



Up For Renewal: What Magazines Taught Me About Love, Sex, and Starting Over

Cathy Alter

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By age thirty-seven, Cathy Alter had made a mess of her life. With a failed marriage already under her belt, she was continuing down the path of poor decisions, one paved with a steady stream of junk food, unpaid bills, questionable friends, and highly inappropriate men. So she sat down and asked herself what she truly wanted. *A decent guy. A nicer home. More protein.* When she took a closer look at her wants, she noticed something that seemed very familiar -- with the addition of exclamation points, her list could easily be transformed into the cover lines on every women's magazine: Find the love you deserve! Paint to the rescue! Eggs-actly perfect meals!

So Cathy gave over her life to the glossies for the next twelve months, resolving to follow their advice without question. By the end of her subscriptions, she would get rid of upper-arm jiggle, crawl out of debt, host the perfect dinner party, run a mile without puking, engage in better bathtub booty, ask for a raise, and rehaul her apartment.

Well, at least that was the premise of her social experiment. What actually happened was much less about cosmetic change and much more about internal transformation. Singular in its voice and yet completely universal, *Up for Renewal* will appeal to all who have ever wondered if they could actually make their life over.

Up For Renewal: What Magazines Taught Me About Love, Sex, and Starting Over Details

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From Reader Review Up For Renewal: What Magazines Taught Me About Love, Sex, and Starting Over for online ebook

Jane Turner says

Cathy Alter worships the thing I love most in the world: Lady Mags. After a year-long odyssey, she goes from cubicle sex to self-respect and marriage to a Chew (half Chinese, half Jew) with the help of Cosmo, Self and Friends. "The fact of the matter was," she writes, "I did need to be better. And that's why I had found these magazines so surprisingly liberating." Her book acknowledges her debt to magazines, and renews the favor.

Katrina says

This book is a memoir about the one year in the life of Cathy Alter. In the beginning of the book Cathy is a recently divorced, thirty nine year old who's life is out of control. She parties until all hours of the night, gets her lunch out of the vending machine at work and sleeps with her co-worker in her cubicle with no inhibitions. Standing in front of a magazine display, like the cover, she has an idea. What if, she lived her life for one year following the directions of magazines? Then, she does just that. Each month she has a new thing to work on. Month one, plastic wrap.

This book is laugh out loud funny! I was giggling in front of my co-workers the whole time I read this book. When I started reading it, my first thought was, "What and idiot! Who would do this?" but you begin to realize that Cathy had hit rock bottom and if turning to magazines was going to help her out of that slump, great. I am sure that learning how to wrap a sandwich in plastic wrapped perfection might not turn your life around, it was the beginning of something big for Cathy.

Cathy is each one of us. She is insecure and her own worst critic. She had made poor decisions in her life and she just might make a few mistakes today. But she is also sexy and funny and perky and willing to take risks. She is relate-able and by the end of the book you feel like you are saying goodbye to your new best friend.

Lexi says

Dreadful self-absorbed nonsense. Good idea- Alter decided to take one year, and follow the advice in magazines to see if her life would improve. It did- and maybe dumbing the jerky boyfriend and learning to cook etc helped with that. What was annoying about it was that she never said how she could afford to spend Beauty Month trying all sorts of new makeups and spas, she never talked about how Clothing Month would devastate a normal person's budget, she never talked about how she could afford all the new pots and pans that went into Cooking Month. Apparently, freelance writers make a lot more money than one could have guessed. I just kind of wanted to slap her silly, which isn't a great way to enjoy a book.

Kasia says

I feel that it's easy to relate to Cathy in this novel, a woman who reads a lot of magazines to somehow learn all the mystical workings of the female world - how to look good, feel good and attract a good mate with some cooking and exercise tips involved. We all read magazines for various reasons, I enjoy the makeup and fashion the most alongside health magazines and subscribe to almost all the mags that Cathy has been reading herself but sometimes they lay around for months before I get to them but unlike the main heroine I do not treat them as my pillar of salvation.

The book was light and fun, enjoyable with some really good moments that had me bursting out laughing, especially when the Cooking month was involved, at the end of the book, I found myself thoroughly enjoying the authors wit and humor, she's very skilled at suave jokes but also great at making the reader laugh with obvious things. Judging from the video on Amazons page this book was pretty autobiographical, the author clearly has written about experiences she had to deal with as she was ready for all kinds of change. I consider myself very blessed and lucky with all aspects of my life, but books such as this one give some hope to those who need a nudge or help with changing things for the better.

The book was easy to read and a lot fun; I was always trying to find some time in my days to read it and will definitely read more of the authors work, she totally clicked with my idea of a relaxing time out reading until daily life required all of my attention back.

- Kasia S.

Nataliia Kucher says

This is the great book with unpredictable moments but very actual problems. I love happy endings and I am really satisfied that I managed to proceed with it after the hard start and doubts about the sense of it.

Leslie says

Early on the author chides women who, in the 1970s, wore mini-dresses not for themselves, but to attract men. Then, the rest of the book is how the author re-made herself from head to toe, both inside and out, to attract men. I don't get it.

I'd suggest "be yourself" and "be happy you're healthy".

Samantha says

When I read the blurb about this book, I was excited and very interested in seeing what the author found out. By about the 2nd chapter, I was bored and tired of her and her views. The book's premise is that a woman who is recently divorce takes out 14 different subscriptions to popular magazines and follow the advice to change her life. I think that sounds like a great experiment. She starts out talking about her divorce and how

she is having an affair with a co-worker that she hates in her office...really in her office. The author talks about how her co-worker comes into her cubicle, exposes himself and they have sex on the desk. However, she doesn't relate that to anything in the book. I thought she would talk about how she change by reading in the magazines and now learned how to break that off or change it into a real relationship. She doesn't. It was just a story to either annoy or shock the reader.

About halfway through the book, the author doesn't listen to the magazines anymore at all. At least in the first part of the book, she picked and chose what she listened to. Then she kinda quits. I just found this book to be like a series of magazine articles thrown together about her life. I didn't want a book about her life. I wanted to know about the experiment and did it work. Did it help? Or was it just totally stupid to pay attention to the magazines? Yes, I kinda already knew the answer but I chose this book because I wanted some kind of hard facts. I was just disappointed that I didn't get what the book promised. If I wouldn't have gotten this book for free from Amazon Vine then I never would have read it or finished it.

Sarah says

As those of you who breathlessly follow my Goodreads affairs (hello, imaginary friend Gavin) may be aware, I had put this in the "quit" pile, on the grounds that it was a gross misapplication of the One-Year Memoir genre and also that the author/heroine was intolerable. However, my husband, who declines to read things I recommend LIKE IT'S HIS JOB decided that this book, about a woman who tries to improve herself for a year using advice from Cosmo, Glamour, O, etc., was the one he'd like to spend time with in the restroom and then discuss with me. So I read it from middle to end and then beginning to middle and here are some tips to take home:

- 1) Maybe it's not a dealbreaker if your much-younger boyfriend is slaveringly into motorcycles, like if he's really nice to you, but I think it probably is.
 - 2) I don't know if being self-deprecating about being self-absorbed really works. Many have tried.
 - 3) I find it slightly creepy when adults call their mothers Mommy. Not that there's anything wrong with that.
 - 4) One-Year Memoirs are only funny if you go kind of overboard with your self-assigned task; Alter just goes overboard with being obnoxious.
 - 5) This is the last time I will be sneakily reverse-psychologized into de-quitting.
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Tayla says

This is a great summer read. Kind of alarmed that I subscribe to most of the magazines that the author chooses to help her makeover her life (or maybe that's a good thing...?). Love that it's an honest look at women's magazines and doesn't come down on them too heavily one way or another.

Karen says

My Review of Up for Renewal: What Magazines Taught Me About Love, Sex, and Starting Over by Cathy Alter

Up for Renewal: What Magazines Taught Me About Love, Sex, and Starting Over is the delightful and intelligent account of the real life journey by Cathy Alter to see if in her late 30s she could change her life for

the better. In a unique, witty approach, she examines the problems she faces and decides to try and conquer them by studying and following the directions found in the popular women's magazines that she and so many women subscribe to and revere. She committed to taking one year to follow the advice from magazines such as Elle, Marie Claire, Allure, Cosmopolitan, and Glamour. She imagined that at the end of the year her physical, social, financial, work, home, and romantic aspects in her life would all come together to make her a new and happier woman.

With what could be a light chick-lit type book, Alter instead adds characters from her real life that add just enough authenticity to the story to realize you aren't reading a light "beach read", but rather a woman's journey into discovering herself and rebuilding her life. Alter's reality includes her perfectionist mother and the intricate relationship they share, as well as a very close friend who is battling a serious illness. Of course, a serious younger man love interest, Karl, is included along with his domineering Chinese mother as well as her not too helpful psychiatrist.

As Cathy Alter takes this year long journey, she discovers many things about herself. Gradually, Alter and the reader will begin to see that the magazines aren't really what Cathy needed to make herself happy. An astute reader will also learn for themselves the same thing that the author did. She finds that anything in your life can be changed if you have made the decision to do it. Recognizing that you DO need to make changes in your life is half the battle and once that decision is made, half the battle is won.

I found this book to be an enjoyable read and one that was entertaining as well as informative. I found myself nodding in agreement so many times as the discoveries, as well as the mistakes, Alter encountered. They were the same kind of things any of us can face and change with a positive attitude.

Submitted by Karen Haney, August, 2008

Sasha says

Up for Renewal was a charming book. Light-hearted and a quick-read. I would recommend it to any woman who grew up reading Cosmo, Glamour, etc. I think the part that was most amusing was any section that dealt with her mother-in-law who is Chinese. The dramatics of the mother struck close to home. :)

Lauren says

While the author was cute and likeable, the book just didn't work. I'm biased against women's magazines to start with, so I was interested in reading a somewhat objective account of following their guidance.

Unfortunately, this book was more an homage to love than having anything to do with women's magazines, and it wasn't even that good of an homage. Great, I'm happy for you, but the book was a piece of fluff that was even more trivial and superficial than was to be expected (and let's face it, I was expecting an awful lot of superficiality!!!)

Rebecca says

Women is on somewhat of a downward spiral and decides she needs to change some things about her life. Magazines are always trying to make you better, they must work if they continue to sell! For a year she puts all her confidence into magazines and abides by them to see what happens. It seems like I am hardly a chapter into this book when she meets her new boyfriend. She is a bit older than her current boy and has been married once before but within like 6 months, she is already hunting for the ring. It seemed so unlike the character we met at the very start of the book. She tries to tell us, that she isn't on the lookout for getting married anytime soon, but it seems like anytime the boy bends down, she starts to shriek in her head with giddiness on what she thinks is coming. It finally does and the book seems to do a whole change. The magazines are hardly mentioned and it's all wedding all the time. I wanted to like the protagonist, but I just didn't at all. She was barely out of one (miserable) marriage and it seemed like she couldn't wait to dive into the next! What I get from magazine covers is GIRL POWER! But I guess this author did not because even though she tried to say she wasn't on the lookout for a new man, I got the total opposite impression. Yes, she was trying to find a "better" man than she was used to, but it felt too forced. Meh. I liked the writing, but not the story.

Autumn says

This book gets two stars just for its premise and the author's willingness to follow through on the experiment and a half star for being occasionally amusing. But I'm rounding down on the half star because I found the writing, and writer, so irritating. This might have been an excellent 6,000-to-10,000-word magazine feature, though I know few mags would have been willing to publish something so likely to focus on their inherent flaws. What I perceived as the writer's flaws made reading the story difficult. Maybe if you know her you'll like her. But interspersed with her frequent crying, self-doubt, poor decision-making and general neuroses were references to her work as a reporter and writer -- and I didn't see that resume in this book. To be fair, I think she needed a better editor. The experiment -- turning one's life over to women's magazines for a year -- is a great idea, and her willingness to focus on and share her weaknesses is admirable. She also did have some light, amusing moments. But overall I wasn't impressed. And it's e-mail -- with a hyphen; the e stands for something.
