

Her Edit

HER ISSUE, HER VOICE



Issue Eighteen
July/August 2016

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The Love Issue

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Front cover picture
Girls' Education Program alumnae and best
friends Prashanthi and Mogandashi walk home
together.
Courtesy of Room to Read

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Welcome to Her Edit

All you need is love. Possibly, but the Her Edit team can't be alone in being weary of the prevailing view in the media that, as women, we require a significant other to make our lives meaningful and fulfilling.

This month's issue is full of desire, passion and commitment. From Gail Pirkis and Hazel Wood who pursued their dream to create something unique, to the young women and girls across Africa and Asia whose love of reading and learning has transformed their lives.

Of course we all like a little romance and our favourite comedian Maureen Younger celebrates the wit, intelligence and subtle sexiness in old black and white films missing from many of the love scenes in contemporary cinema.

We'd like to hear about your favourite so please tweet or write on our comment page which film ticks your sexy box. I'm nominating Don't Look Now in which director Nicholas Roeg orchestrates an incredible raw scene of intimacy and tenderness between Donald Sutherland and Julie Christie.

Finally, I urge you to read Harleen's delightful story of how she found the love of her life in an arranged marriage. If you're looking for that elusive life partner, then in the age of Tinder and the like, I think it offers an interesting perspective on a different route to happiness.



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Clockwise from above: Hazel Wood (left) and Gail Pirkis of Slightly Foxed, Harleen and Maureen Younger

Her Edit

the love of books

In 2008, weary of the rise of digital books and the 'pile them high sell them cheap' ethos pervading the publishing world, Gail Pirkis and Hazel Wood had an ambition to publish a quarterly quality hardback of reviews of old books. They raised £100,000 from 24 shareholders. The result was the unique Slightly Foxed. Ann Clark and Jayne Phenton went to meet them and hear their story.

TEXT
Ann Clark

IMAGES
Right: 50th issue cover by Clare Halifax
Courtesy Slightly Foxed

THE REAL READER'S QUARTERLY

Slightly Foxed



NO. 50 SUMMER 2016

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For Christmas 2004 I was fortunate enough to receive a gift subscription to [Slightly Foxed](#). I commend this quarterly collection of amuse-bouches as the panacea for all ills.

Each issue contains beautifully written personal pieces about favourite books, some long forgotten or overlooked.

One of the earliest pieces I remember was by Lyall Watson on a book about parasites. He was grippingly matter-of-fact about ingesting a tapeworm as a protection against 'Delhi belly', to counteract the parasites he encountered on his travels.

Another memorable piece, by Ariane Banks, I coincidentally read around the time my family were discussing commissioning a headstone. It made the case for why we should preserve the art of proper letter carving, and left me wondering why one would choose to do anything else.

Each issue is crammed with gems to be savoured.

I have been a fan of Slightly Foxed ever since and this summer it will celebrate its 50th issue. Its two editors, Gail Pirkis and Hazel Wood, agreed to be interviewed by Jayne [Phenton] and me at their offices in London's chic Hoxton Square where we were enthusiastically greeted by Chudleigh, the 'Office Dog'.

They had both previously worked as editors for John Murray (a family-run publishing business with an 18th-century pedigree). When it was taken over

by a conglomerate they decided to leave and set up on their own.

Slightly Foxed was conceived and initially delivered on Gail's kitchen table with the help of £100,000 raised from shareholders (mostly friends and family), the plan being to turn a profit in five years.

Its velvety cream paper is sourced in the UK and Slightly Foxed is [printed](#) in Yorkshire by the craftsmen printers Smith Settle.

Covers, each of which is commissioned from a different [artist](#), have a seasonal theme and usually, somewhere in each, there is a hidden fox. Quentin Blake and Posy Simmons are among the artists who have featured.

'We hope that in twenty or thirty years' time the covers will be representative of the best of the art scene now,' says Gail.

The most distinctive thing about the magazine is its ambition to produce something unique and beautiful for readers rather than simply another addition to the competitive magazine publishing market.

'Slightly foxed' is a term used by second-hand and antiquarian booksellers to describe the condition of books with rust-coloured spots on their pages, but when Gail and Hazel chose it as a title they were

also thinking of the bewilderment many people feel in large bookstores which operate on the 'pile them high, sell them cheap' principle.

Commissioning pieces, Hazel says, 'works in reverse – it's best if people suggest things to us', although contributors have to make a good case for the books they want to cover.

Having different backgrounds, in publishing and journalism, Gail and Hazel were able to draw on different sources for contributors.

'Initially the people we asked were just people who we knew could write well, some professional writers, some not, and that's still the mix,' says Gail.

'Some of our contributors have become regulars, but we also publish people who write in on spec. We do publish some very well-known names, but we're not easily impressed by fame.'

The content is driven by what they like themselves, 'non-fiction or fiction, published two years ago or 200 years ago', Hazel says.

'Most magazines and newspapers are concerned with what's new, but new doesn't necessarily mean better.'

As a business, Slightly Foxed is the very opposite of corporate:

'The most distinctive thing about the magazine is its ambition to produce something unique and beautiful for readers...'



'A real person always answers the phone and we try to treat our subscribers as we like to be treated ourselves.'

The office is very unhierarchical and uncompetitive. Though not a conscious policy, there is currently an all-female team; and the printing company, which feels like part of the family, is now run by a woman, Tracey Thorne.

'Women tend to get on with things and not make a fuss – it gives a certain atmosphere and tolerance. There's none of that posturing you get where men predominate,' says Gail.

The family atmosphere extends beyond the office to their 7,000-plus subscribers, a fact borne out by one of the several albums of fan mail they showed us. So enthusiastic are Slightly Foxed readers that the team regularly receive gifts including biscuits, gin (!) and even chews for Chudleigh.

IMAGE

Above: Chudleigh the office dog
Courtesy Slightly Foxed

Her Edit

Each year the magazine holds a popular Readers' Day with talks from contributors, for which a Slightly Foxed contributor provides the cakes.

Editorial flair and creativity drive the layout for each issue and there's a healthy backlog of pieces to choose from. Contributors are paid on acceptance, but it may be some time before their pieces are published.

Hazel and Gail start their layout with the first and last pieces. Then they pick and choose the rest to get the balance right, 'whether male/female, grim/funny, old/new to give a change in voice.'

In 2008 they launched Slightly Foxed Editions – exquisitely produced limited editions of only 2,000 cloth-bound, hardback copies of classic memoirs. Some of my favourites among them include Helene Hanff's 84, Charing Cross Road, Christabel Bielenberg's The Past Is Myself and Rosemary Sutcliff's Blue Remembered Hills.

A number of those which have gone out of print are available as Slightly Foxed paperbacks. There are also Slightly Foxed Cubs for children – the Carey novels by Ronald Welch, which follow a family from the Crusades to the First World War. And there are mugs, bags, wonderful wood-engraved bookplates, cards

and tea towels available from the SF online shop. Inevitably we want to know the secret to the success of their partnership and the business.

'Hazel and I have over 70 years of experience between us and the older you get, the better and more confident I think one becomes. We work on gut instinct a lot. We've always believed in what we were doing. When we started people said the book

'Hazel and I have over 70 years of experience between us and the older you get, the better and more confident I think one becomes...'

was doomed, but now sales of Kindles and e-books are stalling and proper books are thriving,' says Gail.

Together they share the editorial decisions and both edit every article. Gail runs the financial and business side of the operation and Hazel does the writing ('I'm

not a writer,' says Gail. 'But you could be,' interjects Hazel. 'Hazel's very generous,' says Gail.)

What of the future? To Gail, 'We need to keep developing so we can offer our young staff a career path: from work experience to paid internship and a job in database inputting, then on to design, IT, marketing – whatever they're interested in. You need to keep the company growing. Intellectually we accept that at some point we will have to hand over the reins, but it won't be easy emotionally. Slightly, to some extent, is an extension of our personalities.'

You can find out more about Slightly Foxed at their website at www.foxedquarterly.com, on Twitter @FoxedQuarterly and on Facebook www.facebook.com/FoxedQuarterly



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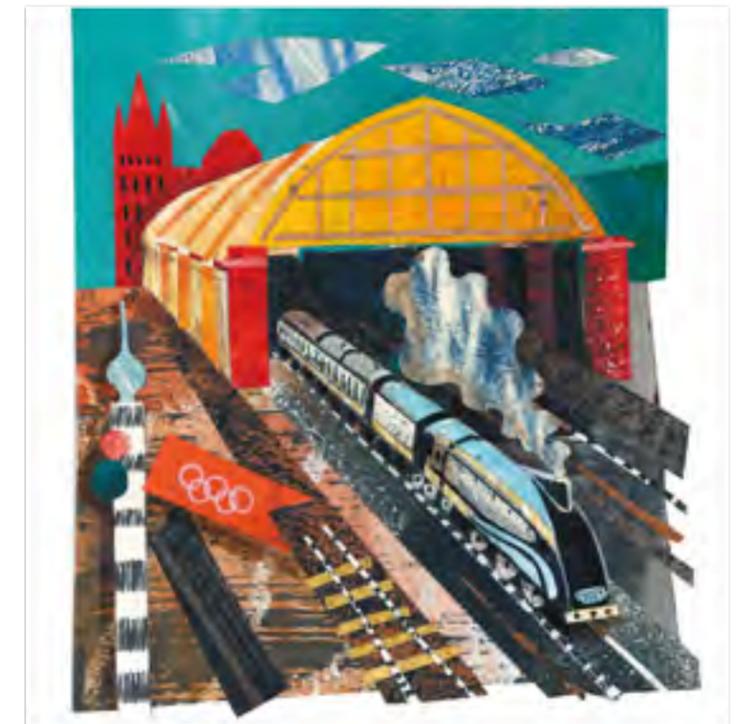
NO.39 AUTUMN 2013



NO.37 SPRING 2013

THE REAL READER'S QUARTERLY

Slightly Foxed



NO.34 SUMMER 2012

IMAGES

Left to right: Issue 39 cover by Janet Brooke, issue 37 cover by Carry Ackroyd, issue 34 cover by Ed Kluz
Courtesy Slightly Foxed



Love story



How Two Girls from Sri Lanka's Plantation Slums Went From Dropping Out of School to Passing on Their Love of Learning

Room to Read is a global organisation transforming the lives of millions of children in low-income countries across Africa and Asia by focusing on literacy and gender equality in education. Founded in 2000 on the belief that World Change Starts with Educated Children®, we target two critical milestones: literacy learning in first and second grades and a girl's transition into secondary school.

Every girl deserves the chance to create her own future and the power to make her own choices about her health, her family and her career. Unfortunately gender inequality often gets in the way, starting early and its effects lasting a lifetime. The barriers to education facing girls in the developing world go far beyond simple economics—cultural bias, tradition and safety concerns often prevent girls from going to and staying in school.

Understanding this challenge, Room to Read's Girls' Education Programme provides much more than academic support for girls. We reinforce girls' commitment to their own education, work with girls to develop essential life skills and increase support for girls' education among their parents, school, and communities. More than 38,000 girls have been supported by our Girls' Education Programme and 93% either remained in the programme or graduated from secondary school in 2015.

This is the story of two girls,
best friends and Room to Read
Girls' Education Programme
graduates, Prashanthi and
Mogandashi from Sri Lanka
who said "I do" to education
instead of marriage.



Room to Read helped me realize the impact an individual can have on a child, and this inspired me to encourage the children in my community to study.'

As you drive past the lush green plantations of Hatton, known for its Ceylon tea, you can't help but roll down your windows to smell the tea leaves wavering in the fresh air and gaze at the rolling landscape around you. You might see the smiling faces of the tea pluckers, many of whom live in crowded conditions on the estates.

In spite of the beauty surrounding them and tea being one of the Sri Lanka's most profitable cash crops, families who work on the estates are among the nation's poorest, with one in three children classified as underweight and 40 percent of babies born with extremely low weight.

'These disadvantaged children often grow up to be disadvantaged fathers and mothers,' said Ranjani, a social mobilizer, or mentor, in Room to Read Sri Lanka's Girls' Education Programme.

'In most cases, the girls drop out of school and marry young because their families can no longer provide for them.'

Four years ago, best friends Prashanthi and Mogandashi, both raised in the 'line-room' slums of

Hatton's tea estates, faced a similar fate. At 14 years old they had to drop out of school to help their families survive and didn't have much more to look forward to than an early marriage. But what happens when girls like Prashanthi and Mogandashi are given a chance at education and the support they need to finish school?

Girls' Education Programme alumnae and best friends Prashanthi and Mogandashi walk home together. Inspired to pass on what they learned, the 18-year-olds began tutoring children living in the line-room slums.

'She wouldn't let me drop out.'

Prashanthi's father, a tea plucker who earned less than two dollars a day, died when she was four years old and her mother lost her ability to walk soon after.

'I was a school dropout. I did not understand why we should study and I did not have the money to go to school anyway,' said Prashanthi, who is now 18. 'It was important I stay at home and take care of my mother while my brother worked on the plantation.' When Ranjani heard Prashanthi had stopped going to school she began visiting her at home.

'I was a school dropout. I did not understand why we should study and I did not have the money to go to school anyway.'

'Ranjani wouldn't let me drop out,' said Prashanthi. 'She would come to my home several days a week and just talk with me. She was persistent in the most sisterly way and her encouragement was inspiring.' In 2009 Prashanthi returned to school and joined Room to Read's Girls' Education Programme.

The lush, serene tea estates of Hatton belie the daily struggles of the plantation workers, especially the women and girls who carry the majority of the workload.

The programme, which helps ensure girls can stay in school and complete their secondary education, provided Prashanthi with funding for transportation, pens, books, and even meals, as well as life skills, education and continued support from Ranjani.

Five years later Prashanthi graduated from school and is hoping to start at the university next year.

'Throughout the programme, Room to Read helped me realize the value of education, how it could help me help my family. It was a difficult time for me,' Prashanthi said through her tears, 'but I did it!'

My life changed

Prashanthi's best friend Mogandashi also had to drop out of school when her family could no longer afford it. Mogandashi's mother is a tea plucker and her father works as a laborer in Colombo where he struggles to earn a living for the family.

'My father works very hard and we rarely get to see him,' Mogandashi said as she wiped her tears. 'We barely have enough money to eat and the little money he earns he sends to us.'

Just as with Prashanthi, Ranjani began visiting Mogandashi at home to convince her to return to school as a Room to Read's Girls' Education Programme participant.

'Room to Read came into my life and provided the support I needed,' said Mogandashi. 'My life changed.'

Mogandashi is now a proud graduate of secondary school and is determined to go to university next year to become a bank manager. Girls' Education Programme alumna Mogandashi is waiting to find out if she got into university.

'This way I hope to earn enough so my father can retire,' she said. 'My dream is to be able to support my parents.'



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The impact of an individual

Inspired by their social mobilizers and teachers, Prashanthi and Mogandashi began tutoring the children in the estate slums.

‘Room to Read helped me realize the impact an individual can have on a child, and this inspired me to encourage the children in my community to study,’ said Prashanthi, who juggles tutoring with her chores as well as the computer and English courses she’s taking in preparation for university.

Over 20 children crowd into her small room and sit on floor mats, but neither they nor Prashanthi seem to mind.

‘Whether it is math or reading, I want to help them. I understand how they feel and so my hope is that even while I am away at university they will remain inspired and find the courage to carry on—to continue, graduate and work hard towards a better future,’ Prashanthi said.

Girls’ Education Programme alumna Mogandashi welcomes over 20 children from the tea estates in her small room for classes.

Mogandashi hopes to teach children financial literacy someday. Until then, she too is offering classes to the children from the ‘line-room’ slums.

‘I want to encourage them to study and create their life in a positive way,’ Mogandashi said. ‘It is important to me that I give back to my community in any way I can.’

The ripple effect

In only four years, Prashanthi and Mogandashi went from being 14-year-old drop outs to the first in their families to graduate secondary school. Today they are creating a better life for their families and a better way for their communities by passing on their love of learning.

The good news is that Prashanthi and Mogandashi are far from being outliers. Educating girls has an empowering effect on their communities because girls reinvest their knowledge and income back into their families and communities, helping to bring an end to poverty for themselves and for the world.

IMAGE LEFT

Girls’ Education Programme alumna Mogandashi
Learn more about Room to Read’s Girls’ Education
Programme [here](#) and follow them on Twitter
@RoomtoRead_EUAF

Love scenes

Have love scenes in movies lost all sense of romance? Our favourite comedian, Maureen Younger, explains why a mix tape is better than a sex tape and shares some of her favourite romantic films.

Today in the age of Tinder, sexting and revenge porn, romance seems to be a dying art form. Even in the 1980s when I started dating, there was still some sense of romance. I mean, back then it was easy to know if a guy really liked you, because he would go to all the effort of making you a mix tape!

Before the era of downloads, such an undertaking would of course take devotion and a hell of a lot of time. You would have to record in real time with your little tape machine pressed against the record player or radio, your fingers hovering over the record and play button. And goodness help you if you were recording from the radio: as you'd have the extra stress of trying to tape as much of the tune as possible before the DJ talked rubbish at the end of the song.

Nowadays, a romantic gesture would probably be construed if the guy you were seeing refrained from sending you a photo of his cock.

No wonder then thousands of women like me are glued to a show like *Outlander* which cleverly combines sex scenes with a generous helping of old-fashioned romance.

In a sense *Outlander* reminds me of the old black and white movies – obviously minus the sex scenes. In the films of the 1930s and 1940s, sex could only be hinted at, but as they say, necessity is the mother of invention, and in its place you get a lot of great dialogue, a lot of sexual chemistry and a hell of a lot of romance. I would also contend you often get a lot more believable relationships than some of the cinematic love stories foistered on us in our more sexually explicit age.

Yes, I know these were the days when smoking was still considered sophisticated, but on the plus side, the women in these movies were, for the most part, spunky, quick-witted and gave as good as they got.

Here are some of my favourites from that period (and to be fair from my collection at home. What can I say? I'm not made of money).

IMAGE
Courtesy Maureen Younger



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IMAGES

Clockwise from above: Cary Grant and Katherine Hepburn in *Bringing Up Baby*; Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert in *It Happened One Night*; Robert Donat and Madeleine Carroll in *The 39 Steps*.

All images in the public domain

It Happened One Night (1934) Frank Capra

The film stars Clark Gable as a washed up newspaper reporter, Peter Warne and Claudette Colbert as Ellen Andrews, a spoiled and pampered heiress. Having escaped from being kidnapped by her own father, desperate to annul her recent elopement with King Wesley, Ellen hooks up with Peter who sees in Ellen the scoop of the century.

When the coach they are travelling in is unable to travel any further due to bad weather and with limited funds, Gable organises for them both to stay in the same motel room. Colbert isn't keen, but it's either that or staying outside in a torrential downpour.

To protect her modesty, though Gable jokingly and charmingly claims it's to protect his, Gable ties a rope half way across the room, throws a blanket over it, thus separating the two beds from each other and calls it the Walls of Jericho. It's a great little scene which was no doubt risqué in the mid-1930s. In it Gable is nonchalant and witty and when he took his shirt off to reveal he didn't have a vest on, sales of vests plummeted.

Colbert has her own daring little scene, one that has become one of the most iconic scenes in American movies. Forced to hitchhike a lift to New York and with Gable's hitchhiking techniques proving ineffectual, Colbert saunters on to the road, raises her skirt to show quite a lot of shapely leg and a car stops immediately much to Gable's chagrin.

The film ends rather coyly, but with a great in joke. Having by now eloped and ensconced in another motel room, we hear the sound of a trumpet and presumably the Walls of Jericho i.e. the blanket falling to the ground. Following Lubitsch's principle (the director should do the 2x2 but allow the audience to come to 4), the film lets the audience come to its own conclusion about what happens next...

Bringing Up Baby (1938) Howard Hawks

If you like your romance screwball style, you can't get much better than this. Firstly, it stars Cary Grant in the unlikely form of a palaeontologist called David Huxley; Cary Grant of course being about the only actor who could carry off pratfalls while still looking sexy. He is also endowed with a wonderful knack for comic exasperation, and boy does that come in useful.

This is because his counterpart in the movie is Katherine Hepburn as Susan Vance, a determined if accident prone and slightly eccentric heiress. They meet on a golf course, when she mistakenly plays his ball, and then thanks to Susan, disaster follows upon disaster. Matters are not helped when David is roped into helping Susan look after Baby, who happens to be a leopard with a penchant for listening to the song, I can't give you anything but love.

There are great set pieces from the scene in a posh hotel where David is forced to walk right behind Susan given he has inadvertently ripped the back of her dress off to the moment we see David flouncing about in a negligee.

Susan is determined to get her man. David is determined to escape. Naturally he fails. Their declaration of love is made over the skeleton of a brontosaurus he has spent the last four years putting together. Needless to say it takes Susan less than four minutes to destroy it, but it seems David doesn't mind. After all, that's love!

Brief Encounter (1945) David Lean

Besides being a strong contender for most British film ever, Brief Encounter seems to prove the adage that often the more memorable romance stories are those with a sad ending. Romeo & Juliet anyone?

Brief Encounter tells the story of two unlikely star-crossed lovers, Laura Jesson (Celia Johnson) and Alec Harvey (Trevor Howard). Both are happily married but through sheer accident, they meet and fall in love.

The film depicts with a great deal of style the innocence of their first meeting, to the moment they fall in love, followed by their struggle with themselves and each other as they fight their feelings in order to do the right thing by both their families.

The 39 Steps (1935) Alfred Hitchcock

Robert Donat as Richard Hannay is the epitome of suavity and coolness under pressure while Madeleine Carroll is Pamela, the gorgeous and feisty blonde.

Hannay, inadvertently caught up in a spy ring, is on the run for a murder he didn't commit, and whilst escaping from the police ends up being handcuffed on a misty Scottish moor with Pamela. That's one hell of a first date! Particularly with Pamela convinced that Hannay is a murderer.

Forced to spend the night together in a Scottish hotel, the scene where Pamela, still handcuffed to Hannay, is forced to take off her wet stockings, is a classic example of how inventive a great director can be to get round the then prudery of the censors.

Casablanca (1942) Michael Curtiz

One of the most celebrated screen romances of all time, Casablanca encompasses within the folds of its story all kinds of love; love of freedom, love of country, selfless love, unrequited love, love of lost causes and in its midst the love triangle between Humphrey Bogart's Rick, Ingrid Bergman's Ilsa and Paul Henreid's Laszlo.

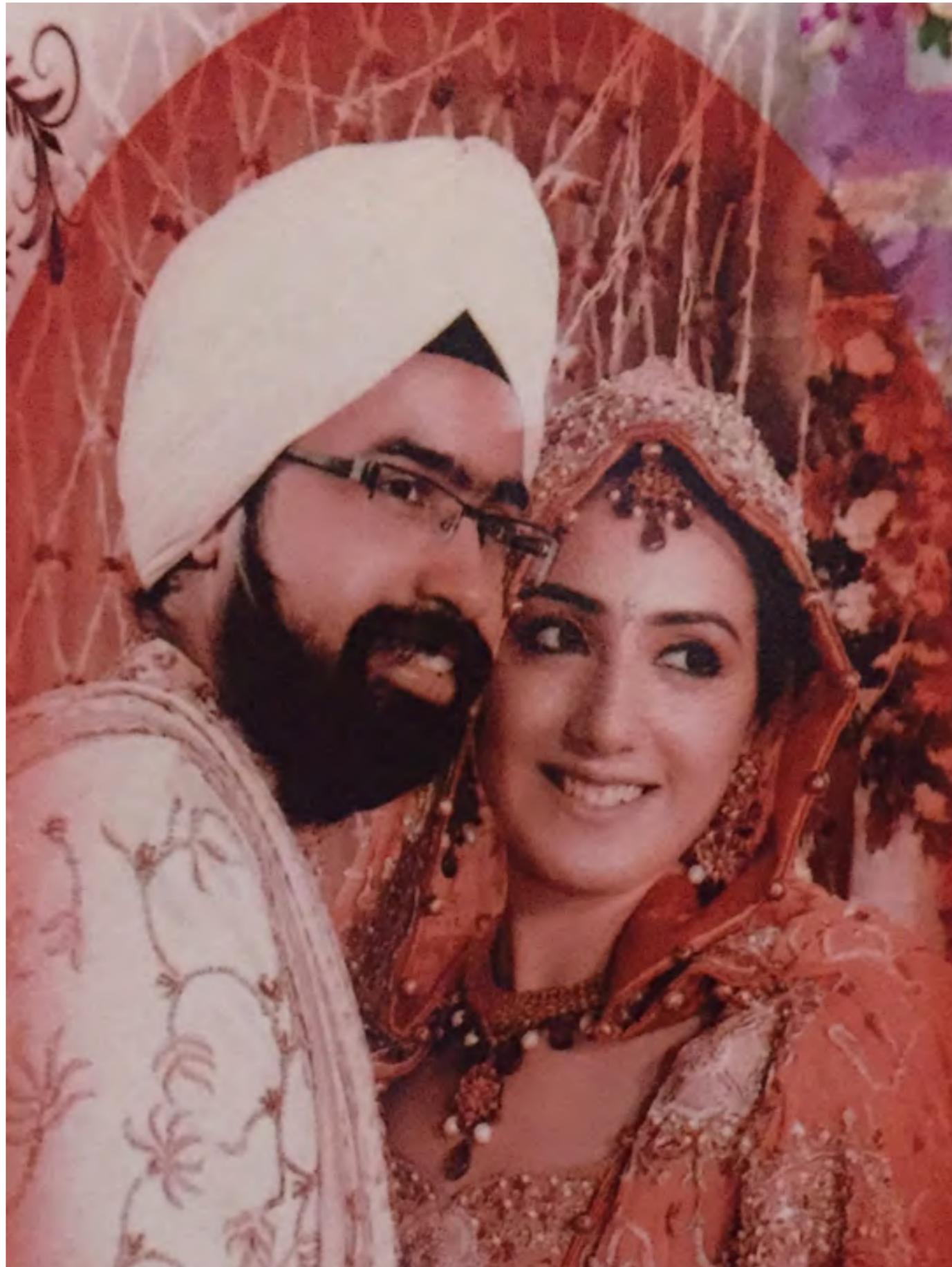
At the beginning of the movie we see in Rick a prime example of what can happen to someone when love turns to hate, but in its closing scenes we also see what love can inspire. No more so when Rick sacrifices his love in aid of a much bigger cause.

It's true no one can do cynical quite like Bogart and Ingrid Bergman pitches her performance just right, even though, allegedly, she had no idea who she was supposed to be in love with throughout filming.

What makes the story really enthralling is that Rick's rival Laszlo is a true hero, a real match for Rick in the audience's admiration and for Ilsa's love. A resistance fighter against Nazism, Laszlo is a survivor of Nazi torture and their concentration camps. His ability to inspire others shown most markedly when he leads the habitués of Rick's café in a rendition of La Marseillaise in order to drown out the overbearing Germans as they sing Die Wacht am Rhein.

Yes, it helps there are a host of great character actors and some brilliant dialogue but it's the chemistry between Bogart and Bergman that is the key.

To find out about Maureen's fabulous comedy nights visit her [website](#) and follow her on Twitter @maureenyounger



Her Edit

The love match

Harleen describes herself as a 'typical North Indian small town girl now living in London for nearly a decade.'

A former banker she is now pursuing a career as a life coach driven 'by the desire to help people live a meaningful life.'

A gold medalist in economics, a Reiki practitioner and mum to a one year old, Harleen is also passionate about singing and dancing to The Bollywood tunes.

Here she writes about how she met her husband, people's preconceptions about arranged marriages and how she's found love to last a lifetime.

IMAGES
Courtesy of Harleen

TEXT
Harleen

Isn't this a beautiful piece? It will look pretty on you,' said mom while tying one of her diamond bracelets on to my wrist. It was time to meet the guy who had passed the initial screening test set by my family to see if he might be a suitable match for me. Of course his family had also screened me; after all, most of the arranged marriages in India are economic arrangements between families who are determined that their surnames and legacies continue well into their future.

The only difference between arranged marriages in the east and love marriages in the west, is the way the two people meet. In India, marriage is not just the couple tying the knot, but the two families joining together as well.

I was intrigued to meet this man who our mutual family friends – the introducers – had boasted about as if he was the only one for me. He'd been a high achiever at school; successfully studied for an MBA degree from a renowned university in Germany; now had a high paying job in the capital and, the cherry on the top, was part of a well-known, but extremely down to earth, religious and humble family. 'What else would you expect?', the introducers said to my family.

As a young, ambitious career woman, my first reaction was, 'Why now? What's the rush?'; but I was convinced (please mind my words – convinced, not pressurised) to at least give it a go. I was at liberty to refuse if we didn't gel together which sounded like a good deal to me, although I was thinking, 'I'll just say no, but I'll meet him so my mom and dad have kept their word'. Win win!

'So let's leave both of you alone.' said the introducer, while I admired their luxurious lounge. I took a quick side look and saw this guy's eyes firmly glued on me. Really?

I was anxious about the inevitable awkwardness as we two strangers sat in an unfamiliar living room admiring the furniture. I decided to break the ice and come to the point.

'So what are you looking for in a partner?' I said, feeling like a powerful goddess because I knew I could turn him down if I wanted to.

Well over half an hour later and we were still talking. We talked about everything including work, future plans, hobbies, passions – there was an energy between us and I was hooked. Something within me made me just want to keep talking to this guy - oh my god! What was that? Why did I feel I wanted more of this?

'How was it?' asked mum, clearly expecting me to say something that might break her heart. 'I want to see him again. I need more time.' I said. She took it as a 'may-be', but it quickly became clear that this guy had fallen for me too. The introducers called to say that he wanted to meet me again for another round of

'talks'. After all it's a matter of one's life isn't it – you want to be sure?

I'm not sure I'd call it dating, but we began to meet up regularly and over time both of us felt there was a vacuum in each of us that the other person seemed to fill. He surprised me with his sense of humour, amazing wit, talkative nature and his

travelling anecdotes. It was obvious. We wanted to be together! I can't forget the big day - 5 June 2009. This year we are celebrating seven years together and planning our little girl's first birthday party in June. Wow, time has flown.

Before I got married I had always wondered how I would deal with the predicament of an arranged marriage and finding love in a stranger, but then love marriages start with finding love in a stranger too, don't they?

Arranged marriages are no longer about marrying a complete stranger after one meeting. Many modern arranged marriages involve long periods of dating and courtship. I think with an arranged marriage you start the relationship with lower expectations and for me my arranged marriage has gradually progressed to love.

Arranged marriages in India these days are changing. Often in rural areas they are more about a forced alliance motivated by financial and religious reasons, but the modern educated urban class leans more towards an arranged union based on two people who share more or less a similar culture, social class and caste with an initial meeting followed by opportunities for chaperoned courtship.

I am proud to say that arranged marriages are still a reality in Indian society and there is plenty of evidence that they are mostly successful. According to a recent IPSOS survey, 74 per cent of young Indians said they would prefer an arranged marriage. India has relatively low divorce rates compared to the rest of the world and another survey reports a high level of satisfaction amongst those in arranged marriage.

Of course there are also appalling cases of women being exploited and forced into marriage, but love marriages do not necessarily protect women from ill-treatment. Domestic abuse, rape and violence, manipulation and deceit depressingly occur in many non-arranged marriages in the west.

'Domestic abuse, rape and violence, manipulation and deceit depressingly occur in non-arranged marriages in the west?'

I feel that all marriages hinge on compromise and the ability to change and it really doesn't matter how you choose your mate – it's what you put into it that matters. My parents had an arranged marriage and I applaud them. They have

weathered a good deal of adversity and are still together after 34 years in a beautiful and glorious partnership.

I am glad I 'outsourced' part of the process of finding my mate to my parents; unlike a dating agency they had nothing but my happiness and best interests in their heart. My husband and I started the journey billed as the 'made for each other couple'. There are moments when we feel made for each other and others when we're just mad at each other, but who doesn't enjoy a roller coaster ride?

Finally, thanks to Allison who asked me sheepishly if I would be 'okay' to write about my experience of this. You have given me a voice to send out a clear message to anyone raising their eyebrows at the idea of an arranged marriage; it might not be for you, but please do not confuse it with someone being pressurised into marriage. They are quite different. There are no guarantees for any of us embarking on a new relationship and, for me, my arranged marriage has given me a lifetime to learn to love someone very special.

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