



The three great rom-com cons

After interviewing almost 100 people in successful relationships for his book *What I Wish I Knew about Love*, bestselling author **Marty Wilson** is getting closer to the secret of success. Just in time for Valentine's Day, he reveals the three Hollywood clichés you need to forget if you want your love to last longer than a typical chick flick.

1. Ignore *Fatal Attraction*; never hold a grudge

Being a "fool in love" and making glorious, heart-shredding mistakes is part of the deal. So, don't waste time pouring acid on their Beemer; thank the cheating dog you caught having dinner with your sister. Be grateful to the high-maintenance witch who sneakily made her way through your whole footy team and thank all the jerks who messed you up so badly you sat in your bedroom alone until 4am, drinking gin and singing *I Will Survive*.

It's the bitches, the losers, the absolute mongrels who walk all over you who make you realise you've found the right one, so thank them with all your (broken) heart.

2. Forget *Bridget Jones*; there is no 'perfect person'

Why didn't Byron or Shelley ever write *Ode to Compromise*? How come there was never a



No one's perfect ... Colin Firth and Renee Zellweger in *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*.

romantic comedy starring Meg Ryan and Tom Hanks called *Give and Take*? It's not starry-eyed and wistful but accepting, even adoring, your partner's faults is the honest, bare-bones truth about making it work. Real love is a decision to honour, respect and be loving towards someone in spite of the fact they, at times, drive you absolutely bonkers.

So ladies, when your man stumbles in at 4am on your birthday, reeking of bourbon, with no ATM card and some wilting chrysanthemums he's nicked from the garage down the road, don't just tolerate it, love him for it. And fellas, when you can't find your one bar of soap underneath the 19 bottles of "Invigorating Body Mousse with Mint, Jojoba and Patchouli", don't just put up with it, adore it.

Give in every day and enjoy giving in.

As someone very wise once said: "Sometimes the secret is just to say those three little words, 'You're probably right.'"

3. Unlike *Pretty Woman*, you won't change him

This follows on from No. 2, where – mostly the ladies it has to be said – tend to say: "Well, I can tolerate their negatives until I can mould him in my image." All the women I spoke to said: "Women change and evolve with age. Men just get fatter." This tip has really helped

with my own marriage. In the same way I know I just have to accept my wife's condescending British tone of voice when she knows she's right, she is now trying to love (and I quote from her list) my male inability to just listen instead of solve problems, my Australian habit of swearing like a drunken sailor when I'm tired/hungry/annoyed etc, how I disappear into thin air when the toilet needs a clean – and 27 or 28 other totally minor things.

But, of course, sometimes Hollywood does get it right.

Believe in soul mates (like in every Meg Ryan movie, ever).

For my book, I interviewed a woman called Allison Machin who told a story that really stayed with me. As a young backpacker, she was introduced to a friend of a friend and they hit it off straight away. She says: "That day, I said to my mum, 'I've met someone who I just know is going to be very important in my life. There was a spark, I don't mean just physically – well, for him it probably was – but we felt connected on some deep human level. In my gut, I just knew.'"

Why did this story touch me so deeply? Well, that "friend of a friend" was me and, three years after that first meeting, Allison

Machin became Allie Wilson, my wife.

Nine years on, we have two beautiful boys, Connor and Elliot, and every day it gets better and better. So, when Allie said her advice to her younger self was, "Believe in soul mates," I just grinned like a big, dopey fool in love.

What I Wish I Knew about Love by Marty Wilson is published by Allen & Unwin, \$17.99.

