



Loose Diamonds

By Amy Ephron
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Introduction

With her wonderful sense of humor, marvelously candid voice, and astonishing perception, Amy Ephron weaves together the most insightful, profound, and *just plain funny* stories of her life to form a tapestry of a woman's experiences from childhood through young adulthood, marriage, divorce (and remarriage), and everything in between. Writing with great honesty and exacting prose, Ephron gives us an evocative, engaging, and often piercing look at modern life.

Throughout *Loose Diamonds*, Amy Ephron celebrates unforgettable memories and friendships, and the things that make life livable (such as her Filofax, which she would be lost without), all with a quick wit and a delicate eye.

Questions for Discussion

1. *When we were burglarized I lost a lot of things including all my jewelry and I realized that for me the real value of the pieces was in the memories that each one held. I have lost a lot of things along the way though (last year's fire at our house comes to mind) and I have a bad habit of sometimes losing jackets on the road. . . . I never lose my sunglasses.*

What is your favorite thing you ever lost? Where did you lose it? (Of course, if you remembered this you might have found it again . . .) Why did you miss it? Were you able to replace it? Your answer can be as vapid or as deep as you want.

Trust me, your answer can't be as bad as mine is (or it can)! I once lost my five-year-old daughter on Main Street at Disneyland. It was a really bad eight minutes. I got her back.

2. *I have always thought that "Loose Diamonds" would be a great name for a race-horse. (Not that I can afford to own a race-horse.) But I would bet on a race-horse named "Loose Diamonds" partly because it would be so much fun to root for it, "Come on, Loose Diamonds, come on. Loose Diamonds! And here comes Loose Diamonds coming around the bend. . . ."*

If you had a race-horse, what would you name it?

3. *For me, my visits across the street to The Birdman when I was little were sort of like a Mary Poppins adventure. But Stiles O. Clements also had a huge effect on the way I ultimately saw the world, and gave me an understanding of and an appreciation for architecture, art, and the beauty of a natural environment, his amazing aviary. Also to this day, those crescent-shaped things were the best cookies I've ever had.*

Did you have a magical experience when you were a kid? Was there someone in your childhood who had a huge effect on you? Or on the way you saw the world? It could be a friend of your mother's, a teacher, a neighbor, a grandparent. Did you have a chance to thank them? If you could thank them now, from a more grown-up perspective, what would you say?

4. *"I have a theory that single women who buy champagne by the case rarely end well. Disclaimer: I've been known to make generalizations based on a case study of four."*

Do you have any theories sort of like the one above? Did you ever have a friend you lost along the way and you always wondered what might have happened to him or her?

5. *I also believe that single women should operate on the basis that the next minute of their life could be the beginning of the rest of their life. I'm not suggesting you run off with a stranger on a street corner. Make sure you know his first and last name (kidding . . . well, not really). Having said that, I was just as bad at dating the second time around as I was the first.*

Do you have any tips for women who are getting a divorce or advice for anyone who is dating if they find themselves unexpectedly single? (Under no circumstances cut your hair, anticipate that if you're getting a divorce there may be a few days where you don't look so good and you may need your hair to hide behind!)

6. *My mother passed a "disorder" down to me that extends beyond milk cartons. I have to decant everything and serve it in an appropriate bowl or dish, jam, ketchup, chutney, pickles, cream and sugar, take-out food of any sort. It makes for a lot of dishwashing but everyone in my family puts up with it. It's a good disorder though, because in a way it's about keeping order and tradition. She also thought if a spoon fell, it meant someone was coming.*

Do you have any odd quirks, table-setting eccentricities, or superstitions that were passed on to you by your mother?

7. *I don't think the scariest thing that ever happened to me was the encounter I had with the Middle Eastern man who made a threat to a United Airlines plane I was boarding . . . although it's up there. But it is an event that has since then resonated with me deeply and that I've analyzed endlessly. But it also raises questions of public responsibility, when to meddle, when not.*

What's the scariest thing that ever happened to you? Have you ever been an observer to something that you thought you should report? Were you frightened at the time? Did you show it? How did you handle it? Was there an aftermath? Do you think about it still?

8. *People either believe in psychic phenomena or they don't. There's no two ways about it. "Why I Quit Being Psychic" is sort of a parody piece—a one-on-one on an AA rant, except that I'm embarrassed to admit that everything in it is actually true, so now you know which side of the fence I fall on.*

Has anything ever happened to you that you can't explain? Have you ever done anything vaguely psychic or do you know someone who has? Under no circumstances go online and consult with a psychic, because trust me, I am psychic, the odds are, they aren't. (By the way, I've fallen off the wagon.)

9. *For me, a first kiss wasn't really a rite of passage, it was just you crossed a little line and now you do kiss or you'd been kissed or something. And my first apartment, because I moved out when I was so young, wasn't really a rite of passage either, it was just a roof over my head that was a safe haven and that, at the time, I could afford. It was a little studio sublet on Park Avenue that was (not to date myself, I think there was rent control at the time) \$85.00 a month. But having a child was definitely a rite of passage, a life-changing experience, not just that I had a child who I loved beyond what I thought any capacity for love could be but also that I couldn't leave and wouldn't be able to leave for the next eighteen years. I got over that thought in about five minutes, but it was a tough five minutes—and having a child is definitely a rite of passage.*

A lot of people weren't forced, because of a somewhat dysfunctional childhood, to grow up as quickly as I did. And because I went to a progressive boarding school, I can't even count a prom dress in my memories—we didn't have a prom. But a prom could be a rite of passage, a first job, a first paycheck, a first trip on your own to Europe or river-rafting down the rapids somewhere, your first publication, your first promotion, your first marriage (kidding). What do you consider a rite of passage? And what are your memories about it?

10. *In a way, you can tell your life by anything—all the tuna fish sandwiches you had (or tuna melts) and where you had them; the little black dresses that you've owned and where you wore them; and depending on your city, the Pont Neuf, the Brooklyn Bridge, lakeside in Chicago, the diner you've always frequented and if you're lucky it's still there. For me, the flagship Saks Fifth Avenue store has always been a benchmark, from the time when I was little and my mother took me to New York and bought me a hat to wear in the Easter Parade; to times when I couldn't afford to shop there and would just stop in for a lemonade at the cafe because it felt like a touchstone to me, a haven; and up through my second marriage when I ran in to buy an inexpensive summer dress because who did want to spend all that money on a dress you'd wear only once and maybe I'd even wear it again (although I haven't because it was my wedding dress and there is something special about it). And, let's be honest, it was my second wedding.*

If you were to pick a benchmark of your own, a shop, a five and dime, a hamburger stand, a national monument what would it be and how would it tell your story? Is it still there? Or, if you were to pick another constant, something silly like tuna fish sandwiches, fishing trips, or croques-monsieurs, how would that story go?

About the Author

Amy Ephron is a bestselling and award-winning novelist. She writes the monthly column L.A. POV for the *New York Times'* T online. Her magazine pieces and essays have appeared in *Vogue*, the *New York Times'* T Magazine, *Harper's Bazaar*, *The Daily Beast*, *House Beautiful*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Huffington Post*, and her own online magazine, *One for the Table*, as well as various other print and online publications. She recently directed a short film, *Chloe@3AM*, which was featured by the American Cinematheque at the Women's Directors Festival in January 2011. She lives in Los Angeles with her husband, Alan Rader, and any of their five children who drop in.