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## How to Make Friends—at Any Age

A new city and a new job left one writer wallowing in social solitude, until she embarked on a month of platonic speed dating

by Meredith Maran



Photograph: Greg Clarke

I didn't think my face could get even hotter and redder, but as it turns out, it could. "Of course I remember," I mumble. "I'm sorry. I . . ."

I *what*? Is there any forgivable way to explain that I've confused her with another of the dozen-plus women I've met in the past month of desperation-driven friendship speed dating?

No way I can think of that won't cause my blunder to end our two-hike-old friendship. "Midlife moment," I mumble, promising myself that from now on, I'll take notes immediately after each date. Maybe *during* each date.

"So," I ask my single-and-sensitive-about-it friend, "any OkCupid prospects?"

The summer I turned 61, the structure of my life collapsed like a bridge built by a crooked contractor. I lost a huge chunk of my savings; my blissful 15-year marriage fell apart; and the downturn in the publishing industry made me wish I'd stuck it out as a nurse instead of becoming a writer. In other words, my life in Oakland sucked so badly (in a First World—problems kind of way) that I had no choice but to do something about it.

By "do something," I don't mean the standard measures I'd already taken: searching for a job in the recessioned-out Bay Area, searching for a winning lottery ticket, searching for a low-cost therapist. Wearing out my closest friends. Going thrift-store shopping. Wearing out my not-so-closest friends. Joining a support group. Wearing out my mailman. Doing a juice cleanse. Doing tequila shots.

I got lucky. I snagged a job writing and editing for Josie Maran Cosmetics, the eponymous beauty company founded by my 35-year-old niece. The office? In Los Angeles. In a moment that could have been voted least likely to plump up a sixty-something woman's shriveled self-esteem, I said good-bye to my friends, packed up my laptop, my geriatric vitamins and my vibrator and moved to Hollywood.

The job, my first in an office in 25 years, quickly proved to be great—if you don't count the damage to my already fragile ego. I was working in Hollywood. With coworkers half my age and half my dress size. But no pressure to look amazing every single workday or anything. I found a cute, tiny bungalow to rent. In a hipster neighborhood. With cute, tiny neighbors less than half my age and less than half my skinny-jeans size.

But solving my most pressing practical problems surfaced a most pressing emotional problem, and its name was loneliness. With my heart still aching, I was *so not ready* for romantic love. After floundering for a while, I realized there were two ways to deal with my social solitude. I could throw myself the world's longest and least festive pity party. Or I could get aggressive about making some friends.

A friend of a certain age and I are huffing our way up a steep trail in the Hollywood Hills, baking under the blinding summer sun.

"Did your husband get the job?" I ask.

My friend frowns, shooting me a confused—and distinctly annoyed—look. "I don't *have* a husband," she says. "I don't know how you could have forgotten that. Last week after we hiked, you helped me write my profile for OkCupid."



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I was all out of black balloons, so I went with Plan B. I posted messages on Facebook and Twitter and e-mailed everyone I knew, asking if any of my friends or “friends” or tweeps knew anyone in Los Angeles whom I might like and who might like me. To my delight, the platonic matchmaking offers started pouring in.

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