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WEB EXCLUSIVE

INTERVIEW

Gurley Talk

Newsweek, February 4, 2000

Helen Gurley Brown's new autobiography comes in at 287 pages. But since its release earlier this week, almost all media coverage has centered on the short passage in which she describes being "kept" by a Hollywood producer during her early twenties. "That's three pages of the book," Brown tells Newsweek. "That's what people have gotten all hot and bothered about. But I guess you can't blame them for that."

She should know. This is the woman who wrote "Sex and the Single Girl" in 1962 and whose Cosmopolitan, which she edited for more than three decades, preached pro-sex values to a generation of females. Now, at 76, Brown has written her first memoir.

In "I'm Wild Again: Snippets from My Life and a Few Brazen Thoughts," the cultural trailblazer tells tales from her colorful past in her usual fast and frank style. Brown also has a lot to say about sexual politics in American society in 2000 as well. Newsweek's B. J. Sigismund stepped into her parlor and took down some of her thoughts on adultery, exercise and the intern.



'Wild' Woman: Helen Gurley Brown in 1967, one of her first years as editor of Cosmopolitan (Archive Photos)

Newsweek: Let's start with Monica. You were recently quoted as saying that thousands of women would have done the same thing if they'd had the chance.

Brown: I never felt she should have apologized to the American public. It was hypocritical for anyone to think she should have. He was the president and he was attractive... Should all young women do what she did? No. When I've been asked if she's a Cosmo girl, I've always said in terms of being involved with a married man, yes, and it's not the end of the world. But she fell in love, which is something we *don't* recommend. I've also always said no real-life Cosmo girl would have a girlfriend like Linda Tripp.

If you were still running Cosmopolitan, would you put her on the cover?

No. Never. We rarely used celebrities anyway and when we did they were the most gorgeous celebrities.

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International Edition

Special Issues

How did you feel about what the President did?

I wrote this book at the height of the Clinton-Monica affair, when people were going bonkers. There have been numerous other presidents who were equally active. What's the big deal? What's the surprise? Your sex life is your own business. For the country to go bongos seemed absurd to me. People being forced out of the military? How dopey can you get? Clinton continued to be extremely efficient. He got us through a situation in Bosnia; the economy's never been better. If someone decides not to be faithful, that's not your business, and doesn't interfere with their job performance.

You address adultery in your book.

I talk about adultery and men in particular not being faithful and how horrendous a proposition that seems to be for a lot of people in this country. Adultery is about sex and feeling good and feeling delicious. There's nothing in the world like new sex with someone that you really enjoy going to bed with. But that doesn't always happen with [the person] it should.

What are your thoughts on monogamy?

You don't talk it over. You talk about where you're going to live. You talk about more practical things than signing contracts for fidelity. If people decide to do something extra-curricular in terms of sex, the *last* thing on Earth you do is talk to your mate about it. And you do not confess. Unless the evidence is totally there, and you can't deny it, one *should* deny it. Just lie and say no.

And yourself?

I've personally remained faithful, but I stopped being chaste when I was 19 and got married at 37. There were a lot of years in there to engage in romantic or sexual happenings. Then I found a good man [husband David Brown] who could supply all the things I needed in life. In those years [before marriage], a couple of men I loved were notorious girl-pleasers... I personally found it hurtful when a man was cheating on me.

Let's talk about the book. Why did you choose to include the story about being kept?

That was part of my early life that I thought was interesting. I don't think I made a mistake. But this is a really candid memoir and it was a part of my life. People have asked if I'd recommend it. Of course not. But I have no regrets or guilt. For me at the time, it seemed like the right thing to do. I had serious financial responsibilities [to her mother and sister, who was an invalid] and he wasn't the worst news in the world.

Newsweek: Talk about your current exercise regimen.

I take a lot of abuse because I'm skinny. But your body is yours and you can make it do whatever you want it to do. You don't have to get permission from anyone else to work your own body... you also don't have to be beautiful, rich or famous. I'm a terrible athlete, but exercise is there for you to keep your body in shape. And I eat so much. I'm a cookie-holic. Last night I ate 12 chewy macaroons. As far as my own exercise, it's gotten more serious. Just a month ago, I went from 7-pound dumbbells to 10, which is quite a lot for someone who weighs 100 pounds.

What would you most like readers to take from your memoir?

I think it would be pretentious to think they could learn anything from my life except that you can start from way back and get beyond your difficulties and have a pretty good time of it just with your own effort. You don't have to have a dream or know where you're going if you just keep the work in front of you. It's called self-discipline. Use common sense and postpone pleasure until at least the end of the day.

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