



ILLUSTRATIONS BY JASON LOGAN

# A date for Kate, part 2: Gone surfing

Trolling for dates on the Internet, one comes across two types of men: those into younger women; those into ice fishing

BY WENDY DENNIS

Kate and I are surfing the personals and it's not going well. We're seeing a lot of gold chains, stone-washed jeans, cowboy hats, and haircuts reminiscent of Don Johnson in his *Miami Vice* days. Cyberspace, we're discovering, is a vast land where the pickins are slim for women over 50 and the turf seems to be disproportionately peopled with men with bouffant hair. Still, you've got to start somewhere, so first we try 48-60-year-olds living within a 50-mile radius of Kate's Cabbagetown Toronto home. Pretty soon we're searching for a guy with a penis who lives in our solar system.

Kate's obsessing. She resents being dumped into a category (55+) that seems less an age slot like the others and more a place that you go before you die. She is cool, funny, vibrant and wise, so, understandably, this annoys her. Sec-

ondly, shocking though it may seem, a lot of the men her age are looking for younger women. Kate fears no one will want her. I tell her that she can either search for an octogenarian (in the hopes he'll skew younger) or stop obsessing and trust that somewhere out there is a decent man who'll find her appealing.

I'd be freaking, too, though, and it's not just the cruel injustices of middle age or our demented cultural obsession with youth. It's the brutality of the medium. Kate and I are tossing away men like peanut shells. If, by some miracle, a guy makes it past the first checkpoint (the photo challenge) she could give him the hook, at any turn, for the most capricious reasons. Kate's not abnormally picky. She just knows what she wants, and the Internet affords her the luxury of not having to dally with what she doesn't want.

For instance, she's gym-fit but rejects a guy who bills himself as "health-conscious." ("It's a buzz word. It means they're vegans.") She rejects another because he uses the word "sharing." ("It's just one of those words that when you hear it you say no. It means they lack edge.") She skates by a third because he said that Goofy cracked him up. ("I never watch cartoons. And I work in them.") She nixes guys who can't spell worth shit and guys who blow it by saying things like "what is essential is invisible," which unfortunately whittles down the pool by about 90%. She rejects men with boats and men with baseball caps, men posed in front of their wheels, or any man who says he's a funny guy. (Kate's a comedic actress and her late husband was a brilliant comedy writer. We're talking standards here.) Kate even rejected a guy because of his bad balloon drape. (I'm with her there. At 55, you don't want to be dating a man with bad curtains. If you die, those hideous drapes may be the last thing you see.) Cyberspace confers no second chances: "Look at this one. He's got magnets on the fridge, that's probably not a real plant, his picture is

too high, he's got a light fixture from the '70s, and he wants me to date him? I'm sorry."

After our first foray online, Kate spends about 10 hours exploring on her own. She tries american-singles, lavalife, loveatfirstclick, nerve, 8minutedating, salon, ecyrano and a few others, but just couldn't face lovemelovemypet. And she's an animal lover. She even checked out seniorfinder.com, but prefers not to talk about that experience. The Web site marketing ploys provided much-needed comic relief: "It was like what they do at Blockbuster. You know — if you liked *Titanic*, then you really gotta see *Das Boot*. I'm telling you, it's wacky out there."

All in all, she found the process enervating and the photos appalling. By some freak coincidence, every guy in her age group was five-foot-eleven. She preferred the larger, simpler-to-navigate sites like lavalife.com and match.com because they didn't have a lot of bells and whistles. Loveatfirstclick, on the other hand, was daunting: "Give a wink. Send a nudge. Roll over. Heel. Come get your cookie. You could make a call just waiting."

And Kate wants to go to the phone as soon as possible, not only because the computer frustrates her, but because she grew up with the phone and voices are hugely important to her.

Furthermore, except for a couple of Web sites where she discovered some intriguing candidates of like sensibility — i.e., they at least had the wit to say they'd read a book by Philip Roth — she had trouble finding her niche. She was scouting for a smart, funny guy with "that scholarly boyish thing" going on — the sort who enjoys sitting by the fire and listening to Chet Baker. What she found, mostly, were Bob and Doug Mackenzies perched on Ski-Doods. Not that she can't do outdoorsy. But we're not talking hiking in the silent forest. These guys were all about "scratching your crotch and picking your nose and making sure the fire's out before you're really drunk." We're talking, "Who's up for ice fishing?" She'd click on the photos and think, my God, is that the high end? "I don't think I'm that fussy, but are these the best apples in the barrel? Should I be clicking my heels?"

The worst was a 61-year-old "demented Santa" who wouldn't

change a thing about his past, including his recent brain injury. "OK, so his concentration span is probably 30 seconds and he's blind in one eye and his left cortex is gone, but it doesn't matter. It's all good. If he can embrace it, so can I. And these guys think you're going to say, 'That's the guy for me!'"

As I said, it was a little depressing. So, I decided to give Kate a hand and do a little digging on my own. She brightened considerably when I showed her a charming prospect I'd found on one of the more promising Web sites. Actually, she said "Gimme that!" and yanked his profile out of my hand. This was an excellent sign. Her next assignment is to find at least one guy worth contacting, and to pick the Web site where she wants to post her profile. She's writing it even as we speak. Let the games begin.

■ The next instalment of *A Date for Kate* will appear on April 10.

*Saturday Post*

