

in my late 20s I took on an extra job as a speed-dating host. Like many women my age, I'd been single for a stretch and while some additional coin sounded sweet, I also figured it'd be a great way to meet a lot of men.

And a lot of men I did meet. But I also met hundreds of single women. And boy, were they keen to share their dating tales of woe.

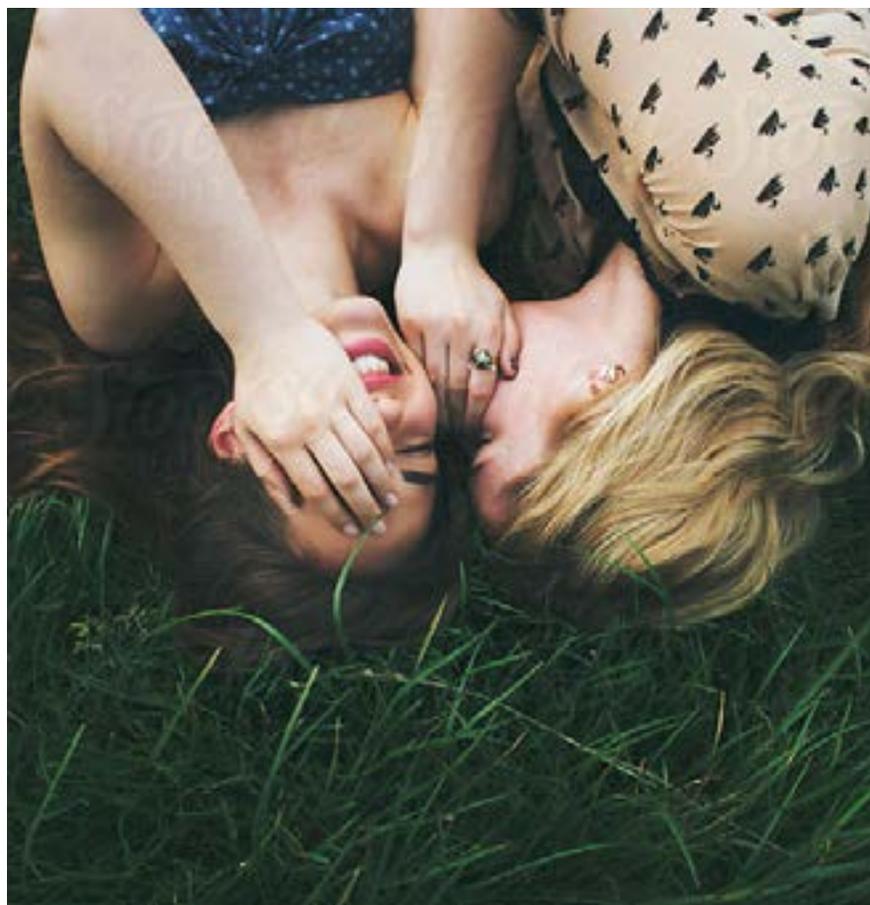
There was a common refrain that I heard many times – the disappearing man syndrome. You know the drill: girl meets boy, girl and boy start the “getting to know you” process, boy vanishes without a word.

It's known as “ghosting”. And it seemed every woman I spoke to – and some blokes – had a ghosting anecdote to share, perhaps in a futile attempt to figure out what really happened to the one that got away.

I certainly had one or two ghosting tales of my own: the bloke with the hotted-up ute that made like Caspar after a romantic movie date, or the guy that rang me every day for two months only to drop off the face of the earth.

It's a baffling scenario and doesn't do much for one's self esteem: it's a lose-lose situation on the dating scene. It also doesn't help that the longer a woman is single, the longer her list of “requirements” for a partner becomes. Something has to give.

“That's it,” one female speed dater announced after regaling me with yet another depressing yarn about a deserting dude. “I'm done with men. I'm either going to become a nun or give women a crack.” That last threat I'd heard before – I'd said it myself. Surely the grass must be greener on the other side, or at least better manicured.



switching SIDES

ONCE SHE GOT OVER THE SHOCK OF SLEEPING WITH A WOMAN, **BROOKE HEMPHILL** REALISED SHE WAS OPEN TO SAME-SEX DATING. AND SO BEGAN HER YEAR AS A LESBIAN.

The idea of switching sides is an idle thought for most, but some time after hanging up my speed-dating hat, I tested the theory by spending a year dating women.

I'd like to say it was a conscious decision to expand my horizons and to see if what I was looking for transcended gender.

But it wasn't. Instead, the series of events that became what I affectionately call my “lesbian year” was the result of one too many glasses of wine, as most unplanned adventures usually are.

Although I hadn't been having much

luck with men – my most recent prospect was a booty call arrangement with a barman half my height – that wasn't my motivation for exploring the other side.

Women literally fell into my lap. Or I should say “woman”, as one at a time is more than enough. There's no need to get greedy.

It all started when I met Hillary at a bar. Waking up the next morning, I was surprised to discover her beside me in my bed. So surprised, I couldn't get her out of the house fast enough.

Once I got over the initial shock of sleeping with a woman, I realised I was

open to exploring the possibility of dating one. And so I did. I dated a couple of them, actually.

“What's it like to be with a woman?” I'm often asked, especially by single girls. “How is it different from being with a man?” Aside from the obvious variance in sexual organs, there's a lot that's different. I'm yet to have a woman disappear on me, in fact shaking them off can be more of a challenge.

And therein lies the greatest lesson I learned from the experience – seeing my behaviour reflected back to me.

“Those experiences were vital in knowing how to be in a relationship. Dating women made me a better straight person.”

It's easy to judge the desperate actions of single women who've been flying solo for a spell. Lord knows I've judged and had my questionable behaviour judged in return.

But loneliness makes you do crazy things. Like showing up to your new love interest's house. Uninvited. Drunk. At 3am. In your mind, doing this is perfectly acceptable. Having someone do it to you gives you a whole new perspective on life.

That's not to say I had unexpected late-night female visitors, much of the revelations were more subtle; the ways women go about having their emotional needs met, for example, from nagging to covertly manipulating. Watching someone else do the things you've unconsciously done a thousand times before is something of an eye opener.

I'm 35 now and no longer single. It wasn't an easy or short journey to get here but those experiences were vital in coming to understand how to be in a relationship. Ultimately, dating women made me a better straight person.

Just as I don't want to give the impression dating issues will be magically erased by changing teams, I also don't want to foster the belief that hooking up with a girl or two can break the cycle of dating disasters.

After all, if you give it a shot, you might like it so much you decide to stay. You wouldn't be the first.

And in the words of comedian Jerry Seinfeld, “not that there's anything wrong with that”. ●

Brooke Hemphill is the author of *Lesbian for a Year* (Affirm Press, \$30). Available now.