

*'I finally
found love*
**AFTER
DATING
MY BEST
FRIEND'**

What would happen if you dated your best male friend? It's a situation two graphic designers – Jessica Walsh, 28, and Timothy Goodman, 33 (both right) – put to the test. Their experiment led to a hit blog which has been optioned for a movie and comes out as a book this month. Here, they tell *Grazia* how the outcome shocked them both

PHOTOS: MIKE MCGREGOR
AS TOLD TO ANTONIA HOYLE



TRUE STORY

LOVE CAN
be

EVERY
RELATIONSHIP
is an
EXPERIMENT

JESSICA'S STORY: Last month, Tim and I stood on a Mexican beach as I prepared to say my wedding vows. Once the best of friends, we knew when we started dating, two years ago, that embarking on a romance would be a risk. Luckily, the risk paid off, and ended in marriage – just not to each other. But although Tim was my wedding guest, rather than my groom, it was our failed relationship that taught me you can't force love – and indirectly led me to my husband, Zak.

Tim and I came up with the idea for *40 Days Of Dating* in December 2012. We'd been friends for four years but had wildly contrasting attitudes to love. I was a worrier who fell in love too quickly; Tim, meanwhile, was a serial commitment-phobe, forgetting the names of the four women he'd be seeing at any one time.

There was a physical attraction between us and we got on, so after discussing our various dating traumas we decided that by dating *each other* we'd either fall in love or work out where we were going wrong. We came up with rules before starting the experiment in March 2013: couples' therapy once a week and we weren't to see other people. We agreed to date for 40 days (how long it takes to break a bad habit, according to research) and document everything in private journals, which we'd post online once the experiment was done. ▶

« TIM TAUGHT ME TO BE FUN, RATHER THAN SERIOUS AND INTENSE »

Tim and I met through work in New York and had a close circle of mutual friends, so I was nervous about potentially ruining our friendship. But despite conflicting attitudes (I wanted to talk about everything, Tim wanted to let it happen naturally), the attraction between us grew and we ended up having sex on Day 25. After the build-up of sexual tension it was both a relief and a lot of fun, and it made me more interested in us pursuing a proper relationship.

On Day 33 we decided to hold hands for eight hours straight and even went to the bathroom without breaking contact. Tim suggested we went away for a weekend to break his phobia about going away with girlfriends. Yet despite – or because of – our growing closeness, we rowed. He accused me of being unable to make decisions. I grew frustrated with his inability to open up emotionally. By Day 40, I knew that what gave us a good chemistry as friends was too complex for a romance. I was disappointed, but not distraught, when Tim said he wanted to break up that day.

I met Zak, 36, a cinematographer, online that June, before we'd had a chance to put our journals online. Ironically, this was the moment when Tim suddenly decided he had feelings for me. I was shocked but knew Zak was the one I wanted.

Thankfully, Zak was completely cool about Tim and me posting our blogs. I was terrified about sharing so many intimate details about my love life – especially when the blog notched up 500,000 hits a day. The attention we received was overwhelming: we were shouted at by strangers who had their own ideas about

whether Tim and I should be a couple.

It's testament to how laid-back Zak is that the attention didn't bother him. In fact, he proposed last February, eight months after we met. I was surprised by how quickly our relationship progressed, but it felt totally different from my other romances: Tim had taught me to be easy and fun, rather than serious and intense.

Tim was taken aback when I told him I was getting married, but he was happy for me. I'm thankful our amazing experience taught me to let life happen naturally – and led me to the man I love.

TIM'S STORY: I spent my twenties worrying that there was always a smarter, more beautiful girl around the corner. I ran away from relationships, scared to commit. So the idea of Jess and I using ourselves as catalysts to break bad habits appealed. I'd always thought about making a move on Jessie but there was never a good moment as she was always in a relationship and I was wary of ruining the friendship.

The first half of the project was tough. I was too worried about jeopardising our friendship to really open up to Jess. But whenever she backed off, I grew more into her, constantly blowing hot and cold.

We first slept together on Day 25 at her place after a date. The next morning things felt awkward, but exciting. Jess ticked most of my boxes – she was fun, talented and ambitious – but over the next two weeks I felt pressured into investing more into the relationship than I was ready for.

By Day 39 – when we were on our

weekend trip at Disneyworld – Jess was demanding to know whether we had a future outside of the project. That's when I decided it was best if we didn't continue. As strong as my feelings for Jess were, I still didn't think I was capable of being a good boyfriend. She deserved better. We both cried as we agreed to break up.

But in the weeks afterwards, without the pressures of the project, I started to wonder whether our relationship *could* have worked in real life. And when Jess met Zak I inevitably wanted her even more. I wished I'd tried harder and messaged her to say I still had feelings for her.

Instead of being hurt when she said she didn't want to try again, I realised she was right. The tension between us that makes a romantic relationship impossible, perversely gave us the basis for a great friendship. Being forced to share my emotions via the blog was therapeutic. I realised if I really wanted a meaningful relationship, I needed to be more proactive and I've had a couple of girlfriends since the project ended.

Of course it felt weird when Jess told me she was getting married. Part of me worried why I wasn't doing the same.

But it's not a competition and I was really happy to be at her wedding. I may currently be single but I'm no longer scared of commitment. And she's taught me to stop looking for perfection. ■

'40 Days Of Dating' by Timothy Goodman and Jessica Walsh (£18.99, Abrams)

Have you dated a best male friend? Let us know at feedback@graziamagazine.co.uk



Jess and Zak – 'The One' – on their wedding day in Mexico