

# Maker of Matches

*Memoir writer-turned-self-help guru teaches readers how to find 'the one'*

By Karen Buscemi Author photo by Dan Brownstein



Susan Shapiro did just about everything early. Born and raised in West Bloomfield, she graduated from The Roeper School in Bloomfield Hills and entered the University of Michigan when she was just 16.

She moved to New York to work on her master's degree at 20. Immediately after graduation, she landed a job on the editorial staff of *The New Yorker*. But two things eluded Shapiro until she was in her mid-30s – getting a book published and getting married. Now, at 45, she's teaching others how to find love.

Her latest book, *Secrets of a Fix-Up Fanatic: How to Meet & Marry Your Match*, is to be released by Delta Publishing in December.

The daughter of Dr. Jack and Mickey Shapiro, of West Bloomfield, the author started her journey of becoming a “fix-up fanatic” when she was a teenager.

“We used to have the greatest party house in Michigan,” Shapiro says. “My parents brilliantly decided that with four troublemaker kids, they didn't want us going out and partying and driving, so they made the coolest party house you could ever think of, downstairs. We had pingpong, and there was a pool table and a sauna and four pinball machines.”

Calling herself the “social one” of the siblings, Shapiro loved



*Susan Shapiro at age 15, with brother Brian, who is one of her many successful fix-ups.*

throwing parties, and at one of those basement get-togethers, two of her friends hooked up and fell in love. Now married 23 years, with three children, Jeff and Nancy Adler of Farmington Hills have Shapiro to thank for their happy union.

“Things just kind of worked out,” Nancy Adler says. “We went out after the party, and it kept on going. I was 18, Jeff was 20. Sue had fun parties. I think she liked putting together interesting groups of people and watching what happened.”

In *Secrets of a Fix-Up Fanatic*, Shapiro talks about all of her successful matchups, including five from Michigan that resulted in 15 children. She even fixed up one of her New York editors with a colleague of her TV writer husband (they also married). And in her most public attempt at a fix-up, Shapiro ended up on the E! Entertainment Network reality show *No. 1 Single*, starring singer and fellow New Yorker Lisa Loeb.

Shapiro was hosting a book party for close friend David Margolick, a University of Michigan graduate living in New York “who's Jewish and single, and all of his guy friends were there,” Shapiro remembers.

“My friend was producing the reality show with Lisa Loeb, who is a 38-year-old Jewish girl looking for a date. We brought all the reality cameras over [to the book party], and I was ‘Sue the Fix-Up Fanatic,’ and I fixed her up.”

Shapiro says that after the show, she received thousands of e-mails from people who wanted her to fix them up, too. “They sent me their

profiles,” she says. “Girls even wanted to meet guys who had been at the party.”

One of Shapiro's former books led to marriage for another reader. *Five Men Who Broke My Heart*, a witty memoir that has been optioned by Paramount Pictures, is an insightful look at Shapiro



reconnecting with her five former loves during a point in her life when she was married to a workaholic, saw no baby in their future and was pushing a manuscript that wouldn't sell. *Five Men* was published in paperback by Delta.

“A lot of people e-mailed me after *Five Men* saying they decided to connect with their exes because

of my book,” Shapiro says. “Not long ago, I got an e-mail from a woman who, because of the book, re-met her college ex-boyfriend 30 years later. They had been engaged, and then they broke the engagement, and now they are getting married. I love that story.”

After all those successful fix-ups and numerous e-mails from readers wanting to meet “the one,” Shapiro decided the time was right to write a self-help-structured book that would tackle the issue of not only how to meet someone, but also how to introduce others.

“All of these things were converging all at the same time – it was like God was telling me to write this book,” Shapiro says. “Everybody was sending me their profiles like I’m match.com – somebody was calling me ‘sue.com’ – so I thought, ‘OK, I should write this thing.’”

#### FINDING HER VOICE

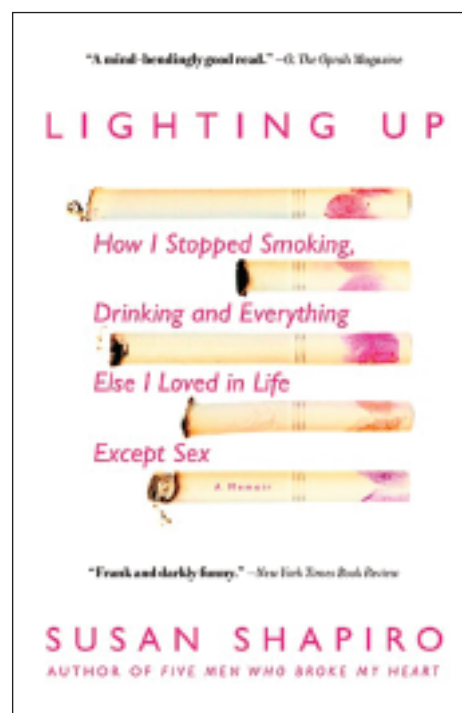
Success as a journalist had come easily for Shapiro, writing for publications including *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The Boston Globe*, *People*, *Glamour*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Jane*. Local credits include *The Detroit News*, *Detroit Free Press* and the *Detroit Jewish News*.

But the writer says she came to discover that she was just chasing bylines and checks, and not going after what she really wanted – a book deal.

“I thought I was really successful because I was writing

for *The New York Times*, and all these great newspapers and magazines, but in essence I was being impatient – I wasn’t really trying to sustain longer narratives,” Shapiro says. “When I would finish a novel, I would e-mail it to editors, instead of slowing down and going through agents.”

Those early books were attempts at fiction, and it took friend and



mentor Laura Berman, a *Detroit News* columnist, to get Shapiro on the memoir-writing track.

“Laura read [a project I was working on] and said, ‘You have no imagination whatsoever, why are you trying to write a novel? Write a memoir.’ And then she told me, ‘You write best about people you love.’” Shapiro adds, “That totally unlocked me, and I stopped trying to write novels – and now I write

non-fiction, and all the books are about people I love.”

Berman, who refers to that novel as a “thinly disguised memoir,” says of Shapiro’s memoir-writing, “It’s hard to write warmly about people and not sound goopy, and Sue is good at doing that.”

Danielle Perez, senior editor at Delta – which in addition to the paperback edition of *Five Men*, published *Lighting Up*, another funny yet thoughtful memoir that details Shapiro’s addiction therapy to get over smoking, drinking and even chewing gum – says that these personal stories have wide appeal.

“Sue gets tons of e-mails from people who say those memoirs really helped them because they saw so much of themselves in the books,” Perez says. “She’s funny, and provocative, too. She’s really asking people to look at themselves in a serious way, and maybe look at things differently than they have for a number of years, which can be difficult to do.”

#### THE WRITER TEACHES

When she’s not writing, Shapiro teaches writing classes at New York University; the New School, a liberal arts university in New York City; and Mediabistro.com, a Web site for journalists. She says that through teaching, she can use her experiences to help others get published.

“I feel I’m really giving back when I teach and help other people,” she says. “A lot of the writing process is self-involved.

If I’m going to take a lot from the world, I have to give something back. I feel like teaching is the way to contribute.”

Shapiro is known to have helped many of her students get their first work in print. One of those students is Ronit Pinto, of Royal Oak, who was in Shapiro’s New School class in Manhattan three years ago. Pinto, who has written for *Allure* magazine, *NY Arts* magazine, *The Jerusalem Post* and the *Detroit Jewish News*, says that Shapiro helped her to dredge up personal feelings and put them into her writing.

“Sue has a wonderful ability to condense many ideas in a few words, while keeping things interesting with humor and personality,” Pinto says. “She sets an example of something I aspire to – to be concise, with personality.”

In addition, Shapiro has taught writing for more than 10 years at the Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen, in New York. She even helped some of the people in that writers workshop to get published.

“There are people who are homeless or schizophrenic or drug addicts, and miracles have happened,” Shapiro says. “I [co-edited] a beautiful anthology called *Food For The Soul*, which was a compilation of all the pieces that they wrote about being homeless, and life on the street.” All royalties from the book go back to the soup kitchen, and as a result of the project, she says, a few of the contributors were invited to discuss the book on the *Today Show*, National Public Radio and other media outlets.



Susan Shapiro (center) at a 1998 singles party in West Bloomfield with friends Rhonda Verona (left) and Karen Sosnick, who is another fix-up success story.

#### LIVING THE DREAM

From frank, dark and funny memoirs – which Shapiro says everyone in her family hates, due to the personal family business that is made public in her writing – to a new self-help book and a well-respected teaching career, Shapiro has created the life she has always wanted.

“I love writing by day and teaching by night,” says Shapiro, who returns to West Bloomfield at least twice a year to stay with her parents and visit with longtime friends. “I have a dream apartment in Greenwich Village. I adore teaching, and I love my students.

“My life revolves around writing. [My husband and I] work really hard, and it’s hectic and crazy.

At this minute, I have 80 students. I’ve been writing full time, literally 100 hours a week, since college. It took a lot of years, but I have my dream life now.” ❖

#### MEET SUSAN SHAPIRO

Just in time for Valentine’s Day, Susan Shapiro will read from *Secrets of a Fix-Up Fanatic* at 7 p.m., Thursday, February 8 at Birmingham Borders Books & Music, 34300 Woodward Ave.

