

Internet Doubting?

By Donna Hulme

I'm a widow. I have been for a few years now. I guess I am considered young for a widow; however, I am not incredibly young, seeing how as my youngest child is in college. I tell you this, not for sympathy, but to add a little context to this situation.

Shortly after my husband passed away, the planning for my high school reunion was underway. I wasn't on the planning committee, but a good friend was. In fact, I live half a continent away from where I went to high school. This good friend happened to mention to others in the planning group that I was now widowed. And so it spread through the grapevine, far and wide, amongst our extended network of friends.

I received a call from a guy I used to sit in front of in American Lit. class. We were always just friends, but had a lot of fun in class. He was always whispering something to make me laugh as the teacher was lecturing.

Or, he would flip my long hair with his pencil. When he signed my yearbook, he included a sticker he had peeled from the back of my chair. In other words, I don't think he aced the class, but we had a lot of fun!

As fate would have it, he was recently divorced, living just a state away, and had heard I was recently widowed. After



many phone calls and emails, we decided to get together and have a real "date". What a blast! So, the long distance romance (LDR) continued.

Let me tell you, LDR's are difficult to maintain. Tone in email is often hard to discern. Different time zones lead to phone calls at the wrong time, social functions are often attended alone, and the physical contact of hugs and kisses are condensed into long weekends. Talk about burn out.

Living in suburbia, I am surrounded by married couples, which is fine with me. However, I have noticed married couples want everyone to be married. So, well meaning friends, not being satisfied that I am accompanied only on occasion, suggested I "go online" to find a local guy.

This did not appeal to me. Number One, I rather like my high school friend that I am seeing, and Number Two, I am old enough that I think the guy should do the pursuing, I shouldn't have to take out an advertisement to get a date. On the other hand, most guys my age that I know are married. The ones in the neighborhood, at church, at the supermarket, on the freeway. I don't do bars.

Still, friends kept giving glowing reports of people they knew who had met on the Internet. My cute little newlywed next door neighbors even met on J-Date, so they think internet dating is superb. Two of my daughter's sorority sisters found their mates on eHarmony. On the down side, I had seen some of the men other singles in my community have found online. Obviously, someone was lying about their age.

About the same time I was resisting the "force", I decided it would be nice to move back to Arizona. Realtor.com became my friend. Lo and behold! I found a home that was beautiful, in my price range, and had many of the amenities I was seeking. The home was built by a builder I was familiar with, having lived in Arizona prior to one of our many transfers. The photos on realtor.com showed it positioned on a cul de sac, on the point of a lake, with massive homes across the lake. The listing stated it had not one, but two boat docks! There were photos of a gorgeous pool and patio, all overlooking the panoramic view of the lake. The photos showed an understated classic interior, with nice upgrades. My adrenaline was flowing! I just couldn't believe this "find". It was not too big, and not too small, the photos showed a nice flow of rooms and it was within my price range!

I called my realtor friend, Karen, and sent an email with the link. She agreed that it looked like a find, and made the necessary appointments. I grabbed my checkbook, and hopped on a plane. I think I was flying higher than the plane, the anticipation of seeing this beautiful property, and the luck of finding a home without days of tromping through houses was just incredible!

Karen met me at the airport, and we drove to the house. Almost. I was navigating, since The House was in an area that she normally didn't handle. One wrong turn and half an hour later, I was getting clammy hands.

"Karen, I don't think I really want to live in an area like this." Dogs were chained in the front yards, bondo cars lined the streets, and broken windows were the norm.

After checking our directions again, we found my mistake. Hope sprang eternal again, we were on our way to the correct location. As we entered the street that led to the subdivision, I commented on how nice it was that a major supermarket was so close, I wouldn't have to drive for miles to shop.

We turned down the street where my dream home was sited. Funny, there wasn't broken pavement shown in the photo. Oh, well that could be fixed. The neighboring houses looked pretty nice. Just a few were in need of a paint job.

"Here we are". Karen had pulled in front of the home I had "found". Hmmm. Maybe they were cleaning the fountain today, but I wondered why wires were hanging out of it. As Karen reached for the doorbell, more bare wires greeted her. At that point the listing realtor opened the door.

Walking into the foyer drew my attention to the opposite wall of windows, and the view of the lake. However, the view was through a cracked window with broken window treatments. As we walked further into the house, the marble flooring had been cracked, and shifted. Things only got worse. Plumbing didn't work, wiring was exposed in the most unusual places, the pool was such a mess, it would have to be replastered, the boat docks were rotten, the decking around the pool was cracked, and the massive homes across the lake were actually the back of a business complex. The home was priced too high for me to consider it a fixer. Besides, how do you fix a business complex in a residential neighborhood? Obviously, someone had been having a lot of fun with Photoshop.

I now have the lake view of the house as my screen saver. It is a reminder that photos on the web can be quite deceiving. Anytime someone mentions online dating, I just laugh, and think of my screensaver.

My friend from high school? He is still in the picture. The real life picture, not the one in cyber space.

People shop for a bathing suit with more care than they do a husband or wife. The rules are the same. Look for something you'll feel comfortable wearing. Allow for room to grow.

Erma Bombeck