

Choice is the joy of single life

Scene One: It's 3am. You stagger out of bed bleary-eyed to respond to the cry of a fretful eight-week-old baby. It's the sixth time you or your partner have had to leave your lovely warm bed in the past six hours. The description "living dead" seems peculiarly apt.

You love your baby dearly and you know this stage will soon pass, but right now all you can think about is what 3am meant when you were enjoying the single life.

Prologue: 3am and you are so weary you can hardly put one foot in front of the other.

But what a night! After dining lavishly with friends you finished up with a few relaxed late-night cocktails at that new trendy bar. And why not? You don't have to please anyone but yourself. Ah, the joys of the single life.

Reversing the typical before-and-after sequences of popular commercials can show us how life is and how it used to be. While no parent would swap the joys of dealing with babies, honest ones will admit to occasionally longing to return to single life, just for a few hours.

In the recent census, 32 out of 100 respondents were single. Many of them lead fulfilling and rewarding lives without needing permanent relationships and children. Friendships can supply many pleasures and supports.

And if you're a cat-lover, perhaps the single life has a lot to do with the feline attitude to life. Being single allows us to be self-centred when we feel like it, to be loving towards those close to us when we choose to be and to purr contentedly when people please us.

But if you don't feel like company, it's quite acceptable to hole up in a cosy corner and luxuriate in our own company, just like a cat.

Not that single people don't have a sense of responsibility towards parents and friends, it's just not so constant.

There are always smug married and elderly aunts who think that being single is about being weird or feeling desperate.

Next time you're cornered by one of these at Christmas and they want to know all about your love life, just tell them it's very exciting and throw the question back to them. That should keep them quiet long enough for you to escape.

Why do people assume having a permanent relationship is tantamount to success in life? Their attitude implies that relationships are like over-size T-shirts – one size fits all. That just isn't true.

What suits one person does not necessarily suit the next, and nowhere is this more true than in relationships. Humans are social by nature and we are sustained emotionally, physically and spiritually by our connections with many people. Relying too much on one person has its downsides.

While an intimate relationship with one person does provide expression and engagement at a level we don't enjoy with everyone, there are other ways of feeling emotionally enriched.

You can get this from a wide range of relationships and experiences you have with different people. Each relationship gives you something very different and adds to who you are.

The greatest thing about single life can be summed up in one word: choice. You have an enormous freedom around what you do and when you do it.

Fancy grilled cheese on toast with a glass of red in front of the TV? No problem- the only person you have to please is yourself.

And if you feel like staying out till 3am all you have to worry about is how you might feel the next day.

When you are single, there are fewer people close-by with whom you have to negotiate to get something to happen. You have a greater range of movement and you can do things with many different people for whom you are also important.

That's the joy of single life – variety.

Survival tips

- **Remember that being emotionally nurtured can be achieved in many different ways**
- **Relationships are not like big T-shirts – one size does not fit all**
- **Single life gives you freedom to do what you want, when you want.**