

Observations From the Back Line:

Dating Over Forty

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A few of you may know my husband died early in the life of our marriage. My husband had flown in many dangerous arenas but in 1992 he was smarting from missing the first Gulf War due to an assignment at Command and Staff training in Quantico, Virginia. We were thankfully re-assigned to Fleet Marine Corps, New River, North Carolina and he was again doing what pilots are meant to do. But, on a clear beautiful day while on a cross country training flight with new pilots, overnight in Jacksonville, Florida, his CH53 helicopter came tumbling out of the sky.

It took a long time to recover from that. At first I naively hoped one of his faithful band of brothers would step in on the white horse and my life would continue on without too many interruptions. When I finally woke up from the haze, I realized that as much as I missed the family of the military, it was no longer mine to claim. I moved away, trying to find stability for my children and eventually settled in my husband's hometown of Chicago. I finished my graduate degree, helped my children adjust, and at some point decided I was ready to be in a real relationship, not just the fantasy of one. So, too old to meet men in traditional social settings, at an age when almost everyone was married, working in a field dominated by women, I eventually decided to turn to on-line dating.

On-line dating in the early 1990's wasn't actually on-line. My first experience in Chicago was at "Great Expectations", one of the early match making services. For several hundred dollars, one went downtown, spent an afternoon filming a VHS interview, and then became part of a video library. Potential mates would visit the downtown office and look through the video library and, if interested, would send a hand written note that Great Expectation would forward. There was no computer involved. The VCR's were chronically broken and the tapes sliced in all the wrong places. It took hours to visit, to review, to consider "selections". I did actually meet a nice man that I dated for several years. But, our children hated each other, and I finally just couldn't imagine enjoying day-to-day life with his ex, the children's disputes, and our lack of agreement regarding family life. I didn't think I could manage it all. We had each of us been hurt enough in different ways. I was afraid our relationship would only bring more harm. So, I walked away and it was a good decision.

Over the years I have off and on indulged again in on-line dating. I have had a few relationships that started on-line. But, I have had many, many more first and last dates. I have a somewhat absurd humor that gets me through most situations. When I was out with the New Age vegetarian, strolling the Botanic Gardens, I kept visualizing him leaning over the nearby specimen plant, picking a leaf, and calling it lunch! I can't say my children ever made dating easy either. My daughter was mostly interested in what I might wear, but my son could be counted on for an emergency of

some sort, or his own brand of monkey tricks. From the back seat, they both would complicate any fast food order until my date was red in the face, drooling, and twitching with frustration. Easy pickin's for my children, who normally didn't get along but became fierce allies on these occasions.

A few years ago, all grown up with decidedly more compassion, I remember my daughter saying, "It's Ok Mom, someday there will be some old guys that have lost their wife, like you." Hmmmm, a whole new crop of normal, nice guys? Should I leave on-line dating to scour the obituaries? Not a pleasant thought. Fast forward to 2008. There are no VHS tapes. No office to go to. Only the internet, and a high speed connection and selection process. It is really no fun at all. Would any of us have selected our first mates just by looking at a picture or reading a summary? Attraction is much more complicated; a subtle blend of chemistry, similar interests, friendship, admiration, mutual friends. So many people are looking for the mate as their first choice was "supposed to be": Perfection. "My mate will be a woman comfortable with herself, whether in ballroom dress or jeans, she will take care of her body, be fit, open to new adventures, physically affectionate, have her own interests, earn her own income, a full partner." Is anyone gagging? I already know we're not going to connect. I live in reality. The kids who aren't perfect. The body that really needs exercise. The dinners that rarely get made. The hair that even after 54 years of wishing otherwise, is still not doing anything but curling in all the wrong places. Sometimes I just feel like saying, "Single, frequently disheartened, just browsing". Isn't that attractive? What to do?

I think I may have given up long ago except that I really want to live my life with a nice guy, and I actually know other people who have found "their person" through the Internet. I recently listened to someone say, "It only takes one, the right one". So, when I get deluged with matches, I try to remind myself, "It only takes one. You have to kiss some frogs to find the prince!" In the meantime, I am letting all of you know, I'm not kissing any frogs, but I am still looking: I am a kind and sweet woman. Overweight, frizzy hair, zany humor. Crazy kids – who, yes, (Thank you Lord), "Don't live at home". Flexible, open minded. I mean, I am a therapist! Nobody understands the human condition like a therapist.

And to my fellow travelers on the Internet road, each of you has the absolute right to search for a lifelong partner – without apology, without embarrassment. You may find the right person at the wrong time, or deal with the wrong person at your right time. As human beings, we are made to connect, to share our days, to create intimacy. We can live without that, we can try and substitute through other supports, but at the end of the day, we still crave that partner that will really know us and still like what they see. So, stay in the game. It can happen or at least that's what I hear!