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Autobiography & Memoir

A Kosher Dating Odyssey: One Former Texas Babtist's Quest for a Naughty and Nice Jewish Girl

Van Wallach
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Van Wallach is a Texan-born, Baptist-raised, Jewish man on a quest for love. His slim memoir documents this journey with both humor and insight.

Wallach, now in his fifties, has had a lifelong preoccupation with record-keeping and maintaining years-old correspondence and journals regarding his youthful impressions about love, whether they're scenes in movies or notes received from a school crush. While this may seem obsessive, it provided valuable fodder for this memoir of looking for love in all the wrong—and right—places.

Wallach was raised in a small town in Texas. While both of his parents were Jewish, his mother rejected her background and raised both him and his brother to be Baptists. She assimilated into her small-town society and never looked back. When Wallach's parents divorced and his father left for New York, it left the boys without any connection to Judaism.

Eventually, though, while in college at Princeton, the author rediscovered his Jewish roots. In the memoir, he glosses over a marriage and divorce and focuses more on his journey for love, which parallels his journey back to Judaism.

With the perfect mixture of self-deprecating humor and introspection, Wallach describes, both via anecdotes and in a more extended narrative, his experiences in the world of online dating. He joined several Jewish dating websites and made thousands of connections. Distance was not a factor; he traveled as far as Brazil to make a potential love match.

One of the more fun chapters is entitled, “What I Liked and What They Said.” In it he reprints some of his favorite responses to his ads. For example, one woman started her email by saying, “I’ve always liked bald men.” And another, “…your face bears a resemblance to my ex’s and that’s something I cannot feel comfortable with at this juncture in my post divorcehood.”

Another funny episode occurred when he allowed an out-of-town woman stay with him at his apartment and ended up hating her practically before she walked in the door. [She] “….launched into a stunning recitation of all my personality problems. She railed against my lack of fun, my rigidity, my financial concerns….Forget about cuddling with a stranger; could I stand the sight of her?”

After countless dates and thousands of dollars spent, the author ultimately discovers that love can’t be reduced to a formula, though one suspects he knew this all along.

Hilary Daninhirsch