her memoir, **Single Mom Seeking: Play Dates, Blind Dates, and Other Dispatches from the Dating World**, this way: "My life was not supposed to look like this." At 28, with a 7-month-old daughter, Sarah finds herself suddenly single when her boyfriend Eric flies the coop. Lots of books may start from the single-mom premise, but Sarah delivers her story with humor, insight, lots of practical goodies, and a huge dose of honesty.



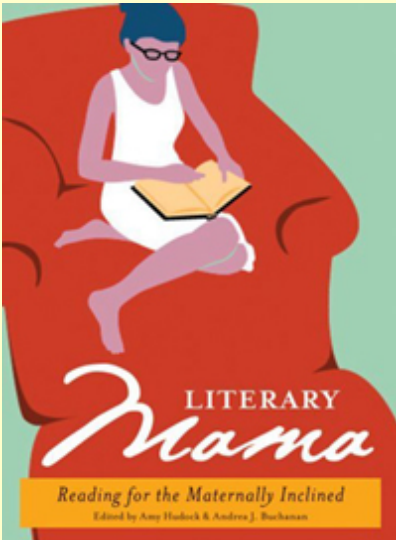
It'd be easy to write a kiss and tell bemoaning the trials of dating -- Ooh, Mr. Wrong had disgusting toenails, Mr. Not-So-Good showed up with his mother, Mr. Creepy asked if he could watch me pee.... Fortunately, **Single Mom Seeking** doesn't fall prey to that style of writing.


The great thing about **Single Mom Seeking** is that it isn't just the story of boy meets girl. It's woman meets herself. The aptly titled memoir takes the reader on a fine romp through Dating Land, but it's as much a search for the author's own wholeness as for Mr. Right.

But **Seeking** isn't a long string of navel-gazing epiphanies. Sarah's story moves chronologically through the world of modern dating, from Yenta-like matchmaking to grocery-store pickups to the inevitable Match.com.

In true memoir fashion, Sarah's search for Mr. Right centers more on her internal growth than on the ways her dates fail to measure up. In the early days, she careens up and down the dating roller-coaster, more a victim to desperate fantasy than anything real. In her first post-Eric sexual encounter, Sarah falls into bed with Mark. After their very first time together, she sinks into post-coital bliss, imagining the new family they will become.

...the three of us -- mama, papa, and baby -- together in one big bed. I want it all; a man who will join us to make a congruent triangle. The three of us will hold each other up. Yes, the triangle is



 Read the Introduction

Recent Reviews

Single Mom Seeking: A Review of *Single Mom Seeking: Play Dates, Blind Dates, and Other Dispatches from the Dating World*

Uniquely Alike: A Review of *Great with Child: On Becoming a Mother*

If the Buddha Gave Birth: A Review of *Momma Zen: Walking the Crooked Path of Motherhood*

Not Quite Haiku: A Review of *Haiku Mama (because 17 syllables is all you have time to read)*

Baby Steps: A review of *Baby Steps: How Lesbian Alternative Insemination Is Changing the World*

Midwifery and Magic: A Review of *The Birth House*

Chick Lit Grows Up: A Review of *Sweet Ruin*

Bigger Isn't Always Better: A Review of *Nice Big American Baby*

Trailblazing the Ordinary: A Review
of *Confessions of the Other*
Mother: Nonbiological Lesbian
Moms Tell All!

Seeking Caitlin Flanagan: A Review
of *To Hell with All That: Loving and*
Loathing Our Inner Housewife

Archives

Reviews Archives

Literary Mama

Home
Columns
Creative Nonfiction
Fiction
Literary Reflections
Poetry
Profiles & Reviews
OpEd
Blog

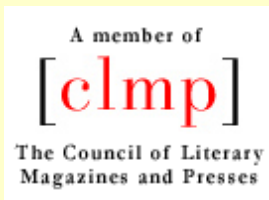
E-zine
About us
Submissions
Contact

Shop Literary Mama

Search

Search this site:

Literary Mama Privacy Policy



Powered by
Movable Type 3.16

what I want. This is my postorgasmic fantasy.
Mark silently slips out the door at 3 a.m.
He doesn't say, "I'll call you."
He doesn't say, "I'll see you soon."
He says nothing.

With each potential mate, Sarah finds a piece of the puzzle she's trying to put together in herself. Jim has dreadlocks and smells like coconut, but comes too quick. Renaldo is an accomplished father, but he's a bit too much of a neat freak. Tom's a great booty call, and "he satisfies me the way an energy bar does. I know I should eat a healthier, more balanced meal, but for now this will do."

A journalist by training, Sarah catalogs her dating adventures with a good ear for dialogue and just the right sprinkling of self-deprecating humor to make me nod in appreciation and recognition. She shares an endearingly neurotic moment when a blind date she's pinned high hopes on is half an hour late:

Maybe I got the time mixed up? Maybe I got the days all mixed up?
Is he going to stand me up? He doesn't have a cell phone. My
armpits are sweaty. Is he really going to stand me up? I don't even
know this guy, and I'm already afraid he's going to leave me. Not
good. Not good at all.

Readers get an earful from Sarah's wonderfully spunky best friends, who babysit Mae, advise her "not to go back for more when there is only less," and raise appropriate eyebrows when she decides to zip off to a one-night stand in a hotel room with a near stranger. A man's gotta "zest your nipple," one of them tells Sarah, when she wonders if it'll work when there isn't any chemistry. "Somewhere," the friend promises, "there are some hot kabbalah-spinning Cajun-chicken-bakin' hot lovers -- who will also respect and adore you... and preferably not be too broke." Hooray for optimistic girlfriends!

I picked up a few rules of the road for myself, too. Don't Instant Message right away. Be prepared when your kid picks up a condom package and asks, "Mommy, what's this?" Get a first-date skirt. And listen to your gut.

Sarah's learning curve isn't a clean, straight line. One of the book's strongest (and most painful) themes involves Mae's father, Eric. Thoroughly believable and realistically complex, Sarah seesaws between distancing herself from a man who isn't right for her and sliding back into a wished-for two-parent family. When a tearful and penniless Eric phones after being AWOL for a whole year, Sarah flipflops.

The grownup in me knows what to do. Just hang up the damn phone. Hang up on him. What are you waiting for? Go now. Get on with your life....
"Baby, I have to come back," he says. "I have to see you. I have to see Mae."
"I know," I say and sigh. In that moment, I know I want him back. Even though I've made great strides in my life, the sound of his voice makes me feel like I haven't moved forward at all. In fact, I move backward. I return to a place I don't want to be, but I can't help inhabiting.

Even years later, after all she's learned, Sarah still makes admittedly less than great choices.

But what's amazing is how, after a few years of dating, I can spot a red flag waving a half-mile away. I don't always want to see it but it's there nonetheless. His flag reads in big, bold letters: I'm Unavailable. Now that I'm savvier, I can see it all clearly. So why

don't I call it off right now?

Sarah isn't afraid to write about the darker parts of herself. Sometimes she obsesses. She ignores red flags when it's convenient. Her relationships with her parents are challenging. She vacillates when she shouldn't.

Fortunately, she isn't afraid to write about her sex drive, either, which makes for delightful little slices of sexy, racy reading. And she doesn't apologize for her inner "bad girl."

At home, I get Mae to sleep, and then the bad girl in me gets pushy. What's wrong with a one-night stand? Use protection, tell your girlfriends where you're going, and be safe. I want to embrace that bad girl for now, even if I tell her to go to hell in the morning.

After a high and dry period, she hooks up with Tom, a guy who's definitely not boyfriend material. He runs late, forgets that he promised to make her breakfast, and plays video games. But she likes the way he nibbles her lip, the way he offers her a "short lived exit from motherhood."

Dating is hard, harder still as a single parent, and not only because your kindergartener's sleeping in the next room and the closest thing to makeout music in your rotation is a Dan Zanes CD. The stakes are much higher, and Sarah never loses sight of the fact that she's a mom first. Even when she's able to set that aside and let her libido lift the maternal veil, she's always seeking someone for herself, and for her daughter. She's searching for a family man.

Near the end, when Sarah meets Mr. Maybe, she pulls the curtains closed. "Dear reader, I must pause here," she writes. "It's time for me to close the door on us. You can't come into my bedroom this time. It's private." It's a nice device, followed by a pleasant postscript "Where Are They Now," so we get another glimpse of all the guys we've met along the way.

Single Mom Seeking is most compelling when Sarah's desire to grow as a woman takes center stage. Although it's a logistical challenge to date as a single mom, Sarah doesn't stop with the long list of nursing preparations and backup babysitters. That's fodder enough for a sweet and funny book, but Sarah digs deeper to uncover truths about herself. In one lyrical line, she sums up a morning-after emotion. "Love hurts. Love has bruised me like a peach left in a plastic grocery bag that bumped against my leg all day. No one wants to touch it now. It's going in the garbage."

Dating, as I'm beginning to discover, can bring up all sorts of sloppy, messy emotions. If only the difficulties were limited to finding the right sitter or first-date skirt. Rachel Sarah offers her story, but not as a guy-bashing ain't-it-awful-out-there bitch session. Searching for a partner is weird, boring, exhilarating, and all-consuming, just like mothering. And like parenting, it's most challenging because it involves that sloppy emotion of love.

Slightly irreverent, sometimes sexy, always honest, **Single Mom Seeking** can be gobbled in a single nutritious hunk. I know, because that's what I did last weekend between lurking on Match.com and getting my kids to bed.

Suzanne LaFetra is an award-winning writer in Northern California. Her work has appeared in **The San Francisco Chronicle**, **the Christian Science Monitor**, on **KQED FM**, and in many literary journals. She plans to post her profile on **Match.com** in time for Valentine's Day. To read more of her work, please visit her website: **SuzanneLaFetra.com**.

