

Taking The Plunge

*A Memoir; Finding A Lasting Love In
Online Dating*

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This book is a memoir, which reflects the author's personal experiences and memories. To protect the privacy of individuals, names and identifying details along with locations and timelines have been changed. The events and conversations described have been recounted to the best of the author's memory, though some details may have been altered or condensed for narrative purposes for narrative clarity. The views and opinions expressed are solely those of the author and are not intended to harm or defame any person, living or dead.

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my friends and family members who listened to all my dating war stories. I am grateful for their wise counsel and considerable patience. To my late mother Darline, my sister Ruth, my dear friends Marc and Brad, my ISU family, treasured colleagues, and most of all, to my very understanding children, Caitlin & Patrick, I love you! Thank you for urging me to put pen to paper!

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INTRODUCTION

The thought of online dating can be intimidating or downright scary. Some might try online dating only to give up, frustrated and disappointed. Sound familiar? If so, then this is for you. In these pages are the hard-earned lessons I learned, and the valuable wisdom gained from years of online dating.

My story played out over two decades, as I navigated an ever-changing and perplexing dating landscape. Along the way, I met some wonderful guys. Several of those meetings turned into serious relationships, before I finally found my perfect match.

Getting there was quite an adventure, one that was challenging, sometimes frustrating, and even downright depressing as I traveled on a road filled with every imaginable type of guy.

I met rich guys and poor guys and many in-between. They were handsome, not-so-handsome and downright ugly, in shape, out-of-shape and medical disasters.

They were liberal, conservative, ultra-conservative, and libertarian. They were funny and sweet, earnest and honest, arrogant and deceptive, witty and snide, romantic and passionate, generous and cheap.

They came with every type of baggage, from the lightweight carry-on to a steamer trunk packed with crazy ex-wives, demanding children, aging parents, and a crushing work

schedule. They opened my eyes to new and exciting experiences and viewpoints, while also confirming my worst suspicions and fears.

They forced me to take a good, hard look at myself, examining what I have to offer and more importantly, what I wanted.

They challenged me as I figured out my deal breakers, while also confronting their deal breakers. Sometimes it hurt. Other times I couldn't wait to relieve myself of the burden of a lousy guy.

I often say it's a good thing that I like meeting people. Otherwise, I would have given up online dating long before I finally met my match.

If you're thinking about taking the plunge into online dating, I hope you can learn from my online dating mistakes as well as my successes. They were gained from the most interesting, fun, difficult, crazy and sometimes hilarious encounters.

For those of you who've ridden the crazy merry-go-round of online dating, I'm sure you can empathize!

Perhaps you too can learn how to benefit from your experiences as I did. It can be well worth the ride!

CHAPTER 1

JUMPING IN

I love swimming. I always have. I swam competitively as a kid, up until college. That's when swimming took a back seat to socializing and partying while I majored in theatre and TV.

After marrying my college sweetheart and having two kids, I took up swimming again to get back in shape. I joined a Masters swim group and competed again. In my 40's and 50's, I dropped the competition but continued doing swim workouts with a wonderful group of women at my health club.

We also regularly socialized offering each other support through life's challenges. One of the biggest challenges for me was my divorce in 2004, after 22 years of marriage. I was 48 years old. It was a difficult time. I had been with my ex for a total of 30 years. I felt like a total failure and worried that I'd be a huge disappointment to my kids.

At times, the road to our breakup was rancorous and bitter, but in the end, thankfully, it was amicable. Once we decided to divorce, my husband and I agreed to stop the fighting. I moved out and bought my own place nearby. We agreed the kids, who were in high school, would split their time between our homes.

By the Spring of 2005, I'd been separated nearly a year. My divorce had been final for six months and I was beginning to

think about getting out there again and dating. It was a terrifying thought considering my long relationship with my ex.

But I hadn't soured on marriage. I grew up in a large family and liked the companionship of family and a steady partner in life. I also liked the idea of a firm commitment to one another through marriage. I hoped to one day meet someone special and marry again.

It was one of my swim friends who first suggested online dating. My swim pals and I were having coffee after a workout one morning when my friend told me about a new online dating site called eHarmony. I laughed out loud when I first heard the name. It was amusing to think we can find love and harmony through a dating website.

I was skeptical, to say the least. But the more I thought about it, the more I kind of liked the idea. My job and teen-aged kids kept me busy. Going to clubs wasn't my thing. Maybe I could find someone to date online. I thought, 'Well, why not? I'll give it a go and see what happens.'

I took the plunge into online dating on March 6th, 2005, the day after my 49th birthday. I sat down at my computer and diligently filled out my online dating profile on the eHarmony website. The site assured me it could help find matches for me with the "potential for long-term relationship success."

That sounded great! I had been married for 22 years and was eager to find another long-term relationship. Its questionnaire

explored various aspects of compatibility. I knew that people were complicated and have many dimensions to their personality. So, it made sense that this could be a great way to find my perfect match!

I happily and confidently made my way through the questionnaire but soon discovered it was long! There were hundreds of questions to be answered. It took me at least four hours to finish. By the end of it, I was exhausted and thoroughly confused as to what it all meant about me, and what type of person I am.

Not to worry! Based upon the analysis of my answers the site began to send me matches.

The Cop

Lo and behold, within a week, a man with an appealing profile reached out, and after exchanging a few pleasantries online, he called me on the phone. He said he was a police officer from a nearby suburb.

Normally, I wouldn't even consider going out with a cop or fireman. I spent years working in TV news in Chicago and learned long ago that cops and firemen have a notorious reputation as a group.

I don't want to generalize, but I've always heard as a woman that it's "buyer beware" when it comes to cops and firemen. They can be volatile and unfaithful, egotistic and testosterone fueled.

Still, they do look cute in their uniforms and can be heroic and fearless, loyal and trustworthy. And this officer sure was cute! So, what the heck? I thought I'd give it a go.

We had a lovely phone call. I found him personable and funny. We laughed a lot and by the end of the phone call he asked me out for a date, and I said yes.

We met at a Mexican restaurant, and he turned out to be just as handsome in person as he was in his profile pictures. We sat down, and I immediately asked to see some ID. I said it as a joke, but I was also feeling a little cautious.

During my years in TV news, I wrote many, many news stories about guys posing as cops. The Cop, to his credit, took it in stride and, in fact, told me he appreciated my concern.

After all, a woman can't be too careful. He gave me a business card and even showed me his badge. In time, I would ask many dates to exchange business cards and would try to do some online verification. I've only done a couple of full-on background checks on guys (more on that later) because I have generally found it doesn't take too long for people to reveal who they are, and what they're looking for.

Sure enough, it didn't take long for my cop to reveal himself. We started dating and I learned that he was taking time off work for some surgery on his shoulder.

He had torn his rotator cuff, and it was quite painful, as I discovered when he and I tried any kind of physical contact. Sex

was quickly ruled out after a disastrous tumble in bed. I'd been so hoping it'd be a romantic night. He was my first boyfriend since my divorce, and I was eager to get back on that horse again, so to speak!

But that night, it seemed every move I made caused him tremendous shoulder pain. I wondered why he even attempted to date anyone considering his dismal physical condition.

I quickly found out why. He told me he could really use my help in his upcoming surgery. That's it, the real reason. He needed a nurse. Well, that or his mommy. I don't know which was worse!

Too bad at the time, I didn't fully recognize it. I was new to dating and because I'm a mom and because I'm a nice person, I agreed to help after his surgery. I was in for a big surprise.

But before then, I was eager for my kids to meet my new boyfriend. I invited him over for dinner. The kids were good sports about it, but I could tell they were clearly uncomfortable. It was too much, too early.

Not that I wasn't ready for dating, but my son made it clear *he* wouldn't be ready to meet any boyfriends until I'd been seeing them for at least four months. That was the new rule. It was the first rule I added to my new self-imposed online dating guidebook.

A few days before my boyfriend's surgery, his ex-wife dropped by his house to check on him. I should have known

something was up. She was very nice and seemed very happy that I was there to help out her ex-husband with his upcoming surgery.

In fact, I got a sense that she seemed a little too much relieved and grateful! A fleeting thought passed through my head, ‘Hmmm, what’s this all about?’ But I quickly dismissed it.

I chalked it up to his ex-wife just being a nice person. She was, after all, the mother of his young son and also had an amicable divorce, just as I did. After his surgery, I went to my boyfriend’s house to check on him. A friend had dropped him off following his procedure.

I was kind of shocked that he was alone at the house, because he was not in good shape at all. He was in a lot of pain and spent the better part of the evening moaning and half-dozing in his favorite chair.

I tried to help him as best I could, paying attention to his pain medications and trying to make him as comfortable as possible, by moving him to the couch and surrounding him with pillows and blankets. But he couldn’t find a comfortable position and just kept moaning and sleeping on and off.

Sometime late in the evening, he woke up and surprised me when he opened his mouth to talk, but instead he just burst into tears. He started blubbering and crying like a baby. It was somewhat shocking. Here was this supposedly strong, stoic police officer weeping like a little boy.

I jumped to his side and sat down next to him on the couch. He put his head on my shoulder and just cried and cried. I patted him gently, cooing softly, “There, there, it’ll be alright. You’re gonna be OK,” but honestly, I didn’t know if he was gonna be OK!

He was an emotional and physical wreck! He just kept crying and crying! I had never seen anyone, let alone a full-grown man, weep and blubber and carry on like he did!

Then, and I hate to say this, I just started getting annoyed. I started thinking like any woman who has had two children would think. Good Lord! Try having a baby, dude. And in my case, try having two babies – meaning two long pregnancies, and two C-Sections!

Oh well. That was mean-spirited, and I know rotator cuff surgery is painful, so I turned back to being a nurse, trying to comfort my boyfriend. After much consternation and fussing, he dried his tears and fell back asleep. When he woke up, I think he was embarrassed about his emotional display but never mentioned it.

Actually, I wasn’t sure how much he remembered, but it was awkward between us. In the days that followed, he was quiet, and within a week or so I opened my email and lo and behold, there was a note from him, telling me he no longer wanted to go out. I got dumped. Via email!

I was surprised again. The blubbering baby was also a gutless

wimp, who couldn't find a way to face the difficult break up conversation – not by phone and certainly not face-to-face.

Instead, he dropped me by dropping me an email. In his email, he said how he only regarded me as a friend. He suggested that we could be “friends with benefits,” if that’s what I wanted.

Needless to say, I was outraged. I was brand new to online dating and was coming off a long 22-year marriage. I wasn't gonna be anyone's booty call, nor did I want a booty call!

Well, suffice to say I let him have it. I whipped out my sharp pen and wrote him a very righteous response saying how I was so insulted by not only his method of break up, but also by his friends with benefits proposal!

I was, after all, *not* that type of woman – how dare you! All that kind of language went into that email. Of course, that pretty much shut down any further communication with him, until I heard from him a few months later, when he needed something again.

I got an email, all cheery and upbeat, saying how his rehab was going well, and he was feeling so much better! He then went on to sweetly ask for a favor. He was applying for a better position within the police department, and he could really use some help with polishing his resume.

Could I, as the professional writer, help him out, pleeeaaasse? I should have ignored him, but I didn't. I helped him out. I thought, ‘Why not? Besides it might be bad karma if I didn't

help.’ I was such a sap!

After helping to polish his resume, he disappeared again and when I reached out to him several months later for something I needed, I never heard back. Complete silence. Unbelievable.

It was a rough first lesson to learn. My cop boyfriend was looking for sex, a mother, a nurse and a copy editor, but certainly not a girlfriend with whom to grow a meaningful relationship.

The eHarmony website, with its extensive compatibility questionnaire had offered the possibility of finding a long-term relationship. Little did I know, however, that those words “long-term” and “compatibility,” would be to my dating life as elusive as winning the lottery!

Lessons Learned: It doesn't take long for someone to reveal their true self and intentions. Pay close attention and it will come into focus. As the great author Maya Angelou said, "When someone shows you who they are, believe them."