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**B****Los Angeles Herald Examiner**Thursday, May 11, 1989

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**Connecting**Cathryn Ramin

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**Living the good life with  
or without Mr. Perfect**

**S**EVERAL FEMALE READERS are under the impression that I think a woman is incomplete without a man. This, they say, runs contrary to what they've learned from years of therapy.

They say they wish I'd shut up.

I've given them the wrong idea, and I apologize. No doubt, I've dwelled too often on the wonders of my first year of marriage. The truth is, finding myself in a wedded state came as quite a shock. It was not what I expected.

On my 28th birthday, which I spent by myself, gliding on cross-country skis through a sunny valley I decided to stop my search for Mr. Perfect. For one thing, it was much too time-consuming. I counted up the hours I had spent in places I didn't want to be. I considered the irritation of getting to know someone new, and the messy job of ending it when it didn't work. I ran down my list of excellent men. On closer examination, they were never exactly right. I wondered why.

**ONE SUNDAY AT LUNCH**, I puzzled over the problem with my father. He said that it seemed to him that I didn't need a man, at least not in the traditional sense. I made good money, I was independent, I'd traveled all over the world. The right man for me, he said, was going to have to offer a lot more than a proclamation of love and a guarantee of security. In his day, my father said, that had been enough for most women.

I thought it over. A few weeks later, I gathered the money I'd been saving, and invested it in a ramshackle cottage in the country. I also got myself an ideal companion for the woods — a red hound puppy with brown eyes and a big bark. On Friday nights, instead of dressing up hopefully for some booze-soaked party, I'd gather up the dog and a few books and magazines and drive away. The last 20 miles were on dark, twisting roads. My mother begged me not to drive that route alone at night, without a man to protect me, but I ignored her. I took the sharp curves with glee. Independence was up there, waiting for me.

Other things were waiting as well, like a porch so deep in snow that I couldn't open the front door until I got out the snow shovel and set to work in the dark, cold night. Once in, there were other surprises — a small flood or an odd smell. At first, these troubles upset me. I called my brother at midnight to ask him how to unthaw a frozen pipe before it burst.

**FEW PEOPLE COULD UNDERSTAND** how I had the nerve to escape from the society of the city every weekend, summer and winter. My friends were suspicious of my motives: Was there anyone to meet up there? Was there some mountain man, perhaps? They couldn't believe that I spent my mornings in the garden, my afternoons hiking by the river with the dog, and my evenings with a good book.

On one of those evenings, after a supper of pea soup and fresh bread, I was sitting by the fire with my feet propped up on the skirt of the woodstove. The red hound was lying on the couch, snoring. Outside, I could hear the storm door rattling in its frame. The first time I'd heard that noise, I'd nearly jumped out of my skin — I thought it was an intruder, or at least a drunk neighbor come to plague me. Now it was familiar. It was a comfort.

That night, I thought I was happier than I had ever been. If another soul had been present, it would not have been the same.

What was the meaning of this? Thirty years hence, would I be like the old lady at the bottom of the hill — the one with six cats and a few chickens — who had lived there without a human companion since anyone could remember?

The dog sighed. If the right man came to join us, we would be glad. If he didn't, we would be just fine. ■

*Cathryn Ramin's column appears on Mondays and Thursdays.*