

entertainment

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On his third attempt to find Ms. Right, Mike D. tried wooing the Weal Features Editor - to no avail. Mr. D' knows the owners of Six Minute Dates Inc. well, and they've promised him he'll meet his match...one day.

12 guys a-courting

Or: How I Made An Ass of Myself at Speed Dating

By Jenn Lutz, Features Editor

I'm your average young woman. I'm 22 years old, a low-income struggling student whose ass is owned by two banks and the federal government.

My car is not my own and I live with my parents. I had my teeth fixed when I was 15, my hair has been almost every length and shade imaginable. I probably have too many shoes and sometimes I talk too much.

So why is a reasonably attractive, relatively fit, well-traveled, confident girl pursuing an education having a hard time meeting Mr. Right?

Sure, I meet eligible (and ineligible) men who catch my eye, but there's never enough minutes in a week to pursue them. Lame excuse? Maybe.

At any rate, my curiosity got the better of me when I first spotted ads in Fast Forward for 'speed dating' and discovered the concept was conceived by a Jewish rabbi in Los Angeles (where else?) in an attempt to help young single Jews meet their match in minimal time.

Poor desperate souls, I thought. It's like one big hellish blind date, only you pay someone to put you through it.

So I signed up. What the heck, maybe I'll actually meet someone, as my suspiciously eager editor put it.

What? Do I look like I need a date? I never thought of myself as desperately in need of a significant other, but when I told friends about my upcoming gauntlet of blind dates, I received oddly supportive comments like, "Good for you, it can't hurt." For cryin' out loud, I thought, what are they trying to tell me?

ON A CHILLY WEDNESDAY NIGHT AT PRECISELY six o'clock, a tidier looking version of my usual self did a double-take in the car's vanity mirror, straightened my skirt and walked down the block to the Good Earth Cafe on Stephen Avenue.

Dana Blonde and Christine Hart, friends and co-owners of Six Minute Dates Inc., one of three speed-dating services operating in Calgary, met me at the door with warm smiles, a ticket for a free drink and a sushi-like menu with the names of 12 male dates on it - complete with checkboxes for 'yes' and 'no.'

This was going to be easy. Just a process of elimination, like a game of Clue. Colonel Mustard, no way. Professor Plum, oh yeah baby!

The first guy to sit down introduced himself as Patrick. Probably the most casual dresser of the crowd, he was friendly, confident and mildly funny. But after my six minutes, he got the proverbial axe. I was looking for real chemistry, not a new best friend.

Every six minutes a bell rang and the guys played musical chairs, navigating their way through the cafe tables while the girls stayed put and let the men come to them. I could get used to this, I thought.

There was Binh, a graphic designer originally from Vietnam who introduced himself as "more reserved," and Doug from Regina who said nothing remotely interesting. Tom, Isaac and Jason, all of whom were nice but boring, also took the cut.

The average age in the room was around 27; most guys had a steady job and a decent education; some had travelled, some had interesting extra-curricular activities. All were "tired of the bar scene" and most claimed they had "never tried anything like this before."

As the minutes crept on, I speculated about each guy's story. Why is he here? What is he looking to get out of this? I sort of drifted in and out of each 'date' with minimal conversation.

Then a very handsome blonde sat down and introduced himself as Neil. Mid-twenties, a grad of the University of Alberta and working as an engineer in oil exploration. Hmm...

Sadly, however, the more he talked about himself the less he asked about me. In the end, the nice-lookin' lad got a reluctant slash across the 'no' box.

I was beginning to think the evening would be a bust - and then Keith sat down. Handsome without being in-your-face gorgeous, he was quietly confident, well-mannered, nicely dressed and asked a lot about me. He worked for IBM, liked to ride downhill on his mountain bike, and his smile was charming. But it wasn't until he'd moved on to the next table that I realized he was the only 'yes' consideration: we had good chemistry and maybe there was a chance.

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The next day I checked my email around noon, not expecting to hear back from Six Minute Dates with match-up results so soon. But there it was. Arrogantly assuming Keith had also found me interesting, I was a little (just a little) surprised to find that he had not. "Although several men chose you as their match (you little heartbreaker), Keith was not one of them," said the message.

Looking for an acceptable excuse to tell my friends what I did wrong, I recalled that I had to go to the washroom in the middle of the evening, a major inconvenience since each date leads straight into the next.

Anyway, Keith saw me waiting outside the bathroom door. I think I said something stupid about

how bad I felt keeping my next date waiting while I used the loo: "One chai latte too many, ha ha..."

If our roles were reversed and he talked a little too much about having to use the toilet, I'd have axed him, too.

So I didn't meet Sir Dream Boat, Prince Charming or Mr. Right. But I met a handful of really great guys with a lot to offer - to someone else.

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JESSICA GREGELY PHOTO

Blonde and Hart started Six Minute Dates in February 2002. The friends work full time at their venture.

