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NEWS

## Single in the Circle City

By [Molly G. Martin](#)

I awoke one stormy night certain I was in hell. Lights were flashing, Hall & Oates was blaring and a teeny-tiny hellhound was gnawing on my toes. Turns out it was just a power surge that happened to bring my radio to life and scare my miniature dachshund to death.

You can imagine the flashback as months later I found myself swaying awkwardly to "Through the Years," thrown slightly off-balance by mood lighting and too much watery Merlot, not to mention the toddler knee-capping me in time to the music.

But this was no nightmare: this was my beloved college roommate's wedding. And I was wearing periwinkle crepe.

Since June 2003, I've been to seven weddings. Most were lovely, elegant affairs celebrating people I love (or, failing that, excellent opportunities to drink hard liquor at 3 in the afternoon without the dirty looks). But more than a few were not for the single and faint of heart. A few times the unmarried women were even herded together and surrounded by an angry, well-coifed mob. Then they threw pointy things at us. We scattered. Masses cheered. It was like that Shirley Jackson story, but with "C'mon Ride that Train" playing in the background.

Weddings, reality shows and pop songs are constant reminders to singles that it's you against the world. And even if you like to believe — as I do — that you're content to go it alone until you find someone who can keep up with you, some days it's hard to ignore the sympathetic glances and deliriously loving couples.

Some days you just really want to be a we.

Optimus Prime, I won't wait forever ...

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I've always known that the object of falling in love is finding a complement to your existence, not the sole reason for it. I know this and, really and truly, am not in a huge hurry to marry. But as time wears on I realize that I am in a huge hurry to be loved ... and loved in that way that you suspect waking up legless and homeless tomorrow would be a little bit easier to handle.

I am, however, no longer in a hurry to mail my pleading letters to Lenny Kravitz, Edward Norton or Optimus Prime. They never write back and mamma didn't raise no fool.

Anyway, I have discovered that I'm not alone in accepting my desire to find "the one." Indy is teeming with single people, too young to be wise and too old to be in the throes of some existential crisis. They are looking for love in a far more pragmatic way. And an entire industry has sprung up, only too happy too oblige.

J-E-L-L-O!

The median age of Indy's population is 33.5, while the national average is 36. In fact, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, Circle City types between the ages of 25 and 44 account for the largest chunk of Indy's population.

But being a city full of relatively young people doesn't necessarily make for good mating grounds. On a list of 80 U.S. cities, Indy ranks 60th for singles aged 18-24, an age group in which 80 percent of the members are single. Sperling, the urban research firm responsible for the study, blames a relatively low number of good dating venues (read: new bars), but applauds Indy's reasonable cost of living. Nearby Columbus, Ohio — whose age demos are pretty comparable — ranked 12th, largely due to higher marks in the "fun stuff to do" column. Columbus aside, don't assume that the rest of the Midwest fared much better than Indy: Chicago fell to 55th and Kansas City, Mo., found itself in last place. No, you have to head 1,096 miles southwest to find No. 1: Austin, Texas, took the top spot.

And the hits just keep on comin', single folks. Somewhere in the ballpark of 60 percent of Indy's households are labeled as "families."

What does all of this mean? Probably very little, thanks to skewed census practices, but we can glean, at least, this simple fact: Indy is a city with a lot of young people, but also a lot of families. This might indicate that the young and unmarried/unattached in Indy may end up with what scientists refer to as slim pickins.

Some of the Circle City's greatest strengths may also be the single Indy-ite's greatest hurdles. A family-friendly metropolitan area, for sure, Indy has a lot to offer, but, so say a lot of areas singles, not for them.

“It’s alright around here, but if you’re not into the artsy stuff or if you can’t find someone to date at work, what do you do? Go to [a meat market]? I’m too old for that shit,” said Jerome, a 31-year-old sales rep.

What an insidious catch-22. To meet singles you need to stalk them in their natural habitat: meat/meet markets. The hitch? You have to actually go to meat markets, eerie worlds where Jell-o shots are the only currency. Once you attain a certain age and sense of self, there is NOT always room for Jell-o.

Even if you hit meat-markets-in-disguise (Brooks Brothers’ fall line and marble countertops in the restrooms doesn’t necessarily preclude hearing “Come here often?”), the sheer weight of the sexual frustration in the room may choke you before you can even enjoy that 23-ounce neon martini. And you may begin to notice the same people at the end of the bar, week after week. If you didn’t hit it off during Thursday karaoke, will you fare any better at Two-for-Tuesday?

Bar none

If “I’m sick of the bar scene” is a gripe of Circle City singles, the natural solution would seem to be do your mate-hunting elsewhere. But that presents yet another pesky question: Where do you go when you know who you are and what you want, but not where to find it?

Answer: You seek professional help (preferably not in the “red light” sense of the word).

“[Indy] is not a city where professionals remain downtown to socialize after work. It can be very hard to meet other professional, single, like-minded people without a little help,” says Heather Hill-Smulyan, the founder of Reservations for Two, one of Indianapolis’ highest-end options for singles. Finding love in Indy, she says, “is all about making paths cross.” That’s where your friendly neighborhood match-maker comes in to play.

Hill-Smulyan founded Reservations for Two after paying her dues working for another national match-making franchise. After observing the sprawling social nature of the city and noticing the increasing number of people re-entering the dating scene after a long relationship or marriage, Hill-Smulyan found her niche.

Reservations for Two offers a full-service match-making experience Yenta-style. The process kicks off with a comprehensive application and face-to-face interview process, after which the self-dubbed relationship experts — having picked up your scent — hit the trail and try to determine if you might be compatible with any of their other lovelorn clients. If they find someone, they make a reservation for two at one of their participating restaurants and contact each of you with the details.

When you hire a match-maker there is, as in any social situation, the potential for rejection. Hill-Smulyan and company don’t guarantee that you’ll be a good match for anyone currently on their roster nor do they guarantee that you’ll even be a good candidate for their service, full-stop. The good news: The women of Reservations for Two are nothing if not forthright and have told more than a few potential clients that he or she wouldn’t find what they were looking for with their service.



Moreover, if you do enroll in the service, they collect feedback on their clients' dates. If you spent too much time moaning over your ex, spent all of dinner with your elbows in the Hollandaise, etc. they will find out and advise you. Reservations for Two's in-house style maven and life coach, Robyn Haagsma, will also be on-hand before your dating adventure ever begins to warn you against ever donning that Laura Ashley sundress again. Hell, she'll even go shopping with you so you don't make another regrettable retail mistake.

(Ah, the magical marriage of surveillance and romance ...)

Now for the bad news: It is difficult to meet with Hill-Smulyan or her henchwomen and not feel "late for the prom." Professional and kind? Sure. Believable as having ever suffered the slings and arrows of true dating hysteria? Hard to say, as they each appeared very young, very sorority-ready and to be wearing wedding rings. Sitting across from this polished and poised posse may make you feel about an inch high if your bangs are sticking to your sweaty forehead after running from the closest parking space — which seemed to be in Missouri.

If you're a professional Indy single of means, ready to get serious about finding your better half, a pro match-maker like Heather Hill-Smulyan may just turn out to be your guru. Just, for the love of Pete, keep your elbows off the table during dinner. They're watching you!

### Dating like the Dickens

Singles in the Circle City who aren't quite prepared to enlist the services of a professional match-maker but are fairly serious about mating might opt for dating service stalwart Great Expectations. Another relatively costly option, yes, but as marketing director Aaron Moore points out, the fee — which is individualized according to a personalized package your consultant will help you build — gives you access to its 4,000-member database.

Like other similar services, much of Great Expectations' client base consists of singles whose careers and lives are well-established. They may be getting back in the saddle after a divorce. They may have worked overtime for 10 years and turned around one day to realize that they wanted to call their house and hear a friendly voice telling them it was time to come home.

Members literally browse through a mega-library of singles, all the while knowing that every profile they peruse belongs to someone serious about finding a match. Members can also take heart that if someone boasts a red flag during the screening

process, like a history of domestic violence, Great Expectations will refuse that person's application.

It's the thorough nature of the screening process that Great Expectations believes distinguishes it from its chief competitors, like Internet dating services. That and the pesky detail that Great Expectations fancies itself a high-tech dating service but not a — gasp! — online dating service. In fact, their lilac-swaddled waiting room is papered with reprints from various national news outfits reporting that more and more Internet dating service clients are turning out to be married.

I've known from the first time I saw *War Games* that computers were capable of great evil.

The biggest argument against such services is that, even after footing the bill, you are also saddled with doing the work. You can view it as being in control or, as more than a few former clients have remarked, being fleeced. But hey, all's fair in love, war and the dating game ...

My pigeon is my life



So, Circle City singles, checkbook permitting, a professional match-maker may set you on the path to finding the Tracy to your Hepburn. But what are the rest of us to do? Those who're looking to broaden our social horizons in a less intense, less expensive way? In a hyphen: Pre-Date.

It's no secret that speed-dating has become a social fixture in Indy. What began as a theme for singles nights at temples across America is now de rigueur in every major city.

In fact, one speed-dating witness/Castleton drink-slinger notes that the phenomenon is "just like anything that Indy finally catches onto ... like karaoke." The impetus for the craze catching on? Capitalists. "It's about money, single people have it and bars and [dating services] need it."

At a recent pre-dating party hosted by Pre-Dating Events and its enthusiastic director, Sundrea Ryan, the participants didn't seem like capitalist pawns.

Patti, who had attended a previous event, noted that, dating prospects aside, “I’ve met great women to be friends with.” This happy by-product of speed-dating is well-cultivated by Pre-Dating Events, which offers three options on its ballot: match, friend or business.

As the pre-daters cycled through five minutes of face-time, I felt a little gypped. My own speed-dating adventure was allotted only three minutes. In the cases of “Bitch-Only-THOUGHT-She-Got-Everything” and “My Pigeon Is My Life” guys, however, three minutes was sufficient.

Pre-dating events are one way to break away from the bars without projecting massive marital fantasies all over yourself and others. “It’s a terrific way to meet people who are in the mood and moment of their life to meet people,” says Jen, Pre-Dating Events’ promotions director — who joined the company following a 17-date outing of her own.

As Pre-Dating Events tailors its parties to satisfy a wide variety of demos, it’s a cost-effective option with potentially far broader appeal. The venues and age demos targeted by each party vary; typically there’s a 10-year age range. Past venues have included Vapour, Howl at the Moon and the Blu Martini. The evening in question introduced me to one of Indy’s newest bar/eateries, Avalon, which provided a classy backdrop and soothing sounds, courtesy of an entertaining Bizarro Sinatra. It reminded me a little bit of the supper club in *The Great Muppet Caper* ... but in a good way.

In a move to distinguish itself from its competitors, just last month Pre-Dating Events ventured into same-sex dating parties. They also sponsor events for everyone from single parents to fitness fanatics. I long for the day they throw a dating party for people who’re creeped out by the Three Stooges. I am so there.

Send me an angle



If you do your homework, you see that dating-turned-science isn’t as disheartening as it sounds. In fact, the calculated ways in which the dating industry has tapped into the market may have actually revived the art of dating in the truest sense. 1960s sitcom teens seemed to have dates with different Brylcreem-ed suitors every week. But in the age of “college marriages,” dating multiple people to try egos on for size is no longer the social or cultural norm. There is one realm, though, that seems to lend itself to this brand of exploration: the virtual one.

In the course of exploring my online dating options I had to: choose a service, draft my own ad and finish my will. Once I poked around and polled some friends, I elected to do my shopping on Yahoo!. Besides being fairly reasonably priced and full of

security bells and whistles, I know of two nice kids in Cleveland who met on Yahoo! — my sister and her husband.

First I had to decide how to market myself in a simple paragraph. What should they know about me and what do I need to gauge about them?

I chose a theme, naming my ad “Brought to you by the letter ‘M.’” Watch out, boys: She’s cute and literate! This seemed like a grand idea until I began listing my likes — the Mets, the Marx Brothers, movies, music — and promptly ran out of “m” words. “Mmmmm, books are nice?” “My politics are left-leaning?” I was stumped. So, I decided to leave my ad very vague, noting only that any respondents must be regular voters. (And love using parentheses. God, I live for parentheses.)

I soon realized that there are a lot of Indy singles doing the “cyberspace thang.” By simply posting my ad for three days I heard from 67 local men, aged 24 to 35. Everyone seemed very nice, but too many respondents violated my criteria right out of the gate. I decided, even before I posted my ad, that anyone mentioning an item from the following list would be automatically disqualified: taxidermy, Frampton Comes Alive and Hemingway. After reading the first few replies I added “messages containing hotel room numbers” to that list.

My future in cyber-dating was not looking so hot.

I am, however, being a little unfair to my respondents. I did come upon a young Ohioan who showed great potential. His ad’s title was among the most moving I’ve ever seen: “Send Me an Angle.” You know. An angle. Like with wigs and a hallo.

So, for lack of sincere enough interest in the people who had replied to me, I took matters into my own hands. I scoured the intangible Internet world for a single Yahoo! ad I liked the sound of and became the asker, not the asked. Let’s call my paramour “Online Otis,” shall we? Anyway, after exchanging an e-mail with Online Otis, I was fairly intrigued. We’d meet for coffee in Broad Ripple, we decided, taking refuge together from the icy conditions of both Indiana and the singles scene. I was pretty excited.

Until he stood me up.

After 20 year-long minutes I determined that, yes, I’d been ditched at Starbucks. I bought an apple cider, fighting the urge to explain to the clerk that “it just takes me a really long time to decide what to order,” and left. At least I didn’t fall on my ass on the walk back to my car.

Score.

“Isn’t it nice to know a lot ... and a little bit not”

I’ve now been to the dating circus and seen all three rings, but I’m still pretty aimless. The good news? According to the Centers for Disease Control (really!) a higher age at the time of your first marriage equals a greater potential for success. The bad news? As people stay single longer, become more educated and gain more life experience, we turn around one day to find that we know too much. An entire industry has grown out of our savvy. We can now poll potential mates about everything from child-rearing philosophies to fiscal health ... which just happen to be identified by researchers as the two most critical factors in marital success.

We now know that we face as high as a 40-50 percent chance of divorcing in our respective lifetimes. The trend of “starter marriages” is on the rise, teaching many of us unwanted lessons.

So we are now in more control of our dating destinies than ever before. Not to mention that we are all now well-aware that we’re doomed. Raise your hand if you’ve never felt more lost.

Anyway, as most of my friends pair off and couple-skate into the sunset I have to wonder if I’ll ever find that one person for the long haul. I’m confident the sun will still rise if I don’t, but I suppose I’m finally ready to take some initiative and throw my back into the chase. And since the business of romance is booming, I have little or no excuse not to.

But, mark my words, should I ever marry, revenge will be mine. The wedding dress code will demand periwinkle ... lots and lots of periwinkle.

## Resources

### **The like-minded route**

Your church, synagogue, etc. probably sponsors singles mixers tailored for age groups, parental status, etc.

Meeting “the one” is by no means a good reason to volunteer for a social or political cause ... but it can be a happy by-product and can weed out those pesky non-voters from your dating pool.

### **Speed-dating**

Pre-Dating Events

<http://www.nuvo.net/archive/2005/02/09/www.pre-dating.com/indy>

### **Match-makers**

Great Expectations

<http://ge-dating.com>

Reservations for Two

<http://www.reservationsfortwo.net/>

### **Personal ads**

NUVO Connections

Reader Willi Womack met his lovely wife of 10 years using Connections. Take that, cynics!

<http://www.people2people.com/?page=login&connect=nuvo>

### **Quest**

Another online community that smacks of hook-ups rather than love stories. The page sports a fire engine red background ... enough said.

<http://www.questpersonals.com/>

### **eHarmony.com**

For the most scientific among you, this service’s claim to fame is a 500-question survey meant to profile the “29 dimensions critical to long-term success in relationships.” The company’s guru, Dr. Neil Clark Warren, is kind of like a Dr. Spock for marriage-hungry grown-ups.

<http://www.eharmony.com/>



### Match.com

The most popular online dating service, which has been somewhat sullied by recent rumors that many members are marrieds looking for “adventures.”

<http://www.match.com/>

### Yahoo! Personals

I actually know two happily married couples who met this way, so it seems kosher to me.

<http://personals.yahoo.com/>

—*MM*

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