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"Our Stories"

We have decided to devote a portion of our magazine to non-fiction. These are stories of things that have happened serendipitously, being in the right place at the right time or just heartfelt musings, thoughts, and feelings on life. Join us in our non-fiction section. These stories speak to anyone and everyone and are told by anyone and everyone who has a story to tell.



"Orange-Purple" by Jim Fuess; <http://www.jimfuessart.com/>

The Backyard of My Childhood Home

By Marilyn June Janson

October 31 would have been their 50th wedding anniversary. I always wondered why they choose Halloween to get married. As a child, I believed that my parents' marriage was cursed by witches and goblins. Their union was a difficult one, plagued by threats of divorce. While sadness consumed our house, I can recall the rare times when Mom was happy.

Mom told me that she chose to get married on October 31 because autumn was her favorite season. She enjoyed seeing the vibrant green leaves turn to rust, brown, and red. In the backyard of our house, I shivered in the damp air and winced at the acrid odor of turpentine, while watching her paint landscapes. I listened closely as she taught me how to mix colors and add texture and depth to her subjects on canvas. With her face fixed with intensity, she brought life to leafless oak trees, their bony branches swaying in the light wind. The rose bushes, having shed their last bounty months ago, appeared unlikely to withstand the punishment from the cruel winter ahead.

She could have gone further with her art if she had not decided to marry

and raise a family. Mom had talent and style that set her work apart from other artists. Today, her pieces decorate my living room and library. I'll never forget the sacrifices she made for me. Or the time I "played" artist and added some strokes of my own to one of her paintings. I was nine years old and she did not scold me. Art had created an escape for her, a way to retreat into a world untouched by my dad's scorn.

"Mom, why didn't you leave Dad?" I asked shortly before she died from cancer.

Her bony hand, purple and bruised from the I.V. needle, reached out to me. She covered my hand with hers and said, "Back then, we didn't get divorced. If a woman left her husband, she became an outcast." Tears streamed down her sallow face.

How sad, I thought. She wasted her life living with a man who did not know how to love. Mom died a broken woman, full of regrets.

With one look at her work, I'm brought back to those brisk, autumn days in the backyard of my childhood home. I remember her soft auburn curls blowing in the breeze and her steady hand as she painted. Despite the pain she suffered throughout her life, Mom found the beauty in nature, her art, and our mother and daughter relationship.

Notes from the Field: Online Dating – It's Not Just a Job—It's an Adventure

By Taylor Collins

Dating isn't an easy job. There really isn't an application process. You just sort of become self-employed in the field of searching for someone—not just anyone—someone special to date. My career in this area is/was an arduous one—I've kept meticulous field notes which are slowly developing into the basis of my *New York Times* bestseller. I may win an award for my invaluable, untiring research.

I will share with you—as sort of a Public Service Announcement—what you might expect if you decide to foray into this uncertain job market.

You're required to write your own job description, do your own background search, review all the resumes of perspective suitors. You are expected to do your own recruitment. Online dating, much like aging, is not for sissies.

To date, and I have been at this for quite some time now, over 3,000 men (I'm hopeful that most of them were men because there is no way to know for sure that what, if anything, they write is true) have taken a gander at my profile. Even with all this activity, I have found the dating pool rather shallow. One of my first contacts was from Jake who wrote – "My lady may like to go fishing 'wish' (sic) me on a sunny day, but she won't have any tan lines by the evening." Well, OK. I thought. At least Jake is direct. Unfortunately, he's also unattractive—that is, of course, unless you like partially bald, potbellied, 5'4" men who like to play pool and ride a Harley. Don't get me wrong. I'm sure there are women who would find these qualities endearing. I think, no make that know, that he is riding up the wrong alley if he thinks I would be interested. You will find more information about him in my field guide entitled, "Reasons Why I Hate Match.com." He's reason #28.

Some of the early contacts, which I took copious notes on, had tag names like: flipomaticplay, misplacedpex, tincup50, magicooman, artgolfehguy and yoursweetbunnies. I shared my comments with my good friend, Francesca, a stunning older friend who is my math consultant (she adjusts my age whenever an adjustment is necessary) and confidante. I wrote her the following: What could these men be thinking? I'm sure Mr. Flipomaticplay would be charming as we cartwheel off into the sunset, and you know that misplacedpex (I wonder if he really meant sex) would be, if nothing else, out of place without his pex, whatever that is. I'm certain that Mr. Tincup50 would be wooing me with diamonds and pearls as we panhandle at the Mayflower. I know it's all I can do to hold back from Mr. Magicoo Man because everyone is standing in line to date a double oo sort of guy--not that I think he's a loser for a moment, as I'm sure he's just misunderstood. And Mr. Artgolfehguy conjures up a picture of a Greek god of some sort teeing off after a quick romp around the kitchen--and

not necessarily in that order and definitely naked--I'm sure I thought of a naked guy who cooks and golfs when I saw his name. And of course, who could possibly resist Yoursweetbunnies? Is there really a man or anyone for that matter on the planet that would want to be referred to as yoursweetbunnies? That is, of course, unless your husband is Bugs - that rascally old wabbit or perhaps the other one who's hopping down the bunny trail.

It's also important that you consult with your girlfriends often. Francesca gave me my most valuable piece of advice which was to not wear a wedding dress on the first date. I never would have thought of that and for her advice, I will always be grateful. Because after two near misses, I finally did meet someone who made the other 2,998 contacts pale by comparison. I should interject here. It's difficult--this search in a cyber-world--as I wasn't sure what it was I sought. You just keep looking for that elusive something--sort of like looking for that mysterious black orchid. You're not even really sure it exists. You keep making notes along the way. You document and keep researching and then...

This subject, I'll refer to him as Dylan--was contact 1300. Yes, that would be number one thousand three hundred in a mind-numbing-aforsaid-mentioned long line of looks, winks and contacts. He would eventually contact me again as Number 1600 at which point I responded to him. I had initially signed a three-year contract which I'm sure accounts for such a high number. (Ok, it was New Year's, too much bubbly. It sounded like a good idea at the time, OK?)

Dylan was different than the others. He had a boyish smile, beautiful blue eyes, and only one photo of himself on a golf course. He was always at the top of my list when I logged on. Well, him and some sort of psycho doctor who never did post his photo. Dylan and psycho man would just be there--at the top of the list of those who checked out my profile.

I now share with you the following excerpt from my notes--the prologue of sorts to my journal which will also be the prologue to my book--I share with you these initial field notes for my memoir--*A Modern Day Love Story*. I wrote to him first.

Hi: I don't think this is supposed to be difficult, but I guess it is. You are very attractive, and you don't look like an ax murderer, and that's light years ahead of some of those that look at me. Cheers.

He responded two days later.

It really isn't that difficult. I just suck at it. And you're just too sexy to ignore. :-)

This exchange occurred in September. "How sweet that he uses emoticons," I thought. And while normally I was turned off by men referring to me as sexy and/or beautiful, he was just too cute to ignore.

We didn't communicate that often - usually by email or a quick text. He was busy. I was busier. It would be two months before we would meet for drinks for the first time face to face on a chilly November eve. What follows is part of another entry from one of hundreds of journal entries, my field notes, which are gradually becoming part of my working manuscript.

We talked about everything. We spoke of nothing. I felt myself being pulled in deeper and deeper - as if the vortex I felt caught in drew me closer and closer with each heartbeat, with each word, with each nuance of touch. I remember a line from a movie- "You had me at hello." He had me before hello. One look at him on the dating site hooked me.

Some things are just beyond words - some things make words redundant. It's about that little surge you feel in your core fiber of being. How it moves through you until you feel that tingle in your heart. How it doesn't matter what was before or what will come after--it's about this exact moment - where you are actually aware that you ARE alive in this moment. You become aware of each breath. That this exact moment, this exact feeling is all that really matters --ever mattered. There doesn't have to be a past--there might not even be a second of future. It doesn't matter.

For this precise instance, what is relevant is that I am overcome --I am connected by something defying knowledge. I am consumed by is-ness - the essence of connection on a level that logic eludes. Does the fleck of salt on briny skin care if it is derived from the sea or came from the sweat of labor? How it came to be is of little meaning. This essence of him from the first moment I saw

him, from the first instant he looked at me with those eyes the color of the sea—he captured me.

Call it fate—call it whatever. I'm open to any signs that appear— the serendipity that might arise at any moment. It's as if we have been here before, and we've taken all these eons to find each other again. I cannot be sure what he feels and cannot know what he thinks. But right now —this man sitting across the table from me seems to have found me again. His touch, his voice, the seemingly familiar smile, the essence of his being arrives to consume me again. I drown in this luminous sea.

Or maybe not. Maybe I'm imagining everything. The significance of this moment is more than words could hope to express. Little does he know what I am thinking at this time of our initial meeting. All I know is that my soul is overwhelmed by this man named Dylan — this man who seems to come from across a far-off sea. This man who holds my hands, pulls them now against his heart — which I feel beating—come to me. Come to me.

Inch Man and the Rose Palace

By Mark Barkawitz

Back in '67 at Pasadena's Marshall Junior High, ninth-grader and JV wide-receiver John Rogers became renowned as the Inch Man because he was so skinny that when he turned sideways, he was said to be only an inch wide. He negotiated rival defenses barely noticed until the quarterback's pass was already secured in his long, bony hands. That was probably the impetus for his choosing to sneak us into the Rose Palace in a rather obvious yet illusory fashion.

In those days, the Rose Palace was little more than a large warehouse at 835 South Raymond Avenue in which floats for the Rose Parade were initially constructed—a float barn—in the fall and early winter before going to another location to have flowers attached for New Year's morning.

And for a few flower-power years in the late '60s and early '70s, it was also used to stage rock & roll concerts during the spring and summer months, while it was relatively empty.

In '68, Big Brother and the Holding Company with lead singer Janis Joplin was scheduled to play. But when we arrived, long-haired and bell-bottomed—Inch Man, Chris "Queebie" Condon, my brother Bruce, and I—the show was already "Sold Out."

"Dang it! Now what are we gonna do?" I moaned.

We all looked at each other, shrugging.

Inch Man plotted: "We'll just walk in backwards."

"What?" I asked. "Are you crazy?"

There was only one entrance in the front of the building with a ticket-taking/hand-stamping adult male on one side and a large security cop with a baton and walkie-talkie on the other side. People crowded to get in with their tickets and meandered out with their hands already-stamped, creating a fairly constant ebb and flow.

"Just stay in the middle," Inch explained. "Don't make any sudden moves. We'll all meet on the left side of the stage." He stared over at the entrance, as if getting his bearings. "Watch." He wandered away from our group, blended into the mass near the entrance, turned towards us, and proceeded to walk backwards between the ticket-taker and the security cop without their so much as noticing the Inch Man amongst them. He disappeared inside.

We cracked-up laughing. But it was nervous laughter because each of us knew our turns were now predestined. Queebie—Inch's six-foot-five neighbor and classmate—volunteered to go next. Bruce and I figured if Queebie could get through with his big ol' head above the crowd, then both of us could make it, too. And I'll be damned, he made it! Bruce went next. As always, I was terrified for my little brother. He was always getting us

into stuff that I had to do, too, or Mom would kill me if I came home without him—the responsibility of a big brother. Bruce did a half-turn at the entrance and strolled backwards past security—unnoticed.

I sighed with relief, but only momentarily, because now it was my turn. My mouth was dry as sand and my hands shaky. I hated doing this kind of crazy stuff. What if I got caught? What were the odds of all four of us making it in? I licked my lips, took a deep breath, and started for the entrance. But instead of following my cohorts' *modus operandi*, I cruised by first, casing the joint more closely. I stopped, stood around, and then glanced back. Neither the security cop nor the ticket-taker had taken any notice of me. Why would they? I gulped, took another deep breath, and started back again. When I was directly in front of the entrance—where people flowed in on one side and out the other—I did a half-pirouette on my heel, and started walking backwards like a bad stage-actor waiting to get the hook. But six, seven, eight steps and I was in! I turned and ran into the darkness at the back of the crowd where the lighting was dim. A giant, amoeba-like organism throbbed in the light show on the wall behind the band on-stage, creating a surreal reality. As Janis Joplin's voice rasped into the microphone, I dove into my friends, who were already sitting cross-legged on the floor near the stage. One of them punched me in the back. Another stuck his finger in my ear. I was laughing so hard that I didn't even notice which blues-rock song Big Brother was playing.

On October 4th, 1970, Janis Joplin, 27, was found dead on the floor of her room at the Landmark Motor Hotel in Los Angeles from a heroin/alcohol over-dose. I remember thinking back to that night over forty years ago at the Rose Palace when the Inch Man walked us in backwards. And how I hated doing crazy stuff like that. But this time, I was damn glad that I had.

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