

Preface

How We Got Here

*I*T ALL STARTED when Debi went on a coffee date, hoping this might be “the one.” They’d texted and talked on the phone, where she sensed the first stirrings of excitement. As soon as she saw him, she felt a connection. He looked even better than his photos. The caffeine and conversation flowed. She smiled a lot; so did he. It wasn’t like other first dates.

They talked easily and for much longer than it took to drink a cup of coffee—about themselves, their lives, what they were each looking for. Tender strands of attraction started to form.

Later, saying goodbye at her car, he pulled her in and kissed her gently. They both knew something big was starting. The next morning, he texted her. “Good morning. I really liked meeting you, you’re very special.” She texted him, “Thank you and yes, very special connection.” He: “I have to go out of town on business tomorrow. Let’s get together for lunch when I get back.” She: “I would love lunch.”

She never heard from him again.

Debi and I had both started online dating, and over time we'd developed a kind of "buddy debriefing system." Together, we deconstructed the problem of the day, mostly while trudging up our favorite hiking trail.



I'd experienced similar situations. We both felt like clueless teenagers, full of questions with no answers and mystified about how we were supposed to figure out dating again at this age.

Debi is in her early fifties, I'm in my mid-sixties and while our life journeys have been very different, the origins of this particular mystery tour into late-in-life dating were remarkably similar.

Almost ten years ago, each of us arrived in impossibly perfect Santa Barbara with its perfect weather and its movie-set Spanish village architecture. I was married and ecstatic to be abandoning the oppressive rain forest that was Seattle for my lifelong dream of living in California. Debi was engaged and had left the cold and windy city of Chicago with her fiancé for this idyllic little West Coast town.

Arriving in Santa Barbara with our life partners was like landing at heaven's door—a sleepy yet vibrant community nestled by the ocean and framed by a gentle mountain range, with graceful palm trees, a balmy Mediterranean climate, and beaches that went on for miles. What could go wrong?

But it did. We'll spare you the rant and the gory details about what happened to those relationships—the deterioration, the wounds, and the pain—if you've suffered a break-up, you know the drill, and it sucks.

The lives we'd been living were gone. Suddenly, there was no one to look up at when I was reading and say, "Honey, listen to this." No one to eat with, take a road trip with, snuggle up on the couch with. I went to therapy and every meditation group I could get my hands on, letting the tears roll while I sat in silent contemplation. I bought books on emotional healing and binge-watched old episodes of *The Gilmore Girls* in the middle of the afternoon in my PJs.

Debi's plans of a wedding at a luxurious hillside resort morphed into a new life as an *Uber* driver to make ends meet. With a daughter in high school, the idea of failing and having to leave Santa Barbara was not an option.

After years of being homeowners, we both became renters again. Our old friends, mostly couples, drifted away. Our fall from grace included losing our lifestyles, our previous identities, and half our assets.

But as with most stories, endings signal new beginnings, and eventually we picked up the broken pieces of our lives, put our big-girl pants on, and started over. Deciding to date again was part of that journey. However, after decades in relationships, we found that the dating world had changed radically and we were standing there like *Alice in Wonderland*, surrounded by mad hatters and white rabbits, and more than a little stunned.

It's not that we're naïve. Between us, we've been married, divorced, widowed, in long-term relationships and short-term relationships. We've each met previous partners online. We're both mothers and grandmothers. Debi was widowed with three small children before she was forty. I was a single mother for years.

In short, we've been around the block a few times, but this modern dating thing made us scratch our heads. Over time, we've met many other fifty-plus singles who are perplexed and frustrated. This includes men, whose questions and complaints were very much like ours.

It's not only that we're all required now to have sparkling online personas and Twitter accounts that are linked to our Instagrams and our Facebooks for reasons we don't understand, but our minds and bodies aren't the shiny pennies they used to be. Dating someone at this age isn't about meeting the parents or making

babies, but it *is* about excess baggage, chemistry, texting, old-body sex, and OMG so much more.

The final spark that propelled us forward was when one of Debi's dates told her that before he started dating again after his divorce, he searched for a book to help, but couldn't find one.

We've now been out there dating for a while and believe we have a handle on some of its conundrums. Our skins are thicker, we've learned new skills, and thanks to our friendship, we have somebody to turn to when life goes weird, as it often does.

The way we figure it, if we share our secrets and screw-ups, maybe you won't have to slide quite as far down the rabbit hole as we did at first. If you're divorced or widowed and over fifty, you have enough to handle.

Dating is more art than science, though. You will get better with practice, but if you're looking for a guarantee you'll find that one perfect person, put down your pencil.

If, however, you're looking for some guidance, support, tips, and a few laughs, we've got your back. You may or may not meet the last love of your life, but if you give dating a try, at the very least, you're in for an adventure!