

# RENO

M A G A Z I N E

## LOVE STORIES

Finding love online

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# *E loves me, E loves me not...*

How one woman (and many others)  
found love the old-fashioned way: online

**H**ERE COMES THE CONFESSION. Wait for it, because it's a doozy. Keep in mind I'm not exactly anonymous here, what with the bizarre name, decades-old history in Reno, and full-color picture on the next page.

OK, here it goes: I was lonely. Desperately lonely, to be honest.

I was a single mom, mid-30s, recently (and surprisingly) divorced. I considered myself past my prime and way past the point of preening and prepping for a night out in a local bar competing with the 20-something, pre-Botox crowd.

Instead of navigating the casino-bar underworld on this particular Saturday night, there I sat on my sofa, curled up in sweats, watching *Sleepless in Seattle* for the 74th time. It occurred to me then and there that while I don't own multiple cats, I probably would if their fur didn't send me into sneezing fits. But that's not me, right? After all, I'm a professional. And I own a home. I even give to charity. And hey, I'm a writer.

So, my solution to the realization of my *desperate loneliness*: I was going to write about dating, which would somehow serve to make me feel like I was expanding my social life and ultimately inching toward dating, despite the fact that it was wholly vicarious. ➤

Met through the Net] Lauren and Steve Jackson found each other on an online dating Web site.



*"I set off on my mission with all the excitement and anticipation of a first date."*



**Working relationship** An assignment for RENO Magazine turned into something much more personal for writer Mikalee Byerman.

\$175-an-hour price tag, simply made me lonelier. After all, if so many locals had found others online who were MFEO ("made for each other," in *Sleepless-in-Seattle* speak), then why not me?

So, with coaxing from my editor and bravery imbibed with a few glasses of wine, I accepted the challenge and posted an online profile. My story is at the end of this article. Also on these pages are stories of other local couples who found love online — or on a lunch break.

Bottom line: The Internet and local services can facilitate

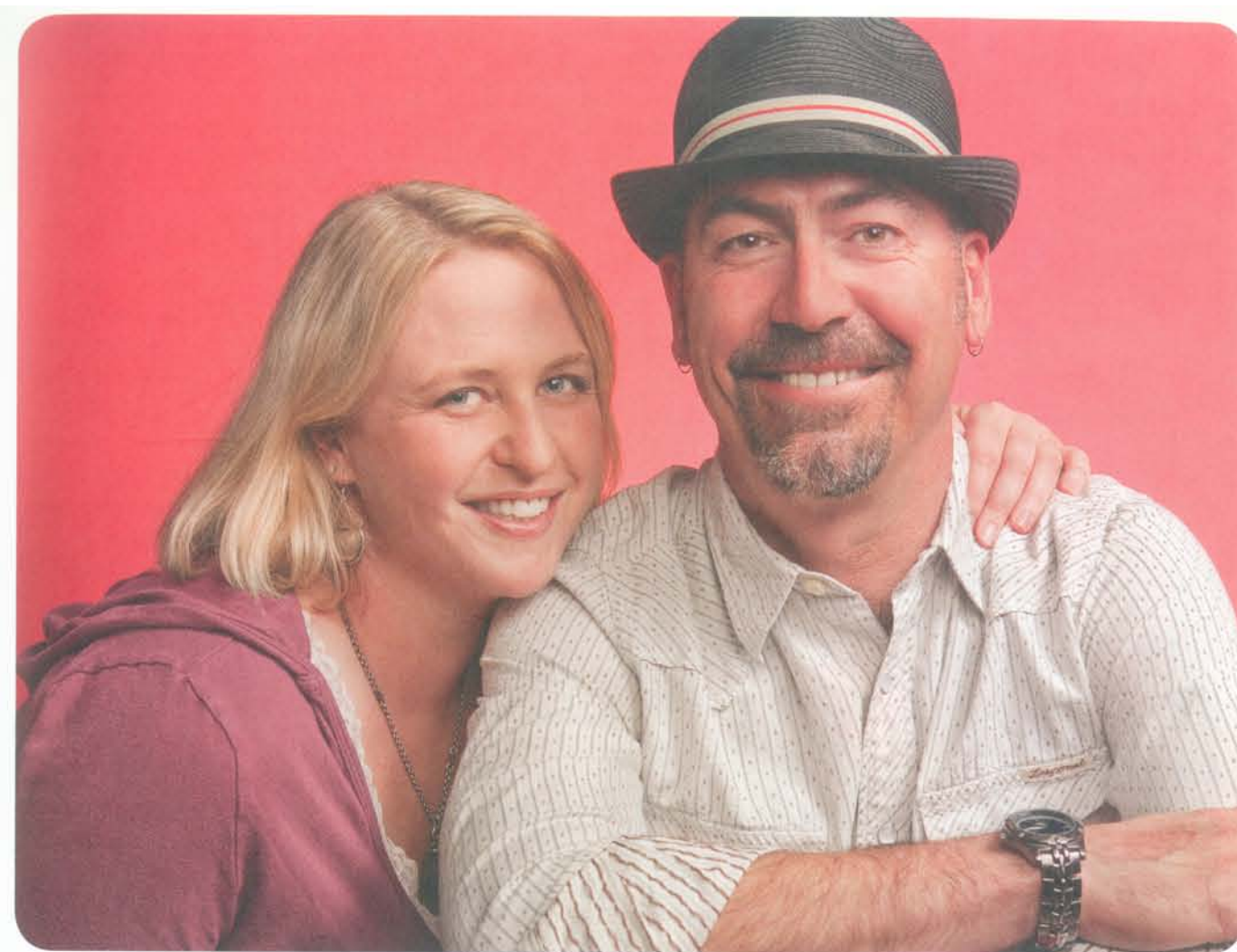
I took another sip of wine and returned to the *Sleepless* marathon, comfortable in my delusion and shaking off the crazy-cat-lady image.

Soon thereafter, I discussed the concept with my editor, who was intrigued by the premise. We discussed recent research suggesting Nevada has the highest divorce rate in the nation, and yet the local dating scene for those not interested in frat parties seems all but absent (at least in my humble, *desperately lonely* opinion). So, my assignment was to find local couples who had met and fallen in love either through an online site or traditional dating service.

I set off on my mission with all the excitement and anticipation of a first date — or at least how I remembered that felt. But the idea, which was supposed to be akin to personal therapy without the

connection, and in some cases, they're better than bars, blind dates, or prowling the produce aisle at your favorite grocery store. Don't believe me? I'm living proof: My boyfriend and I, as a result of this article, met on Match.com. We had been living in the same city for three years, both divorced (in fact, I subsequently learned our divorces were granted one day apart), but in completely different social circles. Without the Internet, that great equalizer, we may never have met. Thanks to my editor, a bottle of wine, and maybe Al Gore, I'm now in a serious, healthy relationship.

And the following couples can say the same. Well, maybe without the gratitude owed to the editor and the bottle of wine.



## Heidi Frantz and Marcel Vasquez

Heidi Frantz, 36, spends her days as a hydrologist mapping flood plains for a Reno engineering consulting firm. It's easy to imagine that her busy professional life leaves her little time to focus on the personal.

"I'm too busy to be spending my free time trolling bars for guys," Frantz says. "And I have quite a few girlfriends who had successes online. So I thought, 'what the heck?'"

She sought advice from these friends, approaching her online dating days with two general rules. First, friends advised her to meet prospects early in the process to quickly gauge interpersonal chemistry. Her second rule: Respond to everyone, even if it's a "thanks, but no thanks."

Rule No. 1 proved prudent, as after signing up on Cupid.com in July, she proceeded to go on a total of four first dates within three weeks — three without connection.

"The best worst date was a guy who showed up at my

door looking like he had just come from the gym — without the funky smell," she laughs.

So by her fourth first date, she admits to feeling tired and a bit jaded resulting from rule No. 2.

"It was beginning to feel like a job," she says. "But then came Marcel."

Marcel Vasquez, a 49-year-old ski instructor and nurse at Renown South Meadows, reached out to her online and eventually asked her out. After a few brief minutes into their first date — lunch at Jazmine — she sensed a connection.

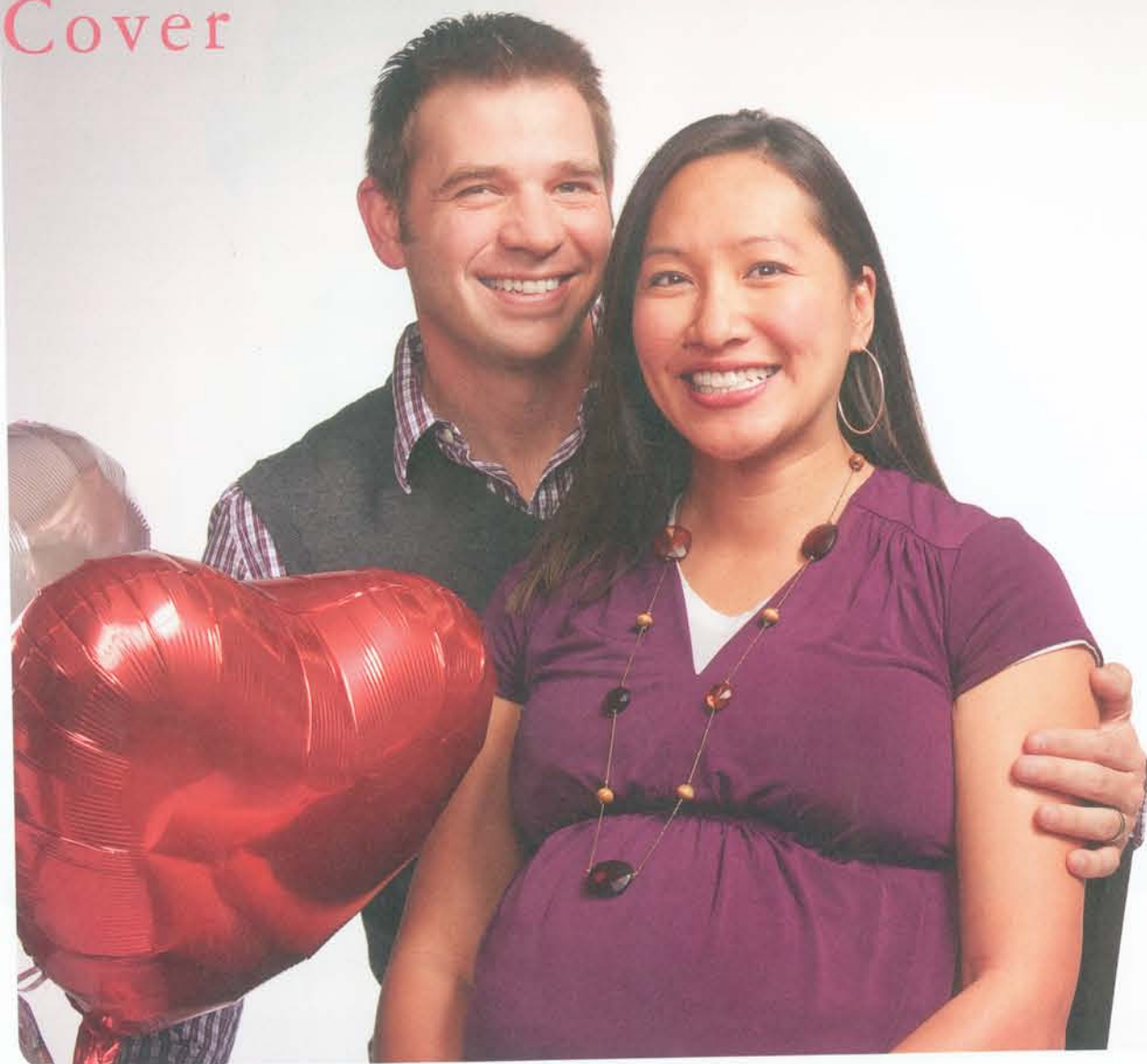
"We both smiled the entire time," she says.

Frantz remembers details of the second and third dates with Marcel; but after that, her memory is fuzzy, as she simply says, "We were just together all the time. It felt so right."

The couple now spends time between her home in Reno and his in Truckee, cooking ("we don't cook together as much as we cook for one another," she says) and reading books of mutual interest like Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*.

"He's my person," she says. "I can't imagine a day without him."





## ↑ Bin Bin Young and Doug Erwin

Bin Bin Young and Doug Erwin included their affirmation for online dating in their wedding vows.

"I told him it was the best \$29.95 I ever spent," Young, 33, jokes. "And our online profiles are both printed out and hanging on the wall at home."

Both would be termed early adopters of online dating, as they began their journey in 2003 with Match.com. At the time, Young was finding the bar scene unfulfilling. Erwin ran a software company in Incline Village and wanted out of the town's "small dating pool."

"I think the Internet is a great way to facilitate

meeting, which is the ultimate goal," Erwin says. "Once you meet, you can tell within the first five minutes if there's potential."

Erwin, 35, says his approach was to let women reach out to him, rather than to actively scour profiles.

"I made a first impression based on the profile and e-mails — making sure they're not Glenn Close, psycho crazy," he laughs. "Then once you meet, you just know."

And with the couple recently welcoming baby Dylan to the family, it appears the potential was there.

"You can tell a lot about a person based on how they express themselves online," Young says. "I knew Doug was creative, intelligent, and had passion in what he enjoyed. Now we enjoy the simple things in life together."

## ➡ Hannah and Nick Serrano

Hannah and Nick Serrano both were young by most standards when they decided to try dating through a service.

"I can tell you it was mostly a time issue for me," notes Nick, who, at 25 years old, was managing a busy mortgage company.

And for Hannah, 27 at the time and working in marketing, convenience was key.

"I had been set up on dates, of course," she says. "And it's always awkward when it doesn't work out."

Tired of Internet dating, Hannah responded to an ad for It's Just Lunch, a franchise with a local outlet that screens potential matches, then facilitates the first date, which always is "just lunch" or coffee.

Nick also saw an ad, his in an in-flight magazine between Las Vegas and Reno.

"I thought to myself, 'Well, if it doesn't work out, I'll just go back to work,'" he remembers. "But I was all for the idea of someone helping out instead of me blindly searching the streets for my date."

According to local It's Just Lunch franchise owner Jennifer Rose, that help is exactly her specialty.

"We have people all the time joke, 'I can't believe I'm paying for this date,' but it's not the date, it's the service," she says. "You can wash all your own clothes, but you know you'll have better results when you dry clean. People pay for things all the time that they can do on their own for better results."

"It was efficient and effective," Nick says, adding that the fact the franchise caters to busy professionals was appealing.

"During this intense hour interview," Hannah recalls, "my interviewer kept saying, 'I know this great guy.'"



*"I was all for the idea of someone helping out instead of me blindly searching the streets for my date."*—Nick

And she was right. He was my first and last date using the service."

Nick and Hannah met for coffee at Java Jungle only three weeks after Hannah joined It's Just Lunch. Four years later, the now-married pair also are proud parents.

"Who would have thought a ho-hum decision made on an airplane would end up being the best decision of my life?" Nick asks.



## Lauren and Steve Jackson

Reno's Steve Jackson, 66, says he met "lots of women" during his almost decade of online dating.

"I was bullish on the process," he says. "I met people I never would have crossed paths with otherwise, really nice people."

One such person was his future wife, Lauren Jackson, whose first husband had passed away almost two years earlier and who found herself ready to date.

"I was in grocery store aisles waiting for my white knight to show up and sweep me off my feet," Lauren, now 62, laughs. "But that wasn't happening, and I just missed companionship — going to a movie, sharing dinner with someone."

So Lauren joined Match.com.

"I'm not going to tell you it wasn't scary for me,"

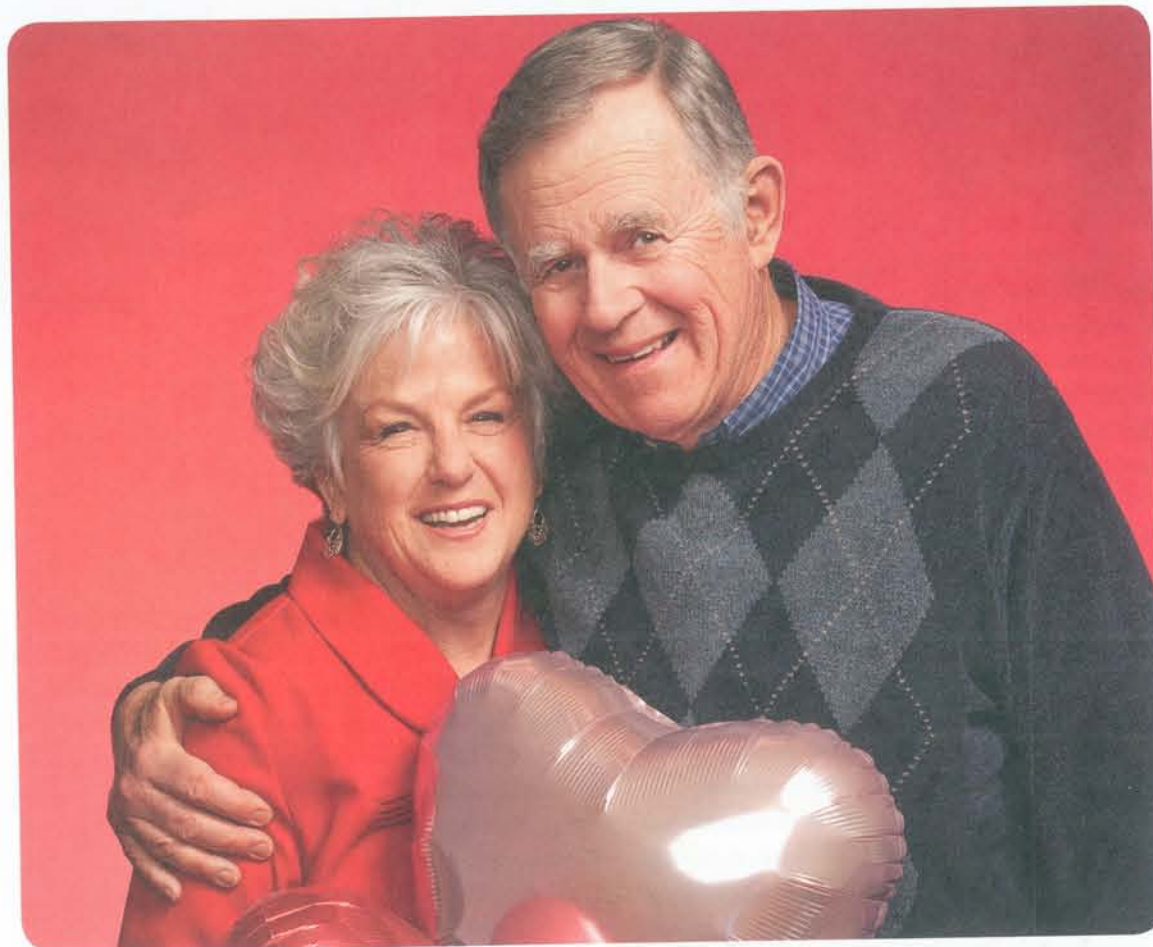
she says. "It was a big, big step."

Such steps are critical, dating columnist and author Tom Blake says. Blake wrote a book on the topic of online dating, *How 50 Couples Found Love After 50*, which includes Steve and Lauren's story.

"The power of the Internet to facilitate meeting is remarkable," he says. "My goal through my writing is to convince older singles to get out there — dust off their uniforms and have fun. It takes effort and energy, but you have to take chances."

Lauren admits to some trepidation surrounding her early online dates, saying she made sure her adult children knew where she was going and that her cell phone remained close.

"But it was a great way to meet, because at my age, I didn't want to play games," she says. "I wrote a profile and basically said, 'Hey, this is me, and I really do have gray hair.' And now I'm so blessed, because I've had two amazing husbands." ■



## DWF

### Learning the ABCs of online dating

**So here's my story.** Randomly, I chose two sites to join: Match.com and eHarmony.com. I was intrigued by the reputation of the former and the gimmick of the latter.

After my profile posted came the deluge. It seems every man (term used loosely, as some were suspiciously pretty) awaits fresh prey. I had so many e-mails, greetings, and "winks" after that first night, I could have benefited from a full-time assistant to screen the prospects.

One potential suitor sent a photo of himself sprawled on a *Sponge Bob Square Pants* bedspread. Ick.

Another told me I was his "sole mate," and that he wanted to find someone "carring" to take to a "festabel" or some other "tipe of outting." My first instinct was to respond with a red pen, rather than a wink back.

Then I learned that eHarmony has a twisted sense of humor. In my inbox on day two, three "matches" awaited my reply: Jeff from Yuba City; Jeff from Eureka; and Jeff from Gridley. My ex-husband's name: Jeff, of course.

I eventually went on a few dates, after learning essential screening techniques. Engage in electronic conversation. See if there's a spark. Do a Google search once you get a real name.

But even that couldn't prepare me for the guy

I dated for a week who ultimately professed his undying love for me on day seven and admitted to a fetish for women who "go green." Initially, I wasn't discouraged by his request, assuming he was referring to eco-friendliness. Heck, we all can stand to reduce, reuse, and recycle a little more, right?

Not so much. This particular guy — a professional, seemingly stable, Google-able guy with whom I shared great chemistry — had less interest in the environment than for his personal wish to paint a woman green, like the alien in the recent *Star Trek* movie. Bright green. Double ick.

But then I met Brett Doyle, 41, who, from our first e-mail exchange, was different. And no, it wasn't his uncanny resemblance to Hugh Grant — though that certainly helps. I knew from our witty banter online and from the intelligence and thoughtfulness of his profile that he was, perhaps, a match.

Now, seven months later, I no longer obsess over my desperate loneliness while watching *Sleepless in Seattle*. Because guess what? He likes that movie, too. So Brett and I, a match made on Match.com, now watch it together. Maybe — just maybe — we're MFEO. Fingers crossed.

Special thanks to Old Navy for providing wardrobe for some of our cover-story couples.