

Everybody's been burned

For happy or sad, true tales of matrimony

By LIZA MONROY

EVERY couple goes through a honeymoon phase. Unfortunately, that blissful time when all — or at least most — is perfect inevitably comes to an end. What happens after cementing commitment is less predictable.

Why do some marriages thrive while others crumble, implode or self-destruct like time bombs? This question forms the basis for "The Honeymoon's Over" (Warner Books, \$24.49), a new anthology edited by writer Andrea Chapin and literary agent Sally Wofford-Girand, and featuring personal essays by 22 women authors, including Joyce Maynard, Terry McMillan, Ann Hood and Lee Montgomery.

Love and marriage may seem like a clichéd topic to rehash in our postmodern times, but each essay in this collection is revelatory — no easy feat when treading such common ground. Anyone who's ever been in a relationship will encounter something relatable in these stories, making us realize that no matter how unique we feel our situations are, details aside, they're not.

In the opening essay, "Thursday," Daniela Kuper chronicles her experience being married to a cult "guru" who one day tells her, when she requests he take out the trash, "I've transcended the garbage."

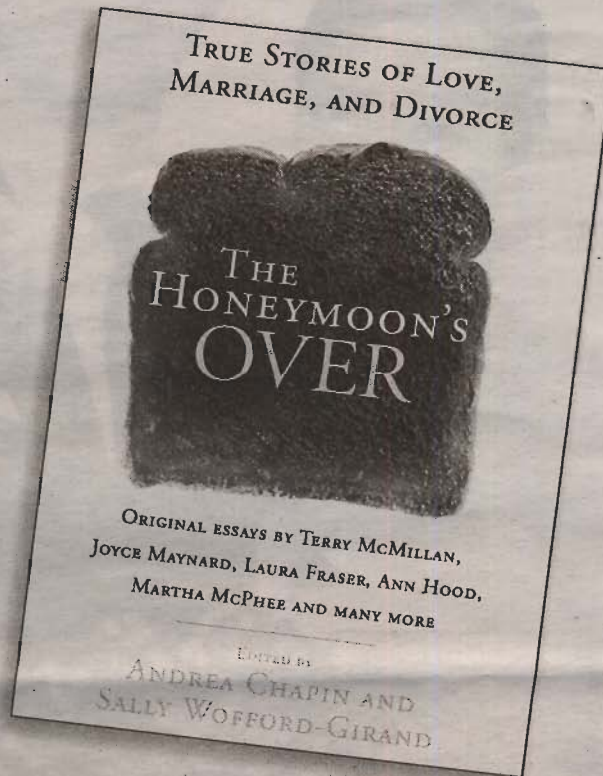
When Lee Montgomery is asked if she ever considers divorce in "A Love Story," she offers: "Divorce? Never. Homicide often."

"A Real Catch," by Isabel Rose, offers 20/20 hindsight as she chronicles all the red flags in her relationship with her ex-husband, which she ignored throughout their courtship out of a bridezilla-like obsession with obtaining the Vera Wang-Martha Stewart ideal of marriage.

Elissa Minor Rust's "Shifting the Midline" creates an interesting parallel between her father's brain tumor and her marriage to a man she has known since her teen years.

When they met, they were devoted Mormons. She questions her faith, eventually abandoning it, while her husband remains firm in his.

"One of the terms we



learned early on was the concept of 'midline shift' when the tumor and swelling brain tissue push the affected hemisphere over into the next, and the entire brain becomes off-center and asymmetrical. A shift like this, even a subtle one, can of course have all sorts of untoward effects. It throws a person's center."

She applies nuances of her father's condition to her marriage. "It's a strange notion, that you can be so sure you are in proportion to the real physical world, but your entire inner compass is off. I felt that way about my life."

Would her husband stay if she abandoned the religion that originally bonded them, throwing off the "midline" of their relationship?

"Of course, with tumors and marital issues alike, things are more complex than yank-and-pull."

"My Fair Student" by Pulitzer Prize finalist Kim Barnes is a rare tale of a romance between a professor (contemporary poet Robert Wrigley) and his student (Barnes) that miraculously survives to become more than the cliché university affair, and it reads like an urban legend.

Of all the relationships described and dissected in this anthology, Barnes' is the one we might most expect to

sink to the lowermost depths, leaving drowned hearts in its wake. But nearly 25 years later: "He still writes me poems. He brings me flowers for no reason."

What makes some unlikely couples work, while others who seem fated for success crash and burn?

The most unforgettable piece in the collection is "The Marriage Coma" by Betsy Israel, a vividly detailed, unexpected essay that provides something of an insight into how a successful marriage works.

In one anecdote, Israel fights with her husband in the car in L.A., and gets out, walking down the empty road in heels. While yelling at her to get back in, her husband begins taking snapshots of her strutting down the street in her tirade.

They put the photos up on the fridge — and, she writes, "Friends were invited to contribute captions."

Israel defines her "coma" as a "slow, logy malaise that seeps into any long-shared or wedded life, like anesthesia."

"Many just pull the plug," she writes. But for the ones who "sat out the marriage coma, the very real sense that all of life has crawled its way over and come to a stop on the couch, they may turn to each other and start to laugh."