



MWF Seeking BFF: My Yearlong Search for a New Best Friend

By Rachel Bertsche

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In her thought-provoking, uproarious memoir, Bertsche blends the story of her girl-dates (whom she meets everywhere from improv class to friend rental websites) with the latest social research to examine how difficult—and hilariously awkward—it is to make new friends as an adult. In a time when women will happily announce they need a man but are embarrassed to admit they need a BFF, Bertsche uncovers the reality that no matter how great your love life is, you've gotta have friends.

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Editorial Review

Review

Advance Praise for *MWF Seeking BFF*

“This charming, funny chronicle of an ‘experiment in extreme friending’ explores the bonds between women and the idea that the world is peopled with potential BFF’s”

?People, 3 stars

“Bertsche’s skill as a writer and the myriad ways she finds potential dates keep things interesting.... The book is also peppered with intriguing research on topics like what makes friends click, how many friends we need and the health benefits of having friends.... A reader cannot help but root for Bertsche, cheer her successes and consider trying out some of her ideas.” **?Associated Press**

“Written with verve, insight and humor, Bertsche somehow manages to be clever but not judgmental.... In contextualizing her personal experience with recent research, Bertsche writes cleverly, but not glibly, about the challenges young women face today.”

?Chicago Tribune (Editor’s Choice)

“Illuminating and funny.” **? New York Post**

“Bertsche’s natural voice and easy, honest prose may leave readers wanting to befriend the first-time author themselves.”—**American Way Magazine**

“A humbling, hilarious journey....Put MWF on your book club list now.” **?Chicago Magazine**

“A charming exposition of the latest research on social connections.... [*MWF SEEKING BFF*] combines personal narrative and social research in an upbeat and approachable manner.” **?Booklist**

“In this sweet memoir...Bertsche’s pursuit is grounded in what most everyone is looking for—more fulfilling relationships and a sense of belonging—and she bravely provides some of the tools, including openness, persistence, and self-awareness, needed to attain these rewards.”--**Publishers Weekly**

“A hilarious, thoughtful memoir of one woman’s search for a new best friend.” **? Shelf Awareness**

“Friendship is one of the most important elements of a happy life—but it can be tough to make new friends. In *MWF Seeking BFF*, Rachel Bertsche weaves together her engaging and often hilarious adventures in search of a new best friend with the latest research about the science of friendship. I couldn’t put it down.”—**Gretchen Rubin, author of *The Happiness Project***

“Reading about Rachel Bertsche’s search for that special someone, you’ll find yourself thinking about all the friends you’ve ever had -- and the ones you hope are right around the corner. Rachel writes with engaging humor and a measure of poignancy, too. You’ll enjoy joining her on her journey.”-- **Jeffrey Zaslow, author of *The Girls from Ames***

“Genuine, funny and thoroughly inspiring, *MWF Seeking BFF* is a tribute to female friendships and a must-read for anyone who has ever found herself sunk into her couch and scrolling through the phone list feeling

like there's no one to call for a last-minute drink or Sunday brunch.” -- **Rachel Machacek, author of *The Science of Single***

“Rachel Bertsche's yearlong diary of searching for best friendship in a new city is compulsively readable and will plant a smile on your face as you turn the pages. Funny, forthright, and honest as a midnight phone call, Bertsche's zesty hosanna to female bonding defines what it is to be a double-X Millennial.”-- **Sheila Weller, author of *Girls Like Us: Carole King, Joni Mitchell and Carly Simon—and the Journey of a Generation***

“*MWF Seeking BFF* is funny, charming, and so relatable. Throughout Rachel's journey to develop more meaningful, enduring relationships with other women, I found myself wishing she had my number.”-- **Robyn Okrant, author of *Living Oprah***

“I guess you could say Rachel had me at "Hello" — I found myself totally invested in her honest, earnest, oftentimes hilarious quest for meaningful female friendship. Whether you're actively seeking a 'BFF' yourself or simply recognize the value in making quality connections with other women, *MWF Seeking BFF* underscores the profound rewards we women stand to reap when we simply open up, reach out to one another, and go for it. A smart, fun, and inspiring page turner that will surely resonate.”-- **Kelly Valen, author of *The Twisted Sisterhood***

About the Author

Rachel Bertsche is a journalist in Chicago, where she lives with her husband. Her work has appeared in *Marie Claire*, *More*, *Teen Vogue*, *Every Day with Rachael Ray*, *Fitness*, *Women's Health*, CNN.com, and more. Before leaving New York (and all her friends) for the Midwest, Bertsche was an editor at *O: The Oprah Magazine*.

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CHAPTER 1

FRIEND-DATE 1. As I approach the restaurant, there's a girl down the block walking in my direction. I squint to make her out through the January flurries. Average height, brown hair, peacoat. An everygirl. That's got to be her. When I enter Market, the new bar next door to my office, I do a quick once-over of the area near the hostess. Empty. The peacoat girl was definitely Hannah. She'll walk in the door in about 20 seconds. 19. 18_._._My head starts spinning. When she gets here, do we hug? Or handshake? Hug is a little familiar for someone I've only met over email. But a handshake is pretty formal for potential buddies meeting for a drink. We did exchange "I feel like I know you already!" emails. And when you know someone, you hug them, right? 11. 10. 9_._._I don't want to be overzealous in my hugging though. Definitely don't want to be that girl. What if I lean in for an embrace as she sticks out her hand for the shake? We'll end up in one of those one-arm-around-each-other half-hugs. That already happened to me once this week, with a colleague. Yikes.

She's here. We make eye contact. "Rachel?" "Hannah?" She goes right in for the hug. I reciprocate. Flawlessly, I might add. There's no sign I spent the last half-minute rehearsing this in my mind.

Let's back up. My inaugural girl-date and I exchanged our first email two months ago. She came to me via my best friend Sara. Actually, we should back up a bit further. Five years, to be exact.

After I graduated college, I moved home to New York and Matt moved to Philadelphia for law school. About a month into his Villanova stint, he broke up with me. I know now this is the natural course of events for post-grad long-distance relationships. Most of the women I know who married their college sweethearts went through the same thing. But at the time, I was devastated. I was quite sure Matt was out of my life forever and I was furious with myself for wasting years on him. I was lonely and frustrated and decided I

needed a new social outlet to distract me. I started a book club.

I invited my other best friend, Callie, and Callie invited her cousin, Lauren. Then each of us invited two more people. The only requirement was that we bring in ladies the others didn't know. The idea was that if we were strangers, we wouldn't let gossip distract us from the book discussions. For three years, nine of us met every month. Over time, girls moved away and others were invited to replace them. Soon after I moved to Chicago, Hannah was called in as a relief book-clubber. After two years, and one bad breakup, she decided to leave Manhattan for Chicago, her hometown.

I was elated when Sara, who also belonged to the book club, emailed to tell me Hannah was moving here. "You guys will be great friends," she wrote. "She has a book club she can invite you into or she can start a new one with you." Amazing. I'd wanted to be in a book club since I arrived in Chicago but when I mentioned it to my friend from college, she said "How 'bout a dinner club?" I once even tried to finagle an invite to a coworker's book group when I overheard her mention the titles they'd read. "If you ever need another person, I'd love to join!" She looked at me as if I'd asked to join an orgy.

I sent Sara an email shortly before Hannah was due to arrive. "What's her email address? I want to grab her as my BFF ASAP." When I next checked my Gmail, I had two responses from Sara. The first had Hannah's email address. The second said "Oops. Didn't mean to cc her. I guess the ice is broken."

Sara is the smartest girl I know, but her fleeting moments of idiocy are made worse by the fact that she has no idea she's just been a huge idiot. After she typed Hannah's name in the TO: field to get her email address, she left it there. She thought nothing of this slight oversight, cc'ing her again on the "oops!"

She'd just forwarded my first potential girl-date an email in which I laid claim to her as my best friend forever! We'd never even met! Sara is as low-key as I am overexcited, so it all seemed peachy keen to her. I was mortified.

Despite our memorable introduction-we'll laugh about it one day?- Hannah wasn't scared off by the declaration of my intentions. We decided to meet for drinks.

So here we are. Hannah and I settle into our seats, order two glasses of wine and start chatting. When she starts to ask if I'm hungry, I shout "Yes!" before she finishes the question. I eat when I'm nervous.

The conversation is off to a comfortable start. We each explain how we're connected to the other book club girls, which leads to a wider- cast name game. Oh, you went to Tripp Lake, you must know Jill! You're from Glencoe? Do you know the Bernsteins? We come from similar upper-middle-class suburban worlds. We know plenty of people in common.

Hannah grew up forty minutes outside of the city. It becomes clear, as she tells me about her recent move, that she already has plenty of friends in town. "So, you know a ton of people in Chicago?" I'm not happy with where this is going.

"Yeah, about a million."

A pause and then I hear myself saying, "I wish you didn't have so many friends."

Um, that was weird. Did I just say that? That's not what I meant. Well, it is what I meant, but I didn't mean to say it out loud. At least I caught myself before saying, "How many, exactly?" That's what I really want to know.

It may sound like the question of a crazy jealous stalker, but it's actually a logical inquiry. A person can only

maintain so many social contacts. Facebook may trick us into thinking we have five hundred friends, but research shows there's a saturation point for actual interpersonal relationships.

It all goes back to the chimps. When British anthropologist Robin Dunbar was studying the behaviors of primates in 1993, he noticed their social groups were generally limited in size. Chimps, for example, could not maintain tribes of more than 50. For any species of nonhuman primates, Dunbar found the "mean group size is directly related to relative neocortical volume." In English, he's saying the size of your brain determines how many relationships you can maintain. Chimps can have about 50 friends. Since human brains are bigger, we can keep up a wider social network. The exact number Dunbar proposed was 148.4, but the Dunbar Number, as it has come to be known, is 150.

Social network means something different today than it did back in the nineties. Dunbar didn't care about the number of people who follow you on Twitter. He was talking about relationships "that depend on extensive personal knowledge based on face-to-face interaction for their stability." Reading someone's status update doesn't count.

When I came upon Dunbar's Number, I realized it was time to do some math. People don't have to be close friends to qualify as part of the 150. They just have to fit into your social group, even if you haven't spoken in a while. If you saw them, you might "have to do a lot of catching up, but they know you fit into their social world and you know they fit into yours," Dunbar told the Wall Street Journal. "You have a history." I whipped out my wedding invite list. Once I removed the guests who are exclusively Matt's friends, and the significant others who have since broken up with my friends or vice versa, I determined that I had sixty-four invitees who fit into my Dunbar web. Then I checked out the Facebook

friends who didn't make the guest list. There were thirty-six people with whom I have communicated in the last year, or who I would actually stop and talk to if I saw them on the street. I'm generally a social person, but I've been known to run in the other direction to avoid small talk. Family falls under the Dunbar umbrella, too, if you maintain independent relationships with them, so I added another thirty-I've got a lot of cousins. That put me at 130. Twenty spots left for my new BFFs. I considered wearing a sign: 20 VACANCIES, NOW ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS!

You can see why I want to know exactly how many friends Hannah has here. If she has a big family and a large network of buddies in both NYC and Chicago, she may have already hit her 150. If she has reached friendship saturation, what am I doing here?

Three girls about our age sit down at the table next to us. As if trying to prove just how popular she is, I see a spark of recognition flicker across Hannah's face.

Suddenly, "Hiiii!"

One of the girls who just sat down is squealing at the sight of my date. Hannah looks at me sheepishly ("I wasn't kidding!") and gets up to greet this long-lost friend. As they briefly catch up, I stare at my food. I can't help thinking of an article I just read about a British journalist. She struck up a friendly conversation with a man who then told her he had no vacancies for friends. He maintained a one-in, one-out policy. Six months later, she got a card notifying her that the guy was now open for friendship. But Hannah agreed to this dinner, so she must at least think she can handle a new friend. A new best friend? We'll see.

Once she settles back into her seat, Hannah tells me about her recent breakup. She'd gone to law school in Boston while her boyfriend was in Manhattan. After graduation she moved to New York City to be with him and took the state bar, only to have him dump her a year later. "Does Matt know any single guys I might want to date?" I rack my brain. Most of the people we know here are coupled off. There is this one guy_..._.

"Who is he?" she asks. "I bet I know him."

I tell her David's name.

"Who are you? Who are you and where do you come from?" Those are her words, and I fall a little bit in friend-love. She's witty! She's quick! Could this search really be so easy?

My friend David, it turns out, is her close family friend. They've known each other since the womb. The setup is not an option, but the coincidence has us laughing. Ever since she moved to Chicago, her friends have been trying to set her up. "I told them I had a girl- date tonight_._._'cause this is a girl-date, you know?" Uhh, yeah, I know. "They keep telling me 'Screw girl dates. You need to go on boy dates.'_"

I wonder if this will be a common theme. Single women my age are more interested in meeting potential boyfriends than potential best friends, though I would argue the latter's a lot harder to come by and plenty more emotionally nourishing. A husband is wonderful, and Matt makes me laugh. He makes me feel beautiful, loved, protected, cared for. But when I need to talk my feelings to death, really sit and analyze why I am confused/lonely/ecstatic, he's just not up to it. It's not for lack of trying, but men can only go over the same thing so many times. They don't understand that, as women, we crave having someone validate our feelings. And then do it twice more.

When I first moved to Chicago, I took a job that turned out to be a disaster. I was to be the senior editor at a new luxury magazine. The job, and the magazine launch, kept getting pushed back until the company decided to have me "train" in their Florida office so I wouldn't up and quit. For six weeks, I spent Monday through Friday in Miami, working as a glorified intern and utterly miserable. I had just relocated to end a long-distance relationship and here I was, in a city I hadn't signed up for, and farther away from Matt than ever. When I finally decided to quit, I needed to run the idea by anyone and everyone whose opinion I valued. Matt's response was "I can't tell you what to do, but I will support your decision regardless." A textbook answer. Such a good guy. But what I wanted was someone to talk it out with me for hours. To say, "You should quit" or even, "You shouldn't." Callie, who herself had quit a job recently, stayed on the phone and walked me through the different scenarios, letting me talk out how I would make a living if I put this Miami disaster behind me. Sara said, "Of course you should quit. You're miserable! You're young! Work at a bakery." I needed someone who would listen as I repeated myself in case a new thought came up. Someone who would tell me what they already knew I wanted to hear so that I would be more confident in my decision. Though Matt said everything right, I got the emotional support I needed from my friends.

I don't tell Hannah about my search-I haven't yet worked out the ethics of disclosure-but when we talk about leaving Manhattan I deliver my usual line: "I don't miss the city, but I miss my friends." I explain that while I do know some girls in Chicago, I haven't made close friends like the ones I had in New York. In the three years I was in our common book club, the nine of us became extremely tight. We'd gone from casual acquaintances and reading buddies to real-life let-me-tell-you-my-problems friends. That's what I miss, I tell her.

The good news, which she told me when we first emailed, is that Hannah was recently invited into a book club and got me an invite, too. In the meantime, she says, I should come to her friend Leah's house for dinner on Wednesday.

"This Wednesday?"

"Yeah, she's having some girls over for a get-together."

It's Monday. Wednesday seems a little quick. Doesn't the two-day rule say no post-date communication for forty-eight hours? Seeing each other again that soon must be a definite no-no. But friend-dating doesn't have

the same rules as romantic-dating. In fact, it doesn't have any rules at all. I can probably write my own. Still, tomorrow night is yoga and Thursday I have plans with my Mom, so Wednesday is my only weeknight to go home, watch Modern Family, and spend some quality time with Matt. On top of that, being the only stranger at dinner with a group of girls who are already close friends doesn't sound appealing at all. I'll have to pretend to laugh at stories I don't get about people I don't know. I'll probably stuff my face just to have something to do while they all gab about their ninth-grade English teacher or some other inside joke that makes me feel like an outsider. It's hard to know how to behave in those situations. You can jump right in, asking "Who?" and "Where was this?" or you can sit back and let them have their laughs. I almost always opt for the latter, sometimes to my detriment. What I think is letting them have their fun, they might take as she-thinks-she's-too-cool.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Dominick Carter:

Have you spare time for any day? What do you do when you have much more or little spare time? Yep, you can choose the suitable activity intended for spend your time. Any person spent all their spare time to take a wander, shopping, or went to typically the Mall. How about open as well as read a book eligible MWF Seeking BFF: My Yearlong Search for a New Best Friend? Maybe it is to become best activity for you. You already know beside you can spend your time using your favorite's book, you can cleverer than before. Do you agree with it is opinion or you have different opinion?

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