



IT'S A MATCH!

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largest virtual-speed-dating event.

Ask any Jewish person if they know someone who has either attended or met their partner at a Matzo Ball, and chances are they'll answer in the affirmative. "That's where almost all of my Jewish friends met their spouses," Linda, one of my childhood friends, told me. While working as a policy analyst at the Department of Energy, she attended the 1994 DC shindig where she struck up a conversation with her now-husband of 25 years. The 28-year-old son of another friend never misses the New York City ball because of its reputation for attracting both a "classy and trashy" crowd, while a studio-executive pal fondly recalled a ball held at the Troubadour, which landed her in a threesome with "a formerly Orthodox girl and a guy hung like a challah."

Since the recent dissolution of a 22-year marriage, I've mostly eschewed dating. "I'm practicing 'radical aloneness,'" I'd tell friends and family, "radical" carrying unimpeachable heft in Los Angeles; at any moment, locals are practicing "radical empathy" or "radical honesty." I feel confident that someone in my zip code is leading a workshop on "radical Swiffering." The online daters in my circle are like dieters who've adopted extreme juice cleanses, insisting that I give one a shot. Since COVID-19 has turned us all into shut-ins and my conversations with my cats have grown more lengthy, I've reconsidered my dating moratorium.

A friend suggested Raya. Aside from my uncertainty over whether I might qualify for the celebrity dating site, there's the question of whether I want to date someone who self-identifies as a celebrity. Reasoning that my recent cancer diagnosis might provide a conversation starter, and maybe I'd meet someone with great insurance, I googled "cancer dating sites."

"People living with cancer are looking great these days," I thought, while checking out profiles at CancerFriendsDate.com, until I realized it was a site for dating Cancers, people who fall under the astrological sign.

Others suggested Jewish sites, but there was only a brief period when I specifically dated Jews. One consisted of attending a High Holiday service at the Temple for the Performing Arts, where congregants read scripts tucked inside prayer books. At this point, I'm an atheist who leads a secu-

The Belle of the Matzo Ball

ON CHRISTMAS EVE, I SAILED OFF ON AN ONLINE JOURNEY TO FIND A SAVORY JEWISH DATE. INSTEAD, I ENDED UP IN THE SOUP



ANYONE WHO HAS enjoyed a bowl of matzo ball soup knows that matzo balls are either sinkers or floaters. Cooking up a floater is a lot like finding love; it requires an almost alchemical combination of luck and timing. A buoyant ball seems to defy nature, while a dense, leaden orb can sit in your stomach stewing for a long time. Then there's the annual Christmas Eve Matzo Ball, a mixer for single members of the tribe, founded in 1987 by entrepreneur Andy Rudnick. Since then, Matzo Balls have been held in dozens of cities around in U.S. This year, the ball pivoted from in-person to online, in what was ambitiously advertised as the world's

lar life, but attending the Matzo Ball seemed like a small enough investment of time. What could go wrong?

So I began stalking the website. The flashing updates quickened my pulse: *2,718 have viewed the site in the last 24 hours. 110 reserved tickets. Shannon in Boca registered. Jonah in L.A. registered.* A video featuring Hannah from Matzo Ball HQ promised a minimum of 20 dates during the two-hour event. Attendees were to fill out a dating profile. I filled mine out and excitedly recruited a cousin, 30, and two single friends, one in her forties, the other closer to my age, 59.

On Christmas Eve morning, though, I woke up in a panic: I had no idea how to speed date. Luckily, Lauren Frances, L.A.'s preeminent love coach, is a friend. "Men are often uncomfortable at first, so toss out a compliment, like, 'I applaud your willingness to show up,'" she said.

Two hours to countdown, I blew out my hair for the first time in months, applied makeup, and squeezed myself into pants tighter than I'd remembered. I was ready.



THE EVENING BEGAN with Hannah from HQ welcoming us in a video. She invited us to sip wine or go freshen up while in the waiting room between dates, and if any problems arose, she said, she was standing by to offer live assistance.

Let's call my first date Forehead, because I never saw more than the top of his *keppie*. Forehead might have been hovering in the stratosphere—I'll never know, as his computer screen provided the only illumination; behind him was complete darkness. How did Forehead make it through ten months of the pandemic without figuring out Zoom?

Forehead resides two hours south of L.A., so when the date ended, I reached out to Hannah. "I'm in the wrong region," I said to a virtual assistant. "I was just matched with

someone in Orange County." Instead of reaching Hannah, though, I was placed in the waiting room for 20 minutes. "We encourage you to watch a video," the screen instructed. I hit play, certain I'd be treated to dating tips—or maybe an upsell, as the site offers concierge matchmaking—but, no, it was merely that same video of Hannah. I was tempted to visit the bathroom, but, afraid I might miss my next date, I sipped wine and remained glued to the screen.

My spirits lifted when my screen revealed a gentleman wearing a suit jacket. But they fell when I saw he was Zooming from Vegas, where he'd relocated for "tax purposes."

I was next mystifyingly matched with a guy in Phoenix approximately 20 years too young. Perhaps during the nineteenth century, it might have made sense that a Jewish *shidduch* required scouring the entire western region of the United States for an actual date, but as L.A. is home to the second-largest population of Jews in America, it seemed perverse that in 2020, a six-hour schlep would be required.

An imposing Russian resembling the handsome but menacing GRU officer in *Homeland* claimed we were in the same city, but ours was less date than interrogation. He peered, steely-eyed, into the lens, repeating my name over and over. "Annabelle Gurwitch, Annabelle Gurwitch. So tell me, what do you do, Annabelle Gurwitch?" I barely had time to answer that I was a writer, when he announced that he'd written nine screenplays, four novels, and assorted short stories. Channeling Lauren, I applauded his productivity during the pandemic.



I WAS ON MY THIRD glass of wine in the waiting room, when a friend texted, "This is more matzo brie than matzo ball." "I feel like I'm a social worker making wellness checks," texted the other. Both tried to contact Hannah regarding being matched in far-flung locations, but with no luck. Comparing notes, we learned that the three of us had gone on dates with



HAVING A BALL

Scenes from Matzo Balls past. Founded in Boston in 1987 by real estate broker Andy Rudnick, the event has since spread to cities across the U.S.

the same men. Lest this indicate that it was an issue limited to our ages, my cousin reported geographic head-scratchers, a lively debate with an itinerant cowboy over whether Panda Express qualifies as Chinese food, and an assignation with a dude in his early twenties, in his pj's, lounging in his childhood bedroom, stuffed animals lined up on the windowsill behind him. "I keep getting matched with old women," he'd complained.

The remainder of my evening unfolded with five additional meetups, punctuated by a total of 120 minutes in the waiting room with Hannah's video, an experience reminiscent of *A Clockwork Orange*.

My spirits lifted when my screen revealed a gentleman wearing a suit jacket, but quickly fell when my date allowed that he was Zooming from Vegas, where he'd relocated for "tax purposes," and I noticed that his positioning in front of a set of mini blinds suggested he was serving time in a white-collar-crime prison facility.

"Not to be a conspiracy theorist," whispered my last date. "Exactly who do you think benefits from my being matched with women in the wrong city?" "The Matzo

Ball mafia?" I answered, a bit tipsy by this point. "Exactly," he said, just before the clock ran out and a UTI kicked in.

Both friends bailed after 90 minutes, while my cousin went on a total of ten (fruitless) dates. Though one dubbed the event "One Flew Over the Matzo Ball," we all felt that the evening served as a reminder of the isolation we were all experiencing and maybe it had been a mitzvah to visit with strangers on Christmas Eve. "At least no one was Toobin-ing it," we all agreed. And my friend's 28-year-old son? He and a pal had attended, and both were matched with Rudnick's twin daughters.



THE NEXT DAY, I phoned Rudnick, who sounded genuinely crestfallen that he hadn't delivered a more successful event. "Pivoting to online was a huge learning curve," he said. When I reported that one of my friends wound up on a date with an empty chair, he gave the only appropriate answer, "Oy," before explaining that the system had crashed. He'd miscalculated and understaffed, and it had been bedlam. "We're offering refunds," he said, in a gesture more menschy than schnorrer, adding that he's addressing all of the issues for their upcoming Valentine's Day event. As he spoke, I recalled my grandmother's dictum that if you make a matzo ball too large, it's more likely to sink. No word on whether the entire enterprise was a ruse to marry off his twins.

On the upside, at a time when travel has been curtailed, my friends and I managed to meet up with people in cities across the Southwest. Sure, it wasn't Paris, but it was memorable—an evening that mirrored what it might be like if you found yourself snowed in at an airport and invited any fellow travelers who'd been bar mitzvahed to stop by your gate for a five-minute klatch.

Me, I'm not sure that being matched solely on the basis of shared genetics is enough to recommend my attendance at another ball, but I am endeavoring to fix my cousin up with my friend's 28-year-old son. Now, if that's a match, wouldn't that be *bashert*? ■

PROMOTION

LA SOCIAL

UPCOMING EVENTS & PROMOTIONS SPONSORED BY LOS ANGELES MAGAZINE

11 FEB

Los Angeles magazine Presents **PetFest Cutest Pet Contest**

Call for Entries
February 11 – March 10
Enter online at petfestla.com



Attention Pet Moms and Dads: *Los Angeles* magazine invites you to enter your pet into our first-ever **PetFest** cutest pet contest!

Entries will be accepted February 11 to March 10 for a chance to win L.A.'s cutest pet award. The winning pet – chosen by a popular, online vote – will be featured in a one-page advertorial feature in the July 2021 issue. Plus, the winner will receive a photo shoot and prizes supplied by PetFest sponsor, NutriSource.

Voting takes place March 11 – April 8 with the winner to be announced via video in June. A portion of entry proceeds will benefit spcaLA.

For more information and to enter visit petfestla.com

11 FEB

GIVE LOVE & BE LOVED

Thursday, February 11, 5 p.m.
Virtual Event



The first edition of PRESENT NOW's NEW signature fundraiser will be an in-home experience, coupled with a live Virtual Event and Silent Auction. Celebrate Valentine's Day with a special LOVE BOX delivered to your door, while supporting children in domestic violence shelters. The live event will be co-hosted by Lisa Breckenridge and Lawrence Zarian!

For tickets and more information, visit presentnowlive.org

06 FEB

CASA of Los Angeles **Wine+Art**

Saturday, February 6, 6:30 p.m.
Virtual Event

Don't miss CASA/LA's Wine+Art virtual fundraiser featuring libations, culinary delights and art auction featuring prolific and emerging artists. Enjoy a Food+Wine Box courtesy of local restaurants from the comfort of your own home. Bid on art by Ed Ruscha, Shepard Fairey, WrdsmtH and more. Wine tasting reception hosted by Erin & Sara Foster. All proceeds support children in L.A. County's foster care system.

For tickets and more information visit CASALA.org/wineart



24 FEB

Rhône Warriors

Wednesday & Saturday,
February 24th & 27th, 7 p.m.

This is a virtual tasting event with wine delivered to your home



WineLA pivoted to Zoom and now you can TASTE at home with the winemakers! Experience a cross section of some of the world's best Rhône wine in this interactive and informative panel tasting. Wine tasting kits are delivered to your home, and you have the option to join one or both sessions for an amazing price! Join the wine community and increase your wine knowledge at ZoomIntoWine.com - 100% of auction proceeds benefit local Los Angeles charity.

For tickets and more information visit rhonewars.com

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