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Loving fearlessly

by Rick Polito

Diane Conway is convinced today might be the scariest day of the year. "Halloween's got nothing on Valentines Day," says the Sausalito comedian-turned-author. "It strikes terror into the hearts of millions of people." And she should know. She wrote the book on scary side of love. Her "What Would You Do For Love if You Had No Fear?" is just out from Inner Ocean Publishing.

Conway found out that love comes packaged with fear in her first "Fear" book: "What Would You Do If You Had No Fear?" Both books are collections of stories from people who faced fear in some way in their lives. Searching for stories for the first book, she got a lot of "skydiving" and "quit my job" responses, but the theme of love came up again and again.

"People were really afraid of falling in love," she says, recalling a highway patrol officer who listed romance as his biggest fear. "And he's got a gun and a badge!"

It was something she knew a lot about. Conway has been married for 22 years, but she says she had to let go of some fears to make that happen. Her husband is younger and that triggered insecurities. "I was afraid he'd look at me one day and I'd be old," she says. She needed to deal with that and she did. "I told him about my fears," she says.

That experience stayed with her. In every story of love there is a "pivotal point," she says, where "you take that split second and you make your move."

Those are the stories she looked for in the new book. Some of the stories are dramatic. One woman was diagnosed with the cancer the same day she had a first date planned. She called to cancel and her prospective suitor wouldn't have it. They're still together. "He's been with her every step of the way," Conway remembers.

Other stories are quieter.

Karen Warner has one of those stories. A former Sausalito resident now living in Brisbane, she met her great love without even knowing it. She had a list taped on her bathroom mirror of the qualities her "prince charming" should have and when she met her mate, she wasn't sure he fit. "He wasn't George Clooney," she says now.

Warner came to realize that being fearful might have been keeping her from finding love. She took a new look at the list and the new suitor. They've been together for 10 years. "Whether we admit it or not, everybody has fear, and I think the greatest fear is about going into a relationship," says Warner. When that fear is overcome, "it feels like a triumph."

Seth Schwartz can't say he overcame his fear. He'd been flirting with the receptionist every time he got a haircut but "we were both afraid to say anything." But then she did. She called him. "She made the first move," Schwartz says. "We're getting married in a couple of months."

Love requires risk, and stories like his and the others help people realize that, Schwartz says. "I think these kinds of books and these stories, they really help people," Schwartz says. "They can see what's going on and say 'Hey that sounds like me.'"

Conway can see herself in a lot of the stories. And she has a lot of stories to tell. At middle age, she can say she's done a bit of everything. She's been a "boot shiner at a country-western bar." She's been a whale watching guide in Maui. She had an all-woman comedy show.

But Conway says she's still fearful. Everybody is. "Even the most together person in the world is fearful."

That's why she thinks "What Would You Do?" books work. People need to see that they're not the only ones who have fears. "I tried to have stories that ran the whole gamut," Conway says. "Everybody can see themselves in one of the stories."

Telling stories is all she's really trying to do. "I'm not a therapist, thank god. I'm a former comedian," Conway says. "It's not about self-help. It's about finding yourself in other people's stories." And though the stories are about fear, they're not really scary. But you could still tell them on Valentine's Day.

The scariest day of the year.

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[Photo: Diane Conway has collected stories of people who've faced their fears and discovered that love is the most universal fear.](#)