

Pet Projects — or how I invented speed dating

By Linda Parker Horowitz

Though I am not credited, I invented what is now known as “Speed Dating” which has gained some notoriety on reality shows. It wasn’t some elegant equation or economic utility analysis. I did not decide who to date on variables such as status, current or future income, education, height, weight or hairline. Nope. I developed it out of absolute necessity.

The initial meeting went like this:

“Hi! I’m Linda Parker.”

“Hi. I’m David Cohen, nice to meet you.”

“It’s really great to meet you, too, David. Are you allergic to cats?”

“Horribly,” he’d cringe.

“Sorry. I can’t go out with you.”

NEXT!

Under no circumstances, no matter how brilliant, how well-educated or divinely cute, no cats, no dates. No exceptions. I was not giving up my cats for any man. Period. I’d been sleeping with cats since I was a child, and they unconditionally took precedence over any prospective boyfriend.

Before I developed speed dating, I’d have a really nice guy over to my apartment. If he was allergic to cats, within minutes, he would be sneezing, wheezing, and having an asthma attack. I did not want to have to call 911, and since I was living in an “iffy” section of Brooklyn, who KNOWS how long it would take for the paramedics to arrive. He could be dead by that time. I didn’t want to be questioned by a burly Brooklyn cop about a possible Domestic and Siamese homicide. “Officer, really it wasn’t my fault! I didn’t know he had a severe cat allergy!” “Sure Suzie Q. You’re comin’ downtown with me.” Coroner’s report: death by dander.

One prospective boyfriend swore that he would be fine so long as he just didn’t TOUCH the cats. Sure. However, he was over 6 foot 6. Living in New York and alone, I had a three-quarter sized refrigerator. He leaned his elbow easily against the top, chatting with me while I prepared dinner, then proceeded to break out in big, ugly, dark red blotches. Apparently, he must have also inadvertently touched his face, because the hideous hives moved there instantaneously. Very attractive and VERY frightening watching his arms and face blow-up. I’m not even 5 feet 2 inches tall, and I’m sorry, but if I can’t see it, I don’t clean it. This includes the top of my refrigerator that cat hair had wafted to, unnoticed by me until the horrid hives incident.

While at business school, I found summer employment in Boston. I looked and looked for an apartment, but at the mere mention of a cat, the prospective landlord got the “frenzied feline fear face” and I got not-so-politely walked to the door. Finally, I was desperate, and when interviewing with the Harvard JD/MBA who was subletting her perfect little one-bedroom right on campus, I now confess that I “neglected” to mention my cat and prayed she wasn’t allergic. The summer passed, and I returned to Ithaca for my second year of grad school. Shortly



thereafter, a call came from my summer landlord. I panicked I'd been discovered and one of her older attorney pals would sue me, even though the only thing I owned was some furniture not worthy of Good Will along with tons of school debt. She was ecstatic that I left her apartment immaculate and called to thank me! Little did she know, and I didn't tell her why. Let her think I was a really considerate future MBA from a rival school and the most extraordinary sub-letter.



Jeffrey was a very polite but allergic New York friend; he actually asked me if I had cats. "Not a problem," he'd reply almost cheerfully that he'd exposed my secret in advance, and pop a Seldane (when it was legal) when he arrived. He'd sneeze off-and-on for about 10 minutes, then be fine. He came to L.A. to visit. Knowing his cat allergy, prior to his arrival I cleaned my apartment more thoroughly than I ever had, even vacuuming the couch (like it might help). I picked him up at the airport late in the evening, arriving at the apartment around 11:00 p.m. Thrilled he was in town but fearful, I watched his demeanor as we schmoozed late into the night, wondering if my single cat would get to him, and he would leave, angered by the inconvenience. He began to noticeably rub his itchy eyes and blow his nose. By 2:00 a.m. his nose running and eyes watering, he started sneezing. "Oh no," I thought, "I'm soooooo busted."

"The 'Katzes' live here, too?" he jested, obviously remembering my Brooklyn apartment and rehearsing acting scenes on Seldane. "Yes," I replied sheepishly, "but only one. She's sleeping in the bedroom." I prayed for forgiveness for kind-of deceiving my friend, and I thanked God for Seldane. "No problem," and out came the Seldane. Why did Seldane get taken off the market? Maybe it's still available across the border in Tijuana. I could keep it around for emergencies.

At work, I walked into a colleague's cubicle and within the first few sentences of our conversation, he began sneezing. I was standing near him when he asked suspiciously, "Do you have a cat?" "Yes," I replied wondering how he came to ask that question. Then I looked down and noticed that the bottom of my maroon jacket was a mass of white cat fur exactly at his nose level. "Oh no," I cried in mock horror, "Yoda got into my closet! I'm so sorry," and fled immediately. Yoda consistently slept in my closet. It was his sneezing that horrified me.



My first new car was a stripped Volvo station wagon. "Stripped" in Swedish means no leather seats; they were covered in a woven wool fabric, designed for butt warmth. I would drive to the office in my freshly dry cleaned black crepe skirt only to find cat hair all over it. I couldn't figure it out. After much consternation and searching for the cat hair source, I discovered that the Volvo seat was recycling it.



***Cat hair –
Truly, the gift that keeps on giving.***

