

The Love List

Was it coincidence or magic? She wrote 100 things she wanted in a man, buried the list in a closet. And then, oddly enough, a man who matched the list almost exactly strolled into ALICE GORMAN's life. Seriously, people, how did that happen? MARTHA BECK, *O*'s life coach, read this story and (coming up) explains the best way to let the universe know what you want.

OUR FIRST REAL DISAGREEMENT erupted at the kitchen table on a Saturday morning in late May. Aubrey and I hardly knew each other at the time. We had spent a total of three weekends together since we met in early March—the first on a blissful fishing trip in the Ozarks, the other two trading visits between his home on the Eastern Shore of Maryland and mine in Memphis. We ▶



Aubrey and Alice just engaged, Dark Harbor, Maine, 1991

had both been married before: he, a recent widower; I, married twice, a divorcee and a widow. He was retired. I was the owner of a contemporary art gallery in Memphis and a partner in a gallery on 57th Street in New York City. We'd been introduced by his cousin from Baltimore, a lifelong friend of mine. The attraction was instantaneous, so much so that we spent those six days together in pure enjoyment of our late-in-life pleasures and commonalities, believing that each of us had found perfection in the other. Without warning, during our second cup of coffee after breakfast, we began having a stupid argument.

"You're really a stubborn broad," Aubrey said in response to my refusal to spend the remainder of the morning with him.

"What do you mean?" I asked, shocked by his insulting bluntness. "I told you I had to go to the gallery on Saturday morning. I have an appointment with an artist. You knew that."

"You told me you *might* have an appointment on Saturday morning, but if I flew down to Memphis for the weekend, you'd change it."

"I did *not* say that," I said, stiffening my spine and feeling my heart begin to race. "Obviously you didn't listen to me, and now you're calling me a liar."

"You see," he said with a grin. He had a wide smile that generally dispelled the seriousness of any discussion, but he continued to make his point. "You're a stubborn

broad. It's your way or the highway."

"Well, what about you?" I felt sickened by waves of prior marital arguments surging up through layers of memory. I'd thought Aubrey would be different. "Aren't you the one being stubborn?"

Aubrey sat back in his chair. "Maybe I'm not the right man for you," he said, half making a statement, half asking a question.

"Maybe you're not!" I crossed my arms, feeling defiant, but in the next second I regretted the whole ridiculous discussion. What were we talking about? I thought I had met the man of my dreams, and we were about to throw the whole thing out the window over an absurd argument. Closing my eyes, I suddenly saw a mental picture of "the list." It had been in the back of my closet for five years. What would Aubrey think of the list?

"I have an idea," I said. I left the kitchen, and several minutes later I came back with the list in my hand. I held the small sheaf of papers out to him. "Read this, and you decide if you are the right man for me." I turned on my heel and marched down the hallway to my room, as if following stage directions.

FIVE YEARS BEFORE MEETING Aubrey, I was in despair. Still dealing with the residue of a divorce after 20 years of marriage and the tragic death of my second husband—a shocking result of his

manic depression—plus several love affairs and a broken engagement, I was emotionally exhausted. In my off-hours from the demands of the art business in two cities, I found myself sinking into bouts of tears and despondency, trying to dispel the fear that I would never have a true and lasting love in my life. A close friend called one day and suggested that I make an appointment with a clairvoyant who was visiting Memphis. "She's fabulous," my friend said as she proceeded to tell me all the insights and factual information the psychic had revealed to her. Dismissing the voice of doubt, I thought: *Why not? What do I have to lose?*

After speaking with the woman—a cheery voice on the telephone—I drove to an ordinary, small brick house on an ordinary street, nothing spooky. The woman who opened the door had an open face and a mop of curly reddish hair. "Hi there," she said, as if we had known each other before. "I'm Charlene. I'm glad you've come." She showed me into the living room, a sparse space with a rocking chair next to a standing lamp and a straight-back chair across from it. The blinds were drawn, making the room feel like twilight in the middle of the day. "Sit here, my dear," she instructed, pointing to the straight-back chair. She sat down in the rocking chair and lit a candle on a small table under the lamp.

"Now, tell me," she said, "what is it you have come to ask?"

Before I could speak, my throat filled with tears. I felt as if I were a small child desperately trying to stay above water in a pool. I started to gasp.

"Do not worry, my dear," she said in a mossy-soft voice. "You are safe here."

Her voice was a sort of balm. I swallowed several times as if flushing away years of unspoken fears.

"Now, tell me," she said again, "tell me why you're here."

"I want to know if—" I began, but I couldn't finish the sentence. Finally, I blurted out: "I want to know if I am supposed to have a true and lasting love in my life. It's okay if I'm not. It's really okay. I have so much in my life. My family. My friends. My artists. My galleries. I just want to [CONTINUED ON PAGE 64]

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 62] know. I want to stop worrying about it—thinking about it all the time.”

“Let us see,” she said, and she closed her eyes.

We both sat in stillness for a matter of minutes, then she cocked her head toward the ceiling, and her voice became high-pitched and singsong. “Well, my dear, the real question is: What is it that you truly *want* for your life?”

I began to feel the tears forming again. “I want to share my life,” I said. “I’ve always wanted to share my life. But it seems that I am destined to be with the wrong person. It always ends in disaster. I don’t know. Maybe I am not supposed to share my life.”

“My dear,” Charlene’s lilting voice filled the room, “the spirits say that you should have *exactly* what you want. They say that of course you should share your life if that is what you want.”

I took a deep breath. I could feel the tension leaving my body. “Really?”

“Yes, of course,” she said, and as if she were repeating instructions from the spirits, she said, “Here is what you must do. You must go home and write down 100 qualities you would like this person with whom you will share your life to have.”

I felt almost giddy. “A hundred? Wouldn’t I be lucky if I got ten?”

“Oh no, my dear,” she said. “You must describe the person down to the color of the socks!”

I wanted to laugh. Color of the socks?

“You will make your list, and then you will put the list away for safekeeping. What you are doing is making clear for yourself exactly the person who will be right for you, and then you will be directing the request into the universe to send that person to you. Do you understand?”

I nodded. But I didn’t understand at all. The idea that somewhere in the universe was a person just right for me—someone who would respond to all the things that were important to me and with whom I could share my life—seemed impossible. Yet in spite of the painful experiences of the past, I had always lived my life as if all things were possible. Why wouldn’t I try making the list?

At home I climbed into my four-poster bed with a yellow legal pad. I was amazed by how easy it was to write the list. I began

with the definitive idea that he must be “at peace with himself.” Then I listed everything, from good family relationships to intelligence and a sense of humor, to sex, religion, money, music, books, gardening, sailing, dancing, fishing, and on and on—down to dark gray socks.

Satisfied that I had done my part, I put the list in the back of my closet.

AFTER ABOUT 15 MINUTES OF WAITING for Aubrey’s answer, he walked into my room with the list in his hand. He had tears in his soft blue eyes. We looked at each other for several seconds before he spoke.

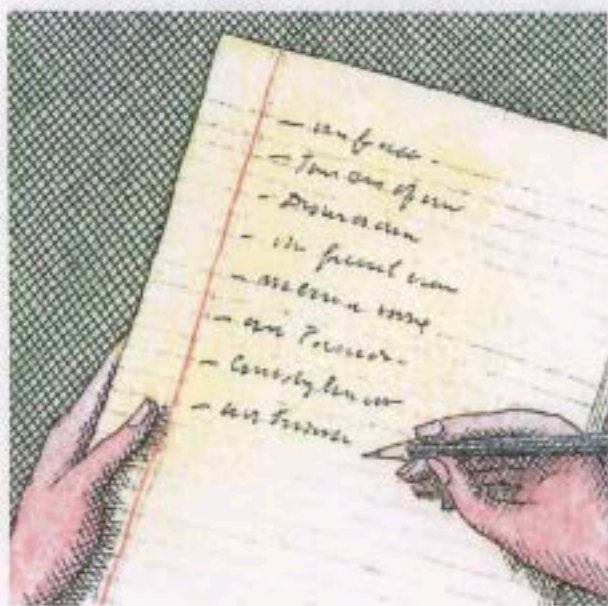
“I missed two,” he said, holding up the list. Then, smiling, he added, “There are many things you have on this list that are true about me that you could not possibly know.”

I wanted to laugh out loud. Instead I jumped up and threw my arms around him. I felt jubilant. Whatever doubts I harbored that he might have missed

many more than two, I knew that the point was that *he thought he missed only two*. I had given my list to the universe and the universe had sent me Aubrey.

ADDENDUM: AUBREY AND I WERE married in February of the following year, the beginning of a gloriously happy and trusting time in my life. Of the two qualities on the list he thought he missed—“loves to dance” and “loves to sail”—neither was important. His interests in gardening and architecture, previously unknown to me, led us to build a house and garden in Maine that surpassed either of our dreams. Some of the more intangible qualities on the list provided even greater surprises. We shared 11 wonderful years before he died of lung cancer, many more joyful years than I had ever imagined possible. What happened was beyond all reason. I can only marvel at the mysterious and beneficent universe that brought us together. ■

Alice Gorman, a freelance writer living in Maine and Florida, is working on a novel.



Go Tell Alice

MARTHA BECK explains why Alice Gorman’s list worked—and what you need to know before you submit your wish list to the universe.

OKAY, FESS UP: AT SOME POINT YOU’VE HAD YOUR OWN MAGIC LIST, HAVEN’T you? I just can’t believe Alice (see “The Love List,” page 61) and I are the only people who’ve written down everything we want in a mate—or a home, or a job, or whatever. In fact, reading Alice’s story makes me want to create more lists of my own—I’m not even sure of the topic, but I’ll think of something. This activity is irresistible for any life coach (definition: “someone who makes people write lists of everything they want”).

The only problem with magic lists is that their efficacy is, um, patchy. For every person whose boyfriend fits 98 percent of her criteria, there are dozens of others who find Mr. Right smoking drain cleaner in the basement and maintaining a Web identity named Daisy Hotrocks. Nevertheless, I believe Alice’s [CONTINUED ON PAGE 66]