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Speed Dating and Dating and Dating - Chattanooga might not be L.A., but I'm not complaining

by Andrew Stegall

May 10, 2006

Meeting single women in Chattanooga is a challenge. Most people here, it seems to me, are married by the age of 25. I, on the other hand, just turned 40 and am still single. I moved here from Los Angeles a little over two years ago. Back home, having never been married and having no children at my age is by no means unusual. But here it's highly unusual. I've met people here younger than I am, who are in their second marriage and have kids in high school. I would like to be married someday, but I've always had a blast being single— at least I did in LA. In Chattanooga, it's not as much fun. I left a huge city full of available singles and now my options are extremely limited. So when I heard that a company called Cupid.com was conducting “speed dates” here in town, I knew I had to give it a try.

The idea behind a speed date is that attraction or chemistry happens very quickly, so instead of wasting an entire evening on a blind date with someone you know you're not interested in right away, why not meet an entire group of people one by one and see if you make initial connections with one or more of them so that you can follow up with them later on your own? I think it's a brilliant

idea. And, in my case, it worked really well.

The “pre-date” event was held at the Fox and Hound near Hamilton Place. There were supposed to be two age groups in two separate pre-date groups: 22 to 34 and 32 to 44, I think. But age groups didn’t wind up mattering: there were so many no-shows that the moderator combined both groups into one. Fortunately, this didn’t seem to bother anyone and the first bell rang starting the six-minute-long pre-dates.

I met eight women in all and, on the whole, they really impressed me: two were doctors and one was in graduate school. All of them were friendly, articulate and respectable professionals. I didn’t even need the six minutes, however. I pretty much knew which ones I was not attracted to or interested in right away. We were given “Match Sheets” on which we wrote the badge numbers and first names of each person we spoke with and after talking with each one, we either circled “Let’s talk again!” or “No, thanks.”

I was instantly attracted to the first girl I chose. I’ll call her Bethany. She had a wicked combination of dark hair and blue eyes. Conversation flew along seamlessly and, when the bell rang, instead of being told to go to the next person, we were told we could take a break and Bethany and I continued talking and laughing until the break was over. She told me that this event was a gift to herself, as her birthday was the day before. Later, when the dates were finished and after I turned in my sheet, I went up to her again and we talked for another 20 minutes or so. I felt pretty sure she had chosen me also.

The next woman I spoke with, I’ll call her Erica, told me she was duped into the speed date. She said that one of her best friends had invited her to meet for drinks at the Fox and Hound at 8 p.m. When Erica’s friend didn’t show up, she called her and asked her where she was. Her friend said, “I’m sorry, I’m not coming.” Erica said she was going to leave then, but her friend told her, “You’re not going anywhere. I’ve signed you up for a speed dating party and I paid for it, so just go into the room on the side with the ‘private party’ sign, have fun and tell me how it goes.”

After Erica, I talked with a girl I had actually met before (I’ll call her Megan), but I couldn’t remember where. I asked her if she knew where we met and she did: the Chattanooga Chamber of Commerce Business Expo back in February. I quickly found out she works in the same industry as I do: advertising sales. She was very friendly, energetic, cute and, given our similar careers, I knew we’d have plenty to talk about, so I chose her also.

When I saw that I had an e-mail with the results the next day, I was excited. It listed matches: women I’d selected who also selected me. But it also listed women who chose me that I didn’t choose. I had three of the latter and only one match: Megan. Bethany was not on either list and I was completely surprised. However, within an hour, I received an e-mail telling me there was a message for me on Cupid.com and sure enough it was Bethany thanking me for choosing her and inviting me to get together. I e-mailed her my phone number and when we spoke, she told me that she had chosen four guys—myself included—but somehow, not one of the four guys knew she had chosen them. (And she should have also been named as a match for me since I chose her and she chose me. Someone had made some mistakes.) But no matter, thanks to her e-mail, we connected

again and got in touch with each other. I was probably one of the luckiest people in the group: I chose two girls and they both chose me.

I knew about a perfect event for a first real date two nights after the speed date. I took Bethany to the Patron Party for the 4Bridges Arts Festival and we had a fantastic time walking around looking at the art exhibits and talking with the artists. We ate dinner in the tent with my boss and his wife—all while a nasty thunderstorm poured buckets of rain outside. Afterward, I asked her if she'd like to continue hanging out and she said yes, so we went to a karaoke bar to meet up with a few of her friends. Last night, we had our second date: Sushi at Sekisui, a drink at Big River Grill and a movie. I've also had one date with Megan: dinner at Easy Seafood and drinks at The Roof Bar. And as I predicted, we talked the entire time.

Because of all the no-shows, I guess, the moderator of the pre-dating event gave each of us a free pass to any future pre-dating event and, given the success of this one, I went online and signed up for one later this month. The age group for that one is 28 to 42, I think, and I'm looking forward to it.

There is one potential problem in all of this, though. Like I said, I chose two girls. Bethany chose four guys. I don't remember how many guys Megan chose, but she told me she made friends with some of the girls and that she even knew who Bethany was. Obviously one or two dates is far too soon for jealousy to enter the picture, but this could get complicated. I guess that if you go on a speed date, you have to understand that this can happen. I'm glad that both girls and I were truthful about the others we chose from the start. I also told both that I've already signed up to go on the next pre-date.

What an interesting situation I suddenly find myself in: instead of having no girls I felt like I could date in Chattanooga, now I may have too many and soon I may have even more.

Cupid.com Speed Dating Event

Wednesday, May 24

Fox and Hound Bar & Grille

2040 Hamilton Place Boulevard

8:30 p.m.

\$40 for online registration (\$45 by phone)

(423) 802-1819

<http://pre-dating.com/speeddating/CHAT.php>

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