

Love | November 7, 2019

10 Women on the Places, Foods, and Things They Refused to Let a Breakup Ruin

Don't mind me, just reclaiming my life.

By [Aimée La Fountain](#)



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Once you and a partner have **broken up**, walking past your (former) favorite date spot might flood you with painful memories, make your heart plummet, and thoroughly ruin your day. Well, time to devise a new route that completely takes you out of your way just so you never have to experience that awful feeling again. Or when “your” song pops up on your playlist—ah, the betrayal of shuffle—you might rush to delete the track, convinced by the lump in your throat that you can never listen to it again.

After some time passes, though, reclaiming things that were hallmarks of your **relationship** can be a great way to reconnect with yourself. It's not about living in the past, it's about rebranding those things by creating new associations in the present. Breaking up can be so rough that you deserve to find little glimmers of pleasure wherever you can, even if it's in something you used to enjoy with your ex. To show you how it's done, below, 10 women share the things they refused to let a breakup ruin for them.

1. Pete's Tavern in New York City

“The first time my ex took me to ‘his favorite bar,’ I was skeptical, imagining something dingy and loud. But **Pete's Tavern** in Gramercy was something special. We first went during the holidays, and the dark interior was illuminated with Christmas lights draped from the ceiling.

The food was to die for. Not knowing the culinary treat that awaited me, I ordered their eponymous Spaghetti a la Pete's. The waiter told me there were four ingredients in the sauce: San Marzano tomatoes, olive oil, basil, and garlic—so much garlic. Enough garlic to melt your face off. Oh my god. It was

the best thing I'd ever had, and that was saying something for Manhattan.

My ex and I would go to Pete's to celebrate special occasions, and when I moved to Gramercy, I ate there once a week. But after we broke up, it seemed intuitive that he'd get Pete's in the split. After all, it had been his favorite bar for longer than I'd ever laid claim to it.

That only lasted until I met my now-husband about two months after my ex and I **broke up**. I dragged him to Pete's, excitedly showing him just how much garlic was in the spaghetti. (Seriously, it tasted like at *least* 11 cloves on a light day.) He loved seeing my enthusiasm, and we started going regularly.

We've since moved away from New York, but my love for Pete's persists. Every time I'm in the city, I make a special pit stop. I'm not worried I'll see my ex. Even if I do, now it's my favorite bar, too. So there." —Katherine L., 35

2. Long walks by the water

"After my most difficult breakup, I thought I'd have a hard time enjoying long walks by the water near my home in Fall River, MA. I thought I'd never be able to look at it the same way again. Taking those walks was one of my favorite things to do with my girlfriend at the time. Most of our dates began or ended with the waterfront. She and I had been best **friends** for years and when our relationship didn't work out, I was heartbroken because I was sure I'd not only lost a romantic partner but also one of my favorite people.

But after she broke up with me, I found going back to the water cathartic. It took a few years, but eventually, she and I became friends again. She's still one of my closest friends to this day. Although I don't live in that city anymore, I actually had my wedding shower at a restaurant on that VERY same waterfront. My ex came to the shower, and we laughed and cried and talked about how we used to walk there. She was one of my and my wife's bridesmaids on our wedding day; my dad talked in his speech about how I actually came out to him because I wanted permission to date her. We both laughed. So did her boyfriend and my wife. I'm glad I never gave up on that waterfront—or on our friendship." —Alaina L., 26

3. The Strand bookstore

"When my ex and I lived together, we shared an apartment in the East Village near The Strand bookstore. Some weekends after brunch and chai, we would stroll over to the dollar shelves and get lost while searching through them. He'd search through one end, I'd search through the other, and we'd meet somewhere in the middle. Those moments felt perfect. I'd always dreamed of living in New York and strolling through a local bookstore with my partner. For a writer, the idea was seductively romantic. It felt like I'd achieved everything I wanted.

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But like any good high, there was always the comedown. After we inevitably broke up, that stretch of **books** made me feel distant from myself and who I thought I'd be. Newly single, I'd shudder as I'd pass by The Strand and eventually avoided the block so I stopped walking past it at all.

Over time, my love of used books trumped the pain of what wasn't meant to be. I started going back to The Strand. It's comforting now to realize how books really do make the best, lasting lovers." —Rachel W., 33

4. Road riding shoes

"I got into road riding 25 years ago. The guy who introduced me to it was all leg with a head of gigantic curly hair. One day, I watched him bunny-hop a speed bump on his way out from visiting me, looking supremely competent, and I thought to myself, 'I want that.' (I swear, I was thinking about the skills.)

THE STRAND BOOKSTORE

That summer, after I bought a **bike**, I signed me and my boyfriend up for a charity ride from Boston to New York. It was 350 miles, and the boyfriend, who had been a bike mechanic, informed me that I'd need some real road riding shoes. They were expensive. They were also fugly, accented with neon green and pink, so drivers on the road could see you better.

We broke up four years later, but I held on to the fugly shoes. I was already in love with cycling by the time our relationship ended. It had become a part of my life in a way the guy never would, so it felt only natural to keep wearing the shoes.

A year after that, I completed another long-distance bike ride, this time cycling 700 miles across Montana. I made more friends who rode and eventually learned to mountain bike and bought new shoes for that, too. Those shoes didn't last as long, but those danged fugly road riding shoes lasted me nearly 20 years. I'd kept in touch with the ex, so when the shoes finally started to crack at the heels, I texted him a photo. He LOLed back. Then I stuck them back on the shelf next to my new shoes, just because I really did love the damn things, and because they still outlasted another couple of charity bicycle rides, a couple of half-Ironman **traces**, an Ironman itself, and two road bikes." —YiShun L., 45

5. The Princess Bride

"My ex and I quoted 'The Princess Bride' in our **wedding** vows. We started by having the officiant use the 'mawwiage' monologue from the wedding in the movie, but we also said, 'As you wish' instead of 'I do' for our vows. I really meant it all, but after 10 years, the relationship ended. I was disabled with two kids. Shortly after we broke up, *The Princess Bride* came on TV. At first, I thought I shouldn't watch it, but then I thought, 'Well, why not?'

The Princess Bride has been my favorite movie and favorite book for much longer than I even knew my ex. I'm not going to let our breakup ruin it for me. Both the book and movie are classics. I'll just enjoy them with someone who can live up to that story, that's all." —Karolyn M., 41

6. Biscuits and gravy

"I love having biscuits and gravy for breakfast. Every time I go out to eat and it's on the menu, I get it. I especially like it if the gravy has chunks of sausage in it. Yum.

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After seeing how much I loved biscuits and gravy, my ex taught me how to make it. It was so delicious, and I didn't know it was so easy. After we broke up, I didn't have biscuits and gravy for about four months because it would make me miss him. What made me start eating it again was realizing how much joy I felt in the moments of making biscuits and gravy instead of focusing on not having those moments with my ex. Now, I can eat biscuits and gravy and not let an ex-boyfriend affect something I loved before he came into my life." —Megan B., 36

7. Michigan's upper peninsula

"When I got divorced, I lost access to a cottage my ex's family owned in Michigan's Upper Peninsula that I adored. Going to the cottage and the UP, in general, was like going to a private space. It was a chance to be away from the world and be ensconced in **nature**. It gave me a chance to relax. Over the six years we were married, I grew to love the place and the friends we had made. I even wrote two books about the Upper Peninsula.

I refused to let our breakup ruin my love of the UP, its expansive nature, its beautiful scenery, and its amazing people. I went back multiple times (and plan to go again early next year) to spend time in the places I love with the people I care about. I'll be a (partial) Yooper until I die. No one can take that

8. Coloring books

“I used to think adult coloring books were silly and that coloring was only for kids. When my then-girlfriend gave me my first one, I tried coloring one picture just to make her happy. It turned out I loved how **calming** it was, especially when I felt in the zone. It’s also very therapeutic to see the finished product. I happily bought several coloring books for myself. When I was done with a picture, I’d post it on Facebook.

Then my ex and I had a difficult breakup. I couldn’t touch the coloring books and the special markers she’d given me just so we could color together. They brought back heart-breaking memories of every time we had sat next to each other and just hung out asking each other for advice on which color to use where. It was painful.

Then, one day, I was watching **TV**. I hate having idle hands when I’m watching TV, so I picked up a marker from the table in front of me and began to color. It was so calming and I felt that creativity that I’d missed bubble back up inside me. Once I started again, I couldn’t stop. I went out to buy new markers and coloring books that I didn’t associate with my ex. Now every time I watch TV or listen to music, I color. I realized that I can still embrace and enjoy this hobby without her and am so happy I didn’t give up something I love because of the initial painful association.” —Lauren-Tara W., 32

9. ‘The Priest and the Matador’ by Senses Fail

“I can remember the first time I listened to the song ‘The Priest and the Matador’ from Senses Fail’s *Still Searching* album. It was just after Labor Day. My new boyfriend and I had spent a few wonderful days at the beach in Wildwood, NJ, and were driving in his white pickup truck back to Philadelphia. The sorrowful lyrics brought up old memories of times when I had struggled with my own demons of **depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation**, but I was able to smile through the hard-to-swallow lyrics because I was in the greatest mood I’d been in for quite some time.

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Fast forward to a year and a half later. Our breakup had completely broken my heart. Before the breakup, I was able to listen to ‘The Priest and the Matador’ without feeling the full weight of the lyrics, but now I was in a dark and lonely place. It was hard to listen to the entire *Still Searching* album, actually, because we’d gone to see Senses Fail play it together.

For whatever reason, though, I couldn’t stop listening to that song. I forced myself to feel the sorrow, the pain, the loss. Eventually, it didn’t hurt as much. A song that at first was good, then painful, became an old familiar friend once again.” —Sarah M., 35

10. A St. Louis Cardinals t-shirt

“My family loves baseball. With both sets of grandparents in the Atlanta area, I grew up a Braves fan. However, I started cheering for the St. Louis Cardinals because of a college boyfriend. I switched allegiances to join him, going so far as to defiantly buy a Cardinals t-shirt. When I started to struggle with some elements of family relationships, some of it was because my family was against my boyfriend.

I **broke up** with him but kept the Cardinals shirt. When my now-husband got a job in St. Louis, I pulled the shirt out of my drawer and blended in right away with the enthusiastic fans of this city. Baseball is not a part of our daily life, but we have enjoyed the games we’ve gotten to attend. My kids just may grow up to be Cardinals fans.” —Emily H., 35

Quotes have been edited and condensed.

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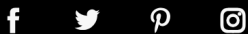
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