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Family & Relationships

Second Wives: The Pitfalls and Rewards of Marrying Widowers and Divorced Men
Susan Shapiro Barash
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Marriage in today's society, with remarriages prevalent and blended families more common, can bring a host of issues that a bride of any age may dread encountering. If this isn't the groom's first trip down the aisle, it's possible that he has children from another marriage, memories of a former wife and financial considerations that will tax a remarriage from the moment the honeymoon bags are unpacked.

Barash, author of A Passion for More: First Wives Reveal the Affairs that Make or Break Their Marriages and a professor of critical thinking and gender studies at Marymount Manhatten College, brings her experience as an academic and, more importantly, a second wife to this useful book on how to navigate the sometimes murky waters of remarriage.

Barash interviewed hundreds of second wives across the United States, from disparate walks of life and of all ages. The outcome is a work of advice, comfort and matrimonial savvy. Although the tales presented are diverse, they have similar themes that many second wives may recognize: a feeling of competition with the first wife, a need to win over stepchildren, a sense of inferiority and anger at the financial burden alimony may present. For a woman who marries a widower, there may be suspicion that she's not as good as the first wife, a condition Barash describes as a "Rebecca complex," from the Daphne Du Maurier novel.

The stories of insecurity and angst that Barash has collected can be heartbreaking, but instructional for women who want to know what issues can arise from becoming a second wife. The author's lucid reasoning and logical advice are a boon, and her many checklists throughout the work organize the interviews in a helpful, clear way. Especially well written is her chapter on domestic violence, a serious issue that she addresses with straightforward honesty.

Although Barash advises second wives to be aware of unforeseen problems, she infuses the book with a sense of optimism and hope, the two most important elements for any marriage.

Elizabeth Millard