



THE TRUTH ABOUT FORMER FLAMES

Happily wedded women, beware! Dialing up an old boyfriend can have shocking consequences for you and your family. *by sue hertz*

Call it a need for closure or just plain curiosity: Nearly everyone's been tempted to check up on an old flame. And these days, there are plenty of ways to do it. Websites like Classmates.com and reality shows like Fox's *Classmates* and TLC's *Second Chance* all offer the opportunity to catch up with the one who got away. What's the harm, you think, in finding out what he's up to?

No harm at all—if you're single. But if you're married, it can be downright dangerous, according to Nancy Kalish, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at California State University. In her 2003 study of 1,000 subjects who have had at least one face-to-face meeting with an ex, Kalish found that a shocking 82 percent of them ended up having an

extramarital affair with their ex. Roughly half of Kalish's respondents went so far as to divorce their current spouses so they could be with their old beau forever! Why is the pull of past loves so strong? Here, three women open up about what drew them back to their ex and what happened as a result.

"I had to apologize to him"

Tim* and I fell in love when I was 16. But at that time I was also harboring a secret: A few months before I'd met him, I'd been raped by a neighbor's son. I didn't tell anyone for years, and instead tried to bury the incident in my mind. As a result, I lost trust in all men, a feeling that grew stronger when Tim and I accidentally got pregnant. He wanted to get married, but I wasn't ready. So I had an abortion, and felt so horrible about it that I

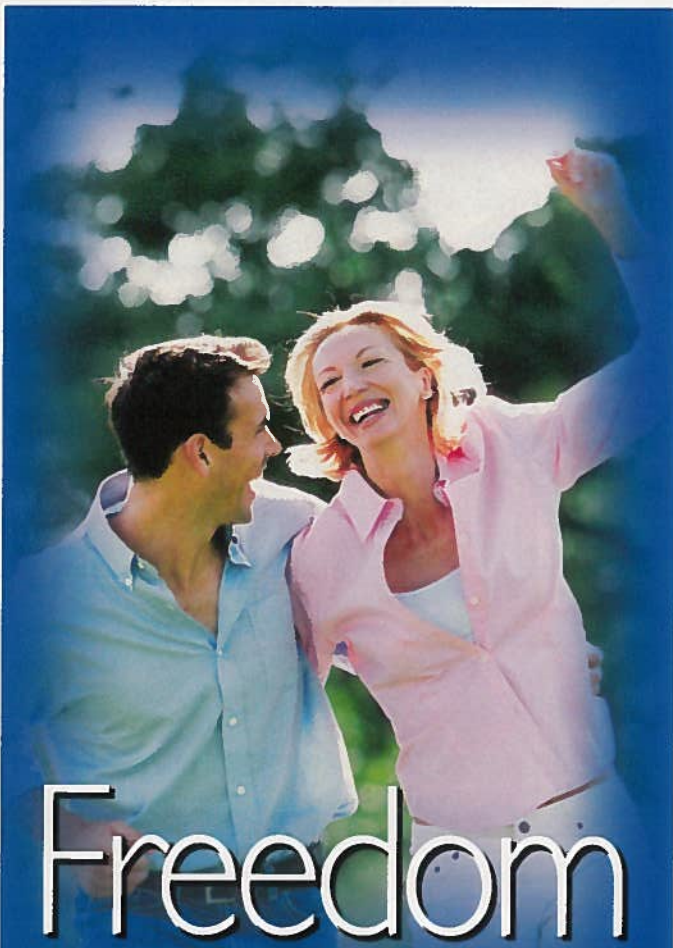
pushed Tim away. The relationship fizzled and ended when I was 18.

I didn't see Tim for more than 20 years. In that time, I got married and had two kids. I thought I was happy. But that changed the day I prepared my daughter for her first confession. It struck me that I hadn't been honest with everyone in my own life—in particular, Tim. He had no idea why I had refused to marry him. I decided he deserved the truth.

I contacted Tim and found out he was also married, had kids, and lived just a two-hour drive away from me. A week later we met for lunch. I talked for an hour, explaining why I didn't marry him and how guilty I felt for breaking his heart. Afterward he said, "I hope you're happily married." Though I had thought that I was, seeing Tim made me wonder.

We continued e-mailing and meeting up. Four months after our first lunch,

*Names have been changed.



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we were so drawn to each other that we kissed. We were in love again—we just didn't know what to do with our love. We even discussed having an affair, but decided we'd both end up wanting so much more.

“He leaned over and kissed me. The world fell away.”

It wasn't long before my husband, John, recognizing that my feelings for him had changed, guessed something was up. When I told John the truth, he was overwhelmed. We immediately signed up for marriage counseling, and I am still trying to work on my marriage. But my unresolved feelings for Tim are a big part of the issue.

But soon Tim made a conscious choice to stay in his marriage. He told me that if it weren't for his kids, things would be different. Although it was painful to break things off, I respect his decision. It was the only choice he could have made in the end. Timing is everything, and this wasn't our time. But I'm grateful I met Tim again. My confession to him helped me start to put my past behind me.

JANET, CHERRY HILL, NEW JERSEY

“My feelings for him never died”

Steven and I had the perfect relationship in college. But after two years, he broke up with me. I was devastated and didn't know his reason until years later: Steven's parents didn't think I was strong-minded enough or that I'd push him professionally. Steven's next girlfriend seemed to be more their type, and he soon married her. I got married as well to a guy named Jim. I loved him, but my feelings were nowhere near as strong as they were for Steven.

Over time Jim and I started arguing a lot. After one particularly bad fight, I knew I had to divorce him. On a whim, I tracked down Steven's e-mail address to see how he was doing. When I confessed to him that I was unhappy in my marriage, I was surprised to hear him say that he was unhappy too. Within days, we knew that if the attraction was still there, we would divorce our spouses and try to make *our* relationship work. So we decided to meet.

Although I was excited to see Steven, I worried that he would no longer be attracted to me: I'd put on a lot of weight since college. When we met in a hotel, I saw that Steven was also heavier and had gray hair. But neither of us cared; the foundation of love was already there. When we made love, it felt like it was from a movie.

We returned to our homes and both started divorce proceedings. My husband was convinced Steven was responsible for our divorce. I, however, told him that Steven had little to do with it; it was just easier for Jim to blame someone other than himself.

Steven and I got married in September 2001, a little over a year after we reconnected. To my relief, my kids loved Steven from the first time they met him. Steven's daughters remain upset with their father for moving out of the state, but also see that he's happier and, as a result, a much

more loving father. The road Steven and I chose was not an easy one, but it was definitely worth it.

DIANE, BALTIMORE

"He was a geek in the past, but now I'm in love"

In high school, Jerry and I were studymates. While he had made it clear that he was attracted to me, I wouldn't admit that I liked him too. I was interested in dating cooler guys. I could tell Jerry was jealous, but nonetheless we stayed good friends.

In college I still kept in touch with Jerry, and felt myself growing closer to him. One night, while walking on the beach, we started kissing. When I suggested we find someplace "more comfortable," he surprised me by saying no. I was so hurt that we broke off contact and didn't speak for 12 years.

During that time, I got married and had three kids. But so many things still reminded me of Jerry: an Elton John song we'd listened to, a car like his on the freeway. I'd wonder why he'd rejected me on the beach years ago. I felt a growing need to reconcile with Jerry, so I called him.

When we met for lunch, we just talked and talked. We continued meeting up to talk—and, at one point, he leaned over and kissed me. The world fell away. Weeks later we decided to spend the day together. We told our spouses we had work obligations, got a hotel room, and made love.

But afterward, reality started to sink in: Here I was, a rational person doing a very hurtful, dangerous thing. It's not that I don't love my husband; he's a wonderful man. Jerry also loves his wife. We may stay with our respective spouses till we're 88. Even so, I've continued to see Jerry ever since we first made contact ten months ago. We made love only once; we realized that the price to pay wasn't worth it. Maybe Jerry and I will go our separate ways. Even if that happens, I don't regret what I've done. We all have pasts—and secrets—others don't know.

ALLISON, MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

FORMER FLAMES: THE FACTS

Eye-opening info from the survey by Nancy Kalish, author of *Lost & Found Lovers*:

How did these lost loves get back in touch? It's a tie: 21 percent did so by phone and 21 percent through written correspondence. Ten percent bumped into each other by chance, and 6 percent saw each other at a high school reunion.

Why did they break up in the first place? Parental disapproval was the main reason

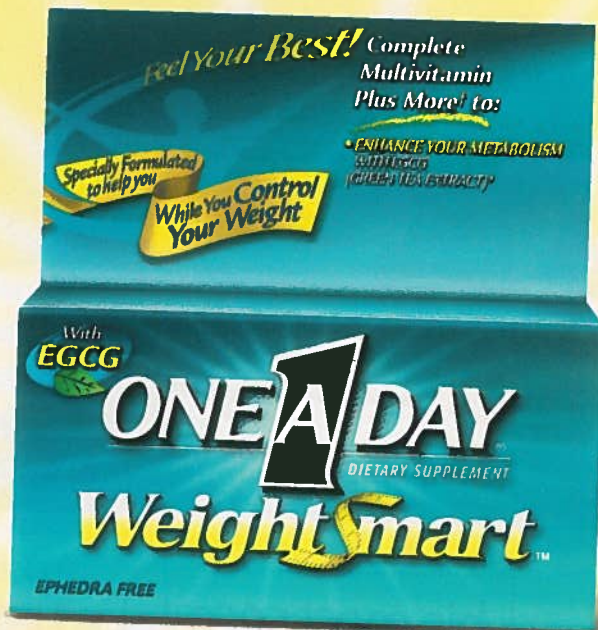
young lovers separated (25 percent). Other reasons included being too young to commit or moving away (both 11 percent).

Are people who seek out old flames unhappy with their current relationships?

It's a toss-up: Half of respondents say their marriage was in trouble; half say they were happily married.

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