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Issue APRIL '07

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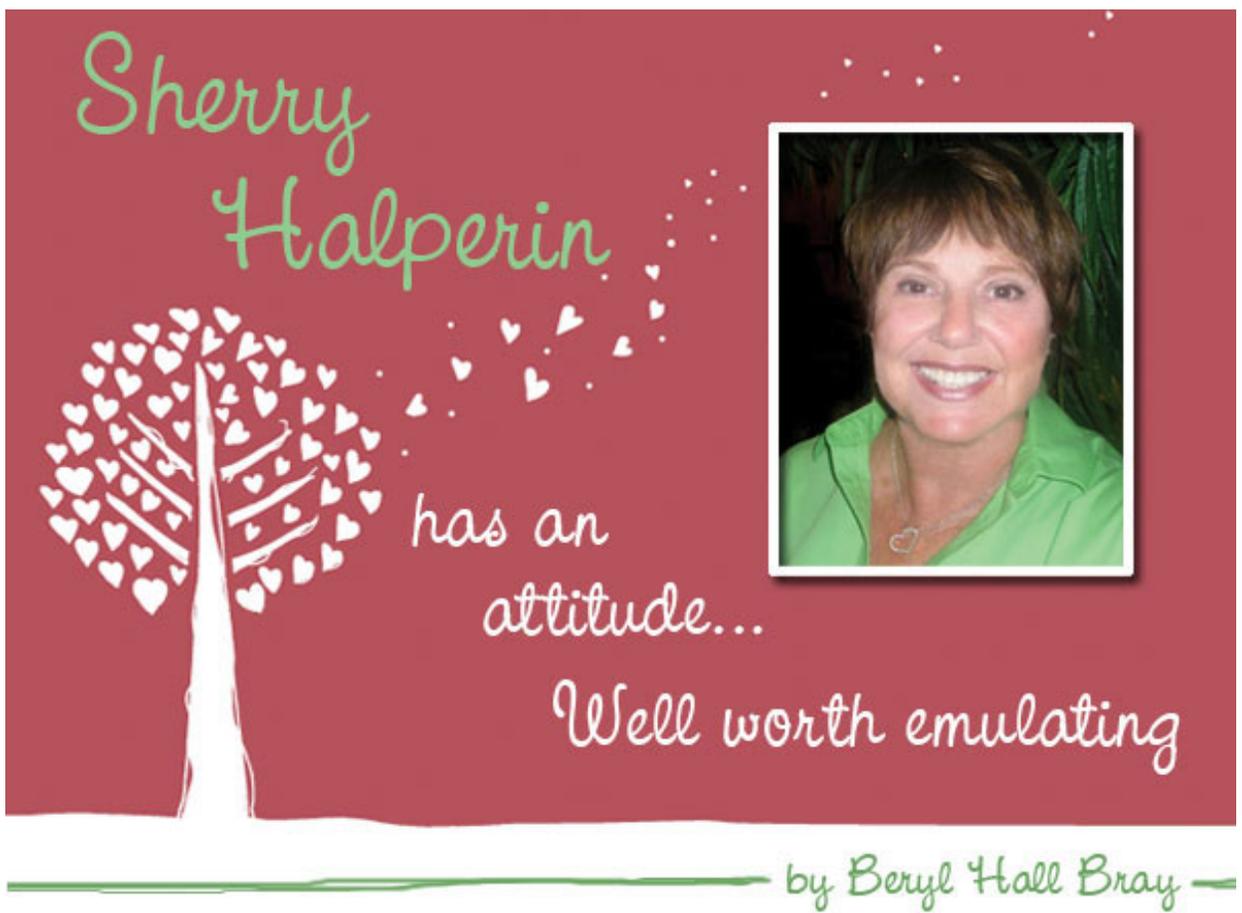


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Sherry Halperin

has an attitude...

Well worth emulating

by Beryl Hall Bray

Did you ever have just the right person with the right life experiences, and right words show up in your life at the *right* time? That happened to me. I was in the middle of **WOW!** deadlines and the emotional challenges of widowhood hit me right where I live. But the deadlines couldn't have cared less and the pages continued to come off the calendar. I called Sherry, already scheduled to be interviewed next month, and said, "Hey, could you..." and ended up giving a little voice to my plight. Her voice extended her compassion and understanding as she said, "It's normal and it will pass." I could feel the assurance I needed. I share this because I want you to know Sherry has a great deal to offer and I wouldn't want you to miss any of it. What makes this interview inspirational is the strengths, weaknesses, honesty, and practical wisdom all wrapped up in a great attitude that thrives on a super sense of humor. She's successful secularly and you'll pick up some good points there. Nevertheless, it is our response to



life's challenges that govern whether or not we'll be successful. What a kick this interview was, I loved it and know you will, too. Join Sherry and me as we discuss how a woman ends up meeting a man in a moose hat...oops, you have to buy the book for that one. However, you'll love listening to everything else she has to say.

**WOW:** Sherry, considering your book and such a full life, I think we should approach you slowly and carefully. First, you're born in a city that proudly declares it has an attitude...though much tamer than your book, *Rescue Me, He's Wearing a Moose Hat!*



**SHERRY:** When I lived in Beacon, NY, it was a tiny village with five thousand people. It totally lacked the culture and sophistication I craved. My goal was to GET OUT. How things have changed. It's now an art mecca and bedroom community for New York City. I was recently back and spoke at the small local library. It was a very proud moment for me. Many of my high school friends were there and we had a blast. I now appreciate Beacon. It gave me a wholesome basis to draw on as an adult.

**WOW:** I think you just gave us a peek at the younger Sherry. Was your family surprised when, as a teen, you ended up studying at the Dramatic Workshop in New York City?

**SHERRY:** I think my Mom was a frustrated actress so she supported me in my decision to study in New York. How brave of my parents to allow a 13 year-old to travel by train alone to the big city, take classes, see a Broadway matinee and then travel home. It was a safer, more innocent time then. My parents saw that I was different from most of my classmates and encouraged me to study music, drama and to be the person I wanted to be.

**WOW:** They set the stage for you to keep an open mind. You've come from good stock. And, your parents needed to be brave because you eventually migrated west and received your degree from the Pasadena Playhouse College of Fine Arts with a major in directing.

While you branched out into various areas in the arts, you put in considerable time as a writer, producer, and director of television shows. You also distributed feature films, agented actors, and produced world music concerts and ballets all over the US (venues such as Lincoln Center and UCLA's Royce Hall).

With so much going on in your career(s), do you remember when writing began to take on greater importance for you?



Issue number eight



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Diana Ewing asks:

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**SHERRY:** Writing has always been an interest to me. It started with the Senior Follies my last year of high school—although I think I created the extravaganza just to be popular! When my children were young, I had to think of ways to be creative and still be a present Mom and writing became the answer.

I began by submitting magazine articles and was astonished when they sold. I then moved on to my local newspaper and wrote a social page every week. A few years later, I became a staff writer on a weekly ABC children's show. My kids loved coming to the set and especially having lunch in the cafeteria where they saw tons of stars.

I became serious about writing about eight years ago when I enrolled in UCLA Extension. It's there that I realized I might have a bit of talent and began to write almost every day.

"I made a very conscious decision...  
that life can go on after a tragedy."

**WOW:** We're going to back you up in time. You've always been avid liver of life, in the midst of all your activity, you managed to find a terrific guy, get married and have a family. Obviously, you continually honed your humorous side—because you had a great marriage. Don't anyone try that without a sense of humor.

**SHERRY, laughed:** I do believe humor is what keeps a marriage and relationships level. If you can laugh at being peed on in the face by your infant son, if you can laugh when you accidentally smash two cars before you leave your garage and if you can laugh when you ask your husband if he packed his rubbers for his trip to rainy New York and he answers "I don't expect to be having sex on this trip."—then you can get through anything.

**WOW:** You were certainly up for that and more, the careers you embraced were not for the faint of heart, but one day everything changed. You suffered a blow, losing your husband after 26 years. That would dump you into an unfamiliar world, leaving you in a fog-like state...only sure of the very things that would change with time. Undoubtedly, this was your biggest challenge ever.

**SHERRY:** You know, I was in shock for months because his death was sudden and I found his body. Horrible. But I made a very conscience decision to be strong and to show my two sons who were in their early twenties that life can go on after a tragedy. I didn't know what I would do with my life. I wasn't poor but I wasn't rich. I knew I had to follow my passions. After all, I had learned how precious life is and how fast it can be taken away. So, when I was offered a job working on a pilot for Fox by a producer friend, I packed up and moved from my small beach town to Los Angeles to start a new life. I honestly believe the second year after my husband died was more difficult than the first. Year one was filled with shock, decisions and lots of sympathetic calls and visits. Year two turned into reality. How will I handle the rest of my life? Can I take care of myself? Who will fix the toilet when it overflows? I sought professional help.

**WOW, paused:** At that point, there are way more questions than answers. As every courageous moment of your life came together, your sense of humor must have re-awakened, becoming a force not to be

**denied. I say that because it is difficult to reach the point where you know laughing and having a good time isn't disloyal. When you began to see the laughable dating situations emerging, how far behind was your sense that you would love to write a book about *that*?**

**SHERRY:** Dating was very hard for me at first. I thought I was cheating on my husband. But when I realized I was alive and only 51 and really wanted and needed male companionship, I dove into dating like a twenty year old on Spring Break. It had changed so much since I was a kid. And the men - what on earth were they thinking? So after each date, I'd come home and call my girlfriends and we'd laugh. Laughter is great medicine for an aching heart. What I was really trying to do in those early years was to replace my husband. Who knew! But, the thought of writing a book about my dating experiences didn't occur to me for many, many years.

**"I knew I had to follow my passions."**

**WOW:** Really, guess you needed those 40 dates. How was writing *Rescue Me, He's Wearing a Moose Hat* good for you?

**SHERRY:** I sat at my computer and the words came pouring out. Over an eight-year period, I had taken notes on my dates - never suspecting to write a book. I "retired" to the California Desert thinking I would write a great murder mystery. But seven chapters in, I decided I'd rather write something funny and found the file on my computer titled "Men I Have Dated." I wrote and laughed and cried and realized how much I had learned from all of those men.

**WOW:** That had to flesh out what you could see about yourself. Would you recommend writing as a form of therapy, whether for publication or not?

**SHERRY:** Absolutely. After my husband died, I wrote every single night for a year. When I finished, I printed out my words and sent them to my college roommate. For me, it wasn't enough to just write. I had to send the letters to someone. It validated my feelings. One the tenth anniversary of my husband's death, she gave me the stack of letters. I read a few and couldn't believe how much pain I had been in. Time has been my friend. Time has healed most of my heart. I tossed all the letters as a symbol of moving forward.

**WOW, paused to picture that action:** Besides writing, what else helped you to begin to reclaim life for yourself?

**SHERRY:** Working. I was proud of what I was doing and gained a confidence in myself I hadn't had in many years. You lose part of yourself in a long-term relationship. I adored my husband but part of me got lost. Finding the old me again was a wonderful surprise.





**"I dove into dating like a twenty-year-old on Spring Break."**

**WOW:** You and I talked about this, what I call Big 'W' Days, even with twelve years having passed there are things, people, situations—oh, I don't know, maybe the way the wind blows—that bring the various emotions up that make it seem all wrong that your husband isn't with you. How do you deal with that?

**SHERRY:** I cry—openly, unabashedly. It now happens mostly when things are wonderful and I don't have him to share the moment. I was on a cruise recently and the sunset view from my balcony was astonishing. I stood there and wept. I wanted him there to share it. I also get choked up when I see my darling grandchildren. I know my husband would have been a fantastic grandpa. How cheated my grandkids are. But these moments are fleeting and I come out of them with a smile. Whatever emotion comes to the surface is the right emotion for you to have.

**WOW:** Thank you. How has all your hard work to have a full life been rewarded? I don't mean to confuse a full life with a busyness that makes it impossible to deal with loss.

**SHERRY:** I think I have been rewarded by being involved with projects I'm proud of and that make my family and friends proud. I'm happy and healthy and that's the best reward anyone can be given.

**WOW:** What new adventures did you take on in this quest to enjoy life again?

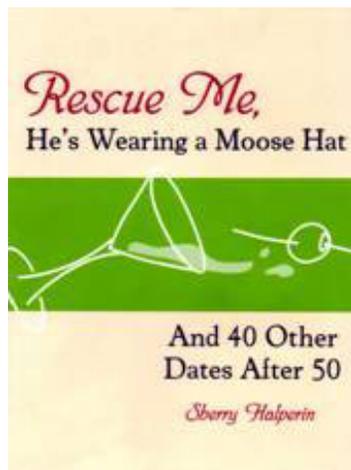
**SHERRY:** I learned how to knit! **(Our eyes widen and jaws drop.)** I adore making hats and purses and scarves. I don't keep anything for myself and always have two or three projects going at once. I also love to travel. On my cruise a few weeks ago, I rented an ATV with a friend and we went zooming around Mazatlan. It was a first for me and I had a blast.

**WOW:** Covering your life in such a short time makes this all so amazing. Can you describe a little of what you did when you realized you had to make a new life for yourself?

**SHERRY:** I decided I had to move. If I was going to succeed at this single thing, I had to find a life that was mine and not ours. So, I moved to a new city, made new friends and got a new dog.

**WOW:** Find a life you did and without forgetting the one you had before. What are the various facets that make up the professional life of Sherry Halperin?

**SHERRY, grinned:** Sherry Halperin doesn't take herself too seriously. I like to have fun and if my professional life doesn't allow that, I back away. I'm also at a point where if I don't think I can do a great job on a project, I won't accept it. I only want my name attached to books or films or shows that I'm proud of. When I work, I work hard. But, I also know how to relax and enjoy life.



**WOW:** Both lessons we would all do well to learn.

Now let's focus on your book, *Rescue Me, He's Wearing a Moose Hat*.

First of all, when do you quit laughing when you say the title and am I the only one that has to suppress the song, *Rescue Me...*

Were your dates indelibly etched in your brain or did you turn on your pocket recorder; or perhaps, run home and make notes for the rest of the night?

**SHERRY, laughed:** After calling girlfriends and hysterically laughing over the dates, I immediately jotted down specifics. As a writer, I am continuously taking notes. Once I saw a flight attendant on an Aeroflot plane that had a huge mole on her face with long hairs sprouting out of it like flowers. I have those notes and memories and will definitely incorporate the character in something I'll someday write. And yes, I still laugh at the title of my book. Don't know how I came up with it but it's been a hoot telling people the book's name.

**WOW, grinned:** Along with the laughs were you always adventurous, diving into waters snorkeling or skimming across the top of the water jet skiing? Or, did that come along later?

**SHERRY, drew back:** I was never adventurous. In fact, I was afraid of flying, suffered for a time with agoraphobia and hated being in large crowds. But after my husband died, it all went away. I guess my philosophy became "What's the worse thing that could happen - I die and be with Warren again?" Now, almost nothing scares me. Life is one big adventure for me and I never know what will come next.

**WOW:** You couldn't be more right about that, it could be one of \ the rewards for facing the big One and continuing on. But, you're working on another book. You say it isn't a sequel and I'll let you tell why. Also, don't you have something exciting to share about *Rescue Me, He's Wearing a Moose Hat*. (I'm sorry, I love that title, just had to say it one more time.)

**SHERRY:** I am definitely NOT writing a sequel to *Rescue Me*. I don't have the time or energy to date another 40 men! I was asked to write another dating book but refused. It's time to move on. But I'm not finished with *Rescue Me* yet. It's been optioned by Darkwoods Productions (*Shawshank Redemption*, *The Green Mile*, *Collateral*, *The Majestic*) and we hope to have the film in production by 2009. I'll co-produce with Anna Garduno and three time Academy Award nominee Frank Darabont.

My new book is a romantic comedy about a young woman who changes who she is to become who she thinks she wants to be. It's sort of a modern day Pygmalion with a humorous twist.



**"Time has been my friend."**

**WOW:** Congratulations! With everything else you have going, you love to cruise and explore new places. Sherry, for women who have had their lives radically changed without their permission, you are an encouragement. Even the worst of circumstances should be challenged, and you've shown you can have many a laugh and adventures giving life your best. Do you have anything that you'd like to add?

**SHERRY:** We all have choices as to how we live our lives. I made the choice to look at the bright side and to see humor in every day life. I believe in making up a Life Goal List. When my husband died, I listed ten things I wanted to accomplish in the time I have left. I've already achieved eight of them and had best start adding more goals. Some were as easy as snorkeling the barrier reef off Belize and swimming with dolphins. Others were more esoteric like seeing my name in lights on Broadway and writing a book. For me, goals equal dreams.

**WOW:** I'd like to throw in a fun question here at the end. Since this issue's theme is Freelancers Union, what would you select as The Perk of a Freelancer's Life?

**SHERRY:** That's easy—I have complete control of my life.

**Sherry Halperin** is now producing The Patti Gribow Show seen in the Coachella Valley of California. She's also in preproduction for the film version of Rescue Me, He's Wearing A Moose Hat and speaks to groups around the country on topics that range from Achieving Goals, Writing and Living Your Dream. Sherry has two grown sons, a daughter-in-law and two young grandsons.

And yes, she is still dating.

Visit Sherry at [www.sherryhalperin.com](http://www.sherryhalperin.com)

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