

Q & A with Melinda & Morgan

1. How much of this book is based on your own experiences with your significant others? Or at least, how much are you willing to admit to? How do they feel about the book?

Melinda: *All the people in my essays are real people. In my first book, I didn't call them by their real names. Then I realized that was silly. My humor is always at my expense, no one else's, so my husband, friends, and children always come out smelling like a rose, no matter how ridiculous I look. I find it is better to ask forgiveness later—after those people see their names in print—rather than permission first, which can be tricky. All my friends have a good sense of humor. Otherwise, we would not be friends for long. My children would rather not appear in my books at all, of course, but I don't care one bit. I am a mean mama.*

Morgan: *My significant other, Mrs. Murphy, maintains a robust sense of humor. We seldom argue and rarely even disagree. But that's boring, right? So I used a lot of material from past, less successful relationships.*

2. How did you two put this book together, since Melinda had most of her essays written when Morgan came on board?

Melinda: *This project came together like every other project between a man and a woman comes together. I had an idea. I plotted. I talked Morgan into doing what I wanted. At first, I think he just wanted to shut me up and make me happy. In the end, he actually enjoyed himself, just like I told him he would. It's an old story.*

Morgan: *I did as I was told.*

3. Did the two of you run into any problematic subjects when writing this book?

Melinda: *Not really. I am the boss. Usually, Morgan does what I want. Almost always, we agreed about where we were going in the book. Once or twice, I gave in gracefully. Morgan is brilliant. If he puts up a fuss about something, he is usually right.*

Morgan: *Is this a trick question? Everything Melinda did was just FINE. Remember, I have to tour with this woman, so I'm erring on the side of caution here.*

4. Were you surprised by any of your coauthor's essays on a particular subject? Enlightened? Enraged?

Melinda: *I am always entertained by Morgan's take on any subject—even when he's totally misguided and wrong.*

Morgan: *Melinda is one of the funniest people I know. Do not read her essays while sipping on anything. I literally did a "spit take" as we used to say in the theatre and shot bourbon right up my nose while reading her essay, "All Dressed Up". Even when she says something totally at odds with the universe and altogether wrong, you can't help but laugh.*

5. Do you think any of the gender-specific behaviors/attitudes in *I Love You—Now Hush* are specific to the South?

Melinda: *Men will be men, and women will love or hate those men, depending upon their mood, the world over, until the earth stops spinning. In the South, there are added cultural complexities that make the interaction between the sexes particularly combustible. When I first started writing about the South, I thought Southern women would be my only audience. I was wrong. Women—and men—from all over the country are*

interested in reading about Southerners. The themes are universal. The Southern part is just an angle.

Morgan: *Southern women are a totally different species. Period. When you see them wandering the streets of some foreign city, such as New York or Philadelphia, they immediately stand out. Sure, the hair and makeup differences are acute. But you'll also notice differences in subtle ways, such as the way they flirt with everyone and call titans of capitalism "honey" or "sugar." So while much of the book applies to all women (I'm sure there's a dame in some third world country saying, "No dear, don't bother yourself with getting water from the well. I'll carry it on my head for the next three miles. That's fine."), it really was written for the women I know best—Southern women.*

6. Do you feel like your essays exemplify the male and female stereotypes accepted in today's society? Do either of you feel you stepped out of the stereotype for your gender?

Melinda: *In many ways, Morgan and I are fairly stereotypical representatives of our people, yet our culture here in the South encourages us to be something more. Good manners down here—even in the twenty-first century—require men to be gentlemen and women to be ladies. Morgan really is a gentleman. He lives up to the hype. I have a little more trouble with my role as a Southern "lady." I'm a little bit suspicious about that noun. However, I cannot deny that if anyone were to say to me that I am NOT a lady, I would be as mortally offended as Scarlett O'Hara. In other words, there is no pleasing me. Southern women, like all women, are more than a stereotype, and one underestimates them at one's peril. What makes this book interesting is the inherent conflict between my XX and Morgan's XY chromosomes. The exaggeration of those differences—which we do well in the South—makes for good theater.*

Morgan: *Mark Twain said that the root of all humor is*

sorrow. There's truth in that, especially when it comes to stereotypes. I think stereotypes can be funny because we get a little tired of them and sometimes feel hemmed in. Speaking personally, Mrs. Murphy and I do often fall into stereotypes. I change the oil in the car; she does the dishes. I fix leaky pipes; she mends the curtains. In that way, our marriage would cause Gloria Steinem, et. al., to have strokes. But then again, we both defy stereotypes as well. I like to cook bread and garden. Our main toilet line busted and Mrs. Murphy fixed it. So I think of stereotypes like a church pew—it's comfortable to sit in the same pew, week after week, and hopefully that gives you the inner peace to explore new emotional boundaries and think a bit past your limit.

7. Do you think this book will help men and women understand each other better?

Melinda: *Good grief, no. This isn't a self-help book. This is just for fun. If reading it helps some man or woman accidentally, of course, I guess that's a good thing . . . but we're not offering any money-back guarantees.*

Morgan: *Sure. I got some good tips from Melinda's chapter on romance. I literally thought, "Boy, I need to remember that tip," on a few of them.*

8. What was the worst part of working with a coauthor? The best?

Melinda: *The worst part about having a coauthor is that you have to halve the profits. The best part is that you have somebody to whine to while you are writing the book who really, really understands.*

Morgan: *Working with Melinda was a complete delight. It was a blast to work with another writer who is funny and dedi-*

cated to her readers. There is no “worst part.”

9. What did you discover about each other during the process of writing this book?

Melinda: *I discovered that Morgan is one of the few people in the world who makes me laugh out loud and that he is the only person in the world with whom I could have written this book. It would not have worked with anyone else.*

Morgan: *I didn't expect Melinda to be a vodka drinker. Or a milk chocolate person. I (wrongly) would have pegged her as a toddy-and-finger-sandwiches lady.*

10. Are either of you writing anything now?

Melinda: *Writers are always writing. Just this week, I began mentally composing an essay in church when the woman ahead of me in the choir loft told me the purse that was bumping me in the leg was from her mother's trousseau, circa 1926. I did not hear one word of the sermon. Occupational hazard.*

Morgan: *I've just finished a drive to all forty-eight continental states in a 1958 Cadillac—a car that came new with four cigar lighters, six drinking tumblers, and no seat belts. Driving a car like that in the world today made for some wild stories I'm eager to share.*