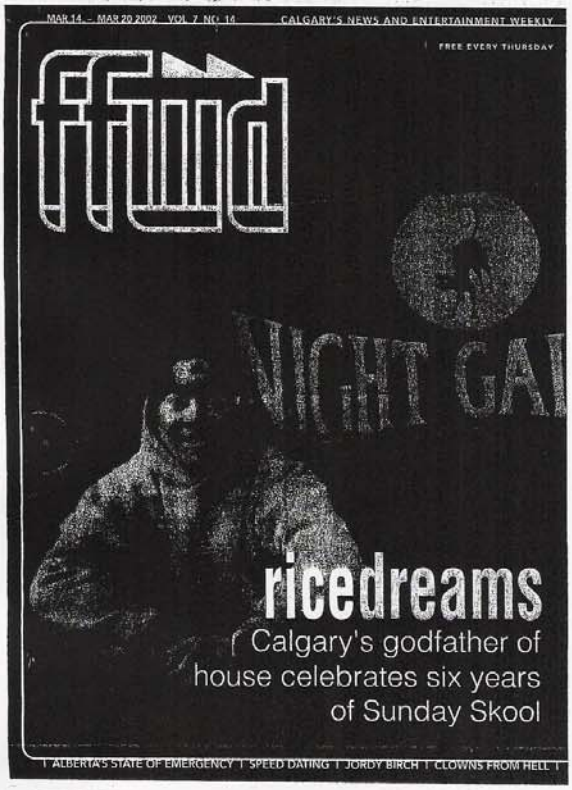

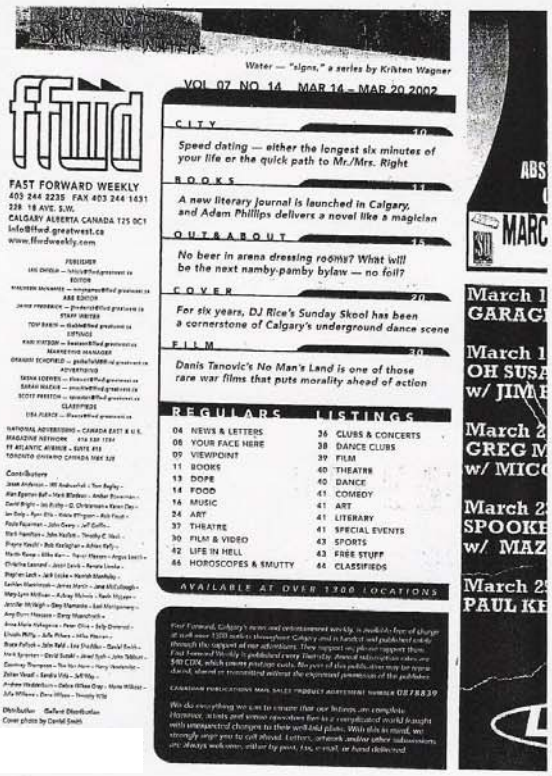

Speed dating

Multiple quickie encounters in the search for love

GEOFF LANGFORD

Our conversation is fast and furious, entertaining and invigorating. I wouldn't mind seeing this woman again, I think. Then, as we part, a thought amuses me. I've only spent four bucks and six minutes on this date. Talk about efficiency.

Ten dates in 60 minutes — the concept caught my attention. You may have heard of speed dating catching on south of the border. If you're a *Sex in the City* fan, you've seen Miranda's attempt at it. Now, it's finally arrived in Calgary, and being keen to put myself in the line of fire, I immediately signed up for this game of musical-chairs dating.

Just a few days before Valentine's Day, two local women launched their new company, Six Minute Dates, with an event for 25- to 35-year-olds.

"We're building events that attract like-minded, single professionals," says Christine Hart, one of the owners. "It's like giving fate a kick-start."

The recipe is fairly simple, but intriguing: 10 men, 10 women, fruit smoothies and a yoga bell. The women are seated at numbered tables, and everyone is given a "score card." After six minutes with your first date, a bell encourages the men to move to the next table, and both parties mark their score card with a yes or no, indicating their interest in seeing that person again.

At the end of the night the organizers collect the score cards and determine which participants chose each other, and the next day they provide them with each other's e-mail addresses.

As the dates begin, I realize six minutes is not a lot of time. Conversations wrap up in a hurry, and there is hardly a moment to make your choice before moving on. I leave the first few dates wishing this was Fifteen Minute Dates.

Eventually, though, I discover how long six minutes can be. Try holding your breath, or holding just one end of a conversation, for six minutes.

"Where's the romance in that?" I hear you asking. Granted, it's nothing like running into a coed on campus, knocking her books everywhere and magically locking eyes as you help pick them up. But really, didn't that only happen in John Hughes films?

Why is it that we don't treat our search for a partner with the same methodical approach as other major decisions, like buying a house or finding a job? And the cost is about what you'd expect to spend on one date — $45 for the night, including a drink.

One of my dates had a big picture perspective on her motivation. "We don't live in villages anymore," goes her philosophy. "We don't meet the sons and daughters of our parent's friends, co-workers and neighbours.

"We've got to get out there and make it happen for ourselves. Relying on chance is romantic, but it's archaic. Granted, this is window shopping, but when you know what you're after, there's nothing wrong with that."

Although it seems more like a game show on Fox, "Speed Dating" is actually a trademark of an international Jewish organization, Aish HaTorah. They developed it to facilitate the successful matching of Jews with other Jews, and the concept has been borrowed and transformed all over North America.

Now that it has hit Calgary, I doubt the dating scene here will be the same — the events have been selling out, and the buzz seems to be building.

And the success rate? Well, lucky for my ego, my four choices were all reciprocated. I've been out on "slow" dates with al of them since, and narrowed it down further to two. My friends are having a huge laugh at my little adventure, but like many things we do, that's half the motivation — entertaining your friends.

As for the rest of the motivation — when was the last time you could say you had 10 dates in the same night?