

Playing the dating game

My first official encounter with the opposite sex was back in 1960. I wouldn't necessarily call my first real date at the tender age of thirteen and a half a resounding success, but I got through it without amping up my acne or breaking out in hives. My date, the daughter of a police sergeant, couldn't have been sweeter as we sat tantalizingly close to each other on the bus ride to the Ing Skating Palace. And when we pulled on our skates and entered the rink it felt like I was entering a strange new world - an arena of testosterone mixed with abject fear. Suddenly the lights dimmed and the organ played a slow skate. I knew that this was my moment to become a man and put my skinny teenage arm around the waste of a living breathing girl!

Nothing could have prepared me for the rush of being so close to Patricia, a girl that had captured my thoughts for many months. Moving together as one I felt like a king with a queen at my side as we whooshed past my friends on the sidelines. My hormones were doing their own private dance as I took in the smell of her hair and the scent of dime store perfume. During the bus ride back to her house, holding hands in the faint shimmer of the street lights dancing off the bus windows I felt emboldened and planted a small kiss on her cheek. To my surprise, she turned and planted one squarely on my eager lips. That was it, one cheek kiss and one full kiss, all I needed to convince me that this dating thing might not be so bad after all.

That probably sounds terminally corny like something from an Andy Hardy movie or episode of 'Father knows best,' but it happened, and just that way. While I'm sure most teenagers today would howl in laughter at this slice of 1960s-style courting, I can assure you that I'm equally shocked at how the dating game is played now if it's played at all. Who takes a girl skating anymore, or bowling or to a sock-hop?

For many single adults, the computer is their spirit guide as they enter the brave new world of computer dating/matchmaking. For the uninitiated, matchmaking is as old as the hills. Many cultures practiced it and some still do. Rich families became richer and countries' domestic tranquility depended on joining princes from one place with princesses from another to secure the peace and strengthen alliances. Nothing the Hindus or the Ashkenazi Jews did in days of yore could compare with the newest high-tech matchmakers, however. Enter the moguls of match.com, Christian Mingle, e-Harmony and others. Millions of companionship-hungry Americans are willingly inputting their most intimate personal information into these services in the hopes of having a high-performance computer armed with a compatibility software program sort through all the variables and spit out a dozen or so Mr. or Ms. Rights for themselves.

One popular Canadian dating site claims to garner 50,000 new singles per day and serves over five million customers/year! Some match you up based on your description of the perfect partner while others go for the 'pure' match of the majority of your likes. The brave new world of dating companies understand our twin predicament of lack of time and laziness and take the hassle of kissing frogs to find our prince (or princess) away. I don't know about you, but there's something very Orwellian about this substitute for human interaction. By eliminating the necessary awkward male/female encounters and the lessons we learn from engaging the opposite sex, we dumb-down our dating skills and remove all the sweaty palms, dilated pupils and other sensory impulses that form the magic of the dating game.

I'm sure that the new-age dater will look back years from now and reminisce about how 'their' computer told them the field was clear to go directly to third base without even picking up a bat. As for me, my memory of my first date is intact and couldn't have been improved one iota even with the most powerful computer on the planet. Thank you, Patricia for introducing me to the wonderful world of women.

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