

TODAY'S CHRISTIAN

Woman

JULY/AUGUST 2003

KIDNAPPED by Terrorists:
*missionary Gracia Burnham's
survivor story*

**"Will Heaven
Be BORING?"**

Answers to
all those
secret fears
about eternity

5 TIPS for
better ties
between you
and that annoying
sibling-in-law

**There's No Place
Like Home~
So Why Not
VACATION There?**

Recording artist **KATHY TROCCOLI**
& author **DEE BRESTIN** dish on
their surprising bond~and
the unique treasures unlikely
friendships can bring. PAGE 30

power
of two

U.S. \$3.95 Canada \$5.50

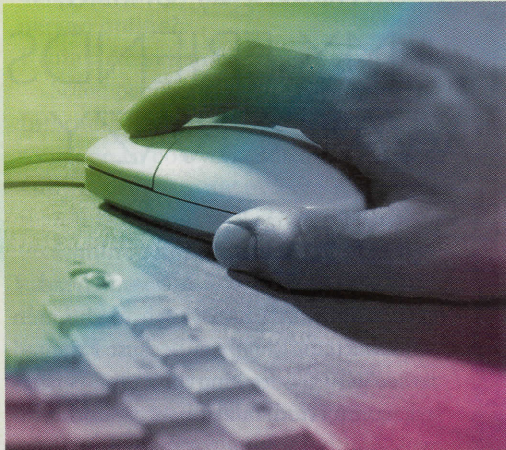


AOL Keyword: TodaysChristianWoman
www.TodaysChristianWoman.com

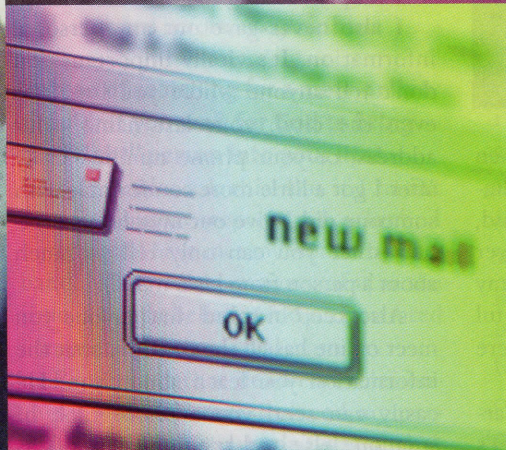


We Just Clicked

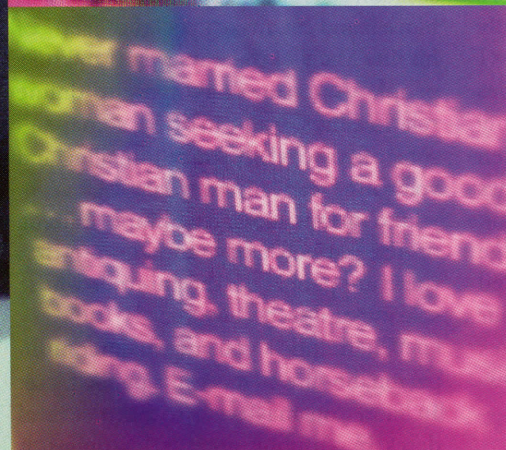
HOW I FOUND
MY MR. RIGHT
ONLINE



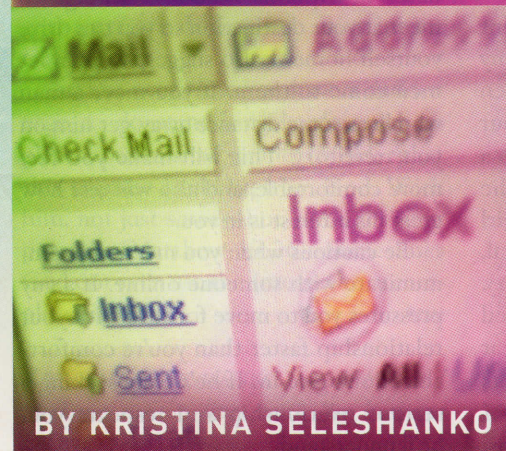
I admit, I'm one of those kooky people who started dating some stranger I met online—then ended up marrying him!



I still feel embarrassed whenever I tell our story. That's because it wasn't just the Internet that brought my husband, Alexei, and me together, but it was the personal ad I placed there. I used to swear I'd never do such a thing; I thought it was silly and hinted at desperation. Plus I was certain that was no way to meet a healthy individual and develop a real, lasting relationship. But one evening, God's nudging changed all that.



When I placed that ad, I was 28 and had just gotten out of a dead-end relationship with a man who made me miserable. He wasn't a Christian, but because I was "so in love," I remained in the relationship, hoping he'd change. Then one evening I got fed up with the way he treated me and finally broke up with him. Later that night, I was online and saw an advertisement for free personal ads. On a "whim," I decided to place one. It read: "Never married Christian woman seeking a good Christian man for friendship... maybe more? I love antiques, theatre, music, books, and horseback riding. E-mail me."



I heard from lots of guys. Perhaps because I'd placed my ad on a secular site, not all of them were Christian—even though I'd specified I am. Some men wrote and offered a barely cursory description of their looks and then asked me for a photo—which I didn't supply. I never heard from them again. I exchanged e-mails with a few other guys for nearly a month before they

asked for my photo—which I didn't supply. And I never heard from them again. Only two guys wrote to me repeatedly and didn't mind that I wasn't willing to share a photo of myself right away. They understood that I wanted to get to know them better before taking that step.

Because of this understanding and patience, I exchanged phone numbers with one of these men, "Richard." I was talking on the phone with him when Alexei e-mailed me. I remember his e-mail distinctly, although I was disappointed by his age (at 24, he was four years younger than I, and I just knew I never could have a long-term relationship with a younger guy!). His note was simple, sweet, and to the point. Later I discovered Alexei was just as surprised he responded to an ad as I was that I placed one. Less than a month after I posted the ad, Alexei found himself lonely and bored one evening. He saw a link on the bottom of his Internet service provider's screen that read: "Meet new people!" On a "whim," he clicked the link and happened upon my ad. That night he wrote me.

We began e-mailing and instant-messaging each other regularly, and enjoyed long conversations about our faith, families, work, and priorities. We even discussed our views on marriage. Alexei and I discovered our thoughts on important issues—such as marriage, God, and the Bible—were quite similar, a refresh-

BY KRISTINA SELESHANKO

ing change from the other men with whom I'd corresponded.

Alexei was also the only man I met through that personal ad who never pushed me to send him my photo. Consequently, he was the only man with whom I finally exchanged photos.

Richard, the other man I'd met online, continued to call me often, but hounded me for a meet-in-person date. When I told him I wanted to get to know him better over the Internet and the phone before we took that step, he stomped off into the sunset.

Alexei was different. His patience seemed never-ending. He made it clear he wanted to meet me in person, but always seemed to understand why I preferred to get to know him better first. When we finally did meet in person—four months later—it was *my* idea.

I INVITED ALEXEI, WHO LIVED several hours away, to join me at an antiques show I attend annually in a nearby town. A crowded area seemed best; after all, I didn't know what kind of weirdo I might end up meeting! But when I saw him standing on the corner waiting for me, I breathed a sigh of relief. He looked sweet.

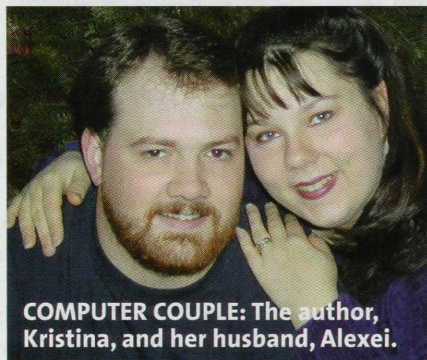
Alexei laughed at my jokes and enjoyed antiquing as much as I did. At lunch, the way he blushed with every spot of mayo he got on his face warmed my heart. We began seeing each other every weekend, Alexei always driving the two hours one way to visit. We also continued to communicate online daily. For Thanksgiving, my mother and I went to his parents' house. I was received warmly, and seeing Alexei in his family environment shed new light on his personality and commitment to Jesus Christ.

Then it happened. The day before Christmas Eve, six months after he'd first e-mailed me, Alexei got down on one knee and proposed. "I could have waited longer," he later told me, "but my mind was made up!" So was mine.

My birthday was a week away, and we'd planned a party to which both our families were coming, so we decided to wait until then to announce our engagement. I've never had such a hard time keeping a secret!

The night of my birthday, we all gath-

When my family learned I'd met a guy online, they were skeptical, and all MY FRIENDS THOUGHT I WAS CRAZY.



COMPUTER COUPLE: The author, Kristina, and her husband, Alexei.

ered at Alexei's parents' house. When Alexei's dad prepared to pray before dinner, Alexei cleared his throat and said, "Oh, I have an addition to your prayer list. Would you please pray for my fiancée and me?" There were gleeful gasps and lots of hugs. Our families were surprised but very pleased.

When we attended our first premarital counseling session with Alexei's pastor, he scrutinized me carefully when he realized we'd met online. (I can't say I blame him!) But his worries quickly vanished when we discussed my views on God and marriage, and when he learned my soon-to-be in-laws approved of our relationship. I think my initial, in-depth instant-message conversations with Alexei covered much of what we later discussed in our sessions. Happily, we found ourselves quite compatible. The counseling sessions brought us closer to each other—and to God.

Six months after our engagement (and a year after Alexei responded to my ad), we were wed. Now that we've been married two years, Alexei tells our friends about how his pastor gave him a startled and dubious look when he informed him he'd "met a great girl online." My family was just as skeptical, and all my friends thought I was crazy.

These loved ones were concerned about three main issues, and I still hear these concerns today when I tell others how I met my husband. Here's how I respond to these important questions:

Is it safe to meet someone online?

Sure, but only if you use your head. I didn't send my photograph to the men who asked for it upfront because I wanted to see who was looking for a God-centered, committed relationship—and who was simply looking for a shallow fling.

I also never gave out any personal information. It's vitally important you don't tell anyone where you live (not even the city), your last name, your address, or your phone number. Only after I got a little more comfortable with someone did I give out my phone number (since you can only tell so much about a person from his e-mails!).

Also keep in mind that anyone you meet online has all the control about the information you learn about him. He easily can send you a photograph of someone else and try to pass it off as himself and can make up all the "facts" of his life. Many of the ways we get to know people in person don't apply to online relationships. You can't hear someone's tone of voice when you're e-mailing and you can't "read" his body language when you're instant-messaging him or talking on the phone. It pays to be aware that there are people on the Internet whose sole intent is to deceive you.

When and if you meet someone in person, be sure to meet in a public place. In fact, you may wish to have several dates in a public area and arrange to meet at your destination so you can drive yourself home. I also suggest women let men come to them. If you meet a man who lives some distance away, get him on your territory. This will make you feel more comfortable, and also will test how great his interest is in you.

Be cautious when you meet and communicate with someone online. If a guy pressures you to move forward with your relationship faster than you're comfortable, don't give in. If he's truly seeking a serious relationship and respects you, he'll understand.

Can you really meet a "normal" person online?

I think Alexei and I are proof of that!

Some people believe that because the Internet's anonymous, it's simpler for someone to con you. But it isn't necessarily easier for a guy to lie to you online than it is for him to lie to you in person (except, of course, regarding his appearance). Sometimes corresponding over the Internet gives you a greater chance to spot misinformation. For example, one man who wrote me claimed he was an archeologist, but he always misspelled the word. It's important to be cautious and, as stated before, use your head.

Instead of searching for a mate online, shouldn't you wait for God to bring the "right" person into your life?

Lots of singles ask this. But if I hadn't been willing to step out on a limb, I never would have met my wonderful husband! While I was unaware of it at the time, I firmly believe God orchestrated our meeting and eventual marriage.

Remember that dead-end relationship I was in before I placed my personal ad? Well, if I hadn't dated that man, I never would have owned the computer that allowed me to get onto the Internet and place my ad. (I did some work for him, and he paid me with a computer.) Around the same time, Alexei, who'd never owned a computer before, saw a television ad for a computer and decided to buy one on a "whim."

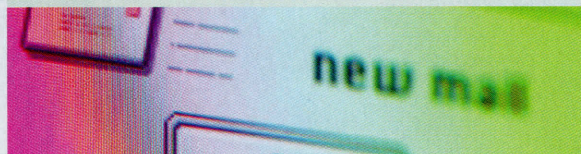
I put the word "whim" in quotations because I now realize it wasn't coincidence. I'm convinced God guided us by urging me to place a personal ad and Alexei to respond to it. His fingerprints are difficult to miss in our relationship.

So the next time you have a sudden urge to do something kooky, such as place a personal ad online, consider that this impulse could be from God. With him, not just some—but *all* things—are possible (Matthew 19:26). Sometimes God can even use the Internet to accomplish his will! tcw

KRISTINA SELESHANKO, an author and freelance writer, lives with her husband in Oregon.

Looking for Love Online?

HERE'S THE SCOOP ABOUT FOUR INTERNET MATCHING SERVICES THAT ARE POPULAR AMONG CHRISTIAN SINGLES.



eHarmony.com

SET-UP: Once you take a free personality profile, you're matched with others in your area or across the U.S. based on the 29 relational dimensions the site's founder, psychologist Neil Clark Warren, believes are most important to relationship success. You must become a member to correspond with these matches; then there's a five-step process of exchanging multiple-choice and open-ended questions until you're basically e-mailing each other through eHarmony.

COST: \$49.95/one month; \$99.95/three months; \$159.95/six months; \$249.95/one year.

PROS & CONS: It's the most expensive but most thorough site on the list. While the site's not just for Christians, it's easy to tell who's a believer.

ChristianCafe.com

SET-UP: Fill out a brief profile (with both multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blank answers), then search the membership

and send messages to the ones who spark your interest. Customize your search, do a quick match (based on age, type of relationship you're interested in, response about Christian faith, and geographical location), visit with others in chat rooms, or instant-message members online.

COST: \$24.95/one month; \$44.95/three months; \$69.95/six months; \$99.95/one year.

PROS & CONS: Ten-day free trial membership lets you "try before you buy."

EquallyYoked.com

SET-UP: Contact Equally Yoked by phone, e-mail, or in-person at one of their 27 offices nationwide. A 45-minute in-person screening session is required before you can become a member. Once you join, you can attend singles events with other members or browse the in-office member library or nationwide online database for one-on-one interactions.

COST: Available only

through Equally Yoked representatives.

PROS & CONS: Members are carefully screened, but you have to visit one of their offices in person. If you're simply looking for single friends or social activities with other single Christians, the regional events fit the bill.

Match.com

SET-UP: Create a brief profile based on your multiple-choice answers and search the membership for free. You must join to communicate with other members. Narrow your search by geography, age, personality traits, or a certain keyword of your choosing. They'll match you with likeminded members or you can communicate with others currently online. Match.com also offers social activities and speed-dating events in larger cities.

COST: \$24.95/one month; \$49.95/three months; \$79.95/six months; \$99.00/one year.

PROS & CONS: While this isn't a Christian site, you can search the extensive membership for Christians using a keyword search that narrows your options considerably. tcw