

A Blushing Bride (Again) – at 62!
By Linda Jay Geldens
LindaJay@aol.com

When my first husband Richard and I were married in 1970, it seemed that we would have a charmed life. Both of us were born in Manhattan, both of us were only children who felt we ourselves did not have the temperament to raise children, both of us were bright, well-educated, unconventional achievers, with the same offbeat sense of humor. He was 36 and I was 30 when we met – neither of us had been married before, because that rare person we sought, someone who was witty, curious, and with whom we “clicked,” had eluded us...until then. Dick was a systems analyst with Hewlett-Packard, and I was an advertising copywriter with Little, Brown Publishers.

We were pioneers of a sort – Dick and I met in Boston in 1969 through DataMate, one of the first computer dating sites, started by some guys at M.I.T. Potential daters had to fill out a detailed questionnaire and then pay the ridiculously small sum of \$10.; in exchange for that, each adventurer was given a printout of about 25 names, addresses, and phone numbers of likely “matches.” It was then up to the individual participant to start the ball rolling by calling those on his or her list.

Richard and I talked on the phone, met for lunch, and within about fifteen minutes were bowled over by the mutual feeling that “this is it!” Our first date was at the Glass Flower Museum at Harvard University. I remember that I was so nervous, I fell as we were crossing the street. Thinking to myself, “Well, great, Linda, just great. Say goodbye to this nice guy. Nobody wants to date a klutz.” On the contrary. Dick was “intrigued” that I could have tripped over my own foot, on such a clear, dry, sunny day.

Several months after we met, we married in my hometown, Cincinnati, and after living in Boston and then Rockville, Maryland, Hewlett-Packard transferred us to the Bay Area in 1973. This was the epicenter for people in the computer business; Dick was ecstatic, and did very well throughout his 18-year career with H-P. In fact, he was a multimedia pioneer in the 1980s, and we became West Coast co-editors of a national newspaper, Video Computing, for several years. It was fun to interview multimedia enthusiasts together and attend conferences in Washington, D.C., New York, Boston, and Orlando.

In 1986 he decided that he wanted to go into the new field of interactive video, and that he needed a Master’s in Instructional Technology (San Jose State University), and then a Doctorate in Education (for which we went to Athens, Georgia, from 1986-1989). When we returned to the Bay Area, Dick worked as a Courseware Developer at Sun Microsystems. It was unusual to be hired by Sun at 57, but he was brilliant and had so much to offer.

In 1992 we were on a sailboat with friends in Marblehead, Massachusetts, during a brief vacation. Dick looked ill. When we returned to California, we found out that, despite having had a “perfect” checkup at the beginning of the year at Stanford Hospital, he had Stage 4 colon cancer and was not likely to live more than four months. The total shock,

anger, disbelief, dread, panic were indescribable. Could this diagnosis be true? I was 53, he was 58, and our lives were, for all intents and purposes, shattered.

Because Dick had a pump implanted that delivered chemo right into his liver, he actually lived ten months longer than the grim prediction of four months. He was able to work full-time for six of those ten months, take part in multimedia panel discussions with his inimitable personality, and we even went to Italy for two weeks so that he could say good-bye to dear friends there. We also had innumerable long, long talks about what our marriage had meant, and he talked to me about what he wished for my life after his death. He encouraged me to date when I was ready, and to remarry when I found someone compatible. I promised him I would.

I believe now that I was in shock for about three years after Dick died, despite the fact that we had been preparing for his death for over a year. For the first several months, like most new widows, I was operating on autopilot – just going through the motions of living. I found that hospice and widows' support groups had a very negative effect on me, made me even more depressed.

The most help I got in grieving and healing was from one-on-one counseling, talks with trusted friends, reading, thinking, lots of time alone, and talking to others in the AOL Widows and Widowers Chat Room. I only had two girlfriends who were widows. Later, I found out through research that the AVERAGE age of widows in the U.S. is 56! In fact, I was just a couple years shy of being the average age for a widow! Somehow, I always thought widows were mostly women in their 80s or 90s.

I started dating 8 months after Dick died (much to some friends' surprise) because that's when I was ready. I had not dated in nearly 25 years, and did not know how to go about it. I also did not know that all the dating "rules" of 25 years ago had disappeared. But I was angry and outraged that I was single again in my late 50s. It did not feel right. Being part of a couple felt right. My first date came from an ad I put in the Bay Guardian newspaper, in which I said I adored jazz. A nice divorced guy from Palo Alto who also adored jazz responded to the ad, and we dated for several months.

About 15 months after Dick died, I had a "light bulb" experience one morning, and I just "knew" it was time for me to move. I sensed that I would do well to live near the water to go through the healing and grieving process. Sunnyvale, where I was living in a 2,300-square-foot, three-story townhouse, was not near the water. I decided to move to Marin County, an hour north of Silicon Valley, because I had multimedia friends there and I liked the quaint, country-type towns that made up Marin – which was still just 15 minutes north of San Francisco.

How was I going to make the move from Sunnyvale to the town I had decided upon, Sausalito? Well, I found out I could get the Marin IJ newspaper in a nearby bookstore. So I would get the paper on Sundays, circle likely apartments in the paper, make appointments, and go over to Sausalito every Sunday and maybe once during the week until I found the right place. Within about two weeks of this process, I found exactly the

right place. It was on the second floor of a house from the late 1800s, and was about 800-square-feet. The landlord -- who turned out to be from my hometown, Cincinnati! -- wanted me to move in within three weeks. I did, but it meant three weeks of extraordinary activity, calling an auction house to get furniture and other items I couldn't take with me, making innumerable trips to Marin with my car piled high with clothes and books, and making decisions, decisions, decisions.

Once I crossed that Golden Gate Bridge for the last time with the last load of stuff, I knew I had made the right decision. Marin County was to be my new home. I ended up making wonderful new friends here, traveled on my own to Mexico, New England, Oregon, and Washington, D.C., and eventually was able to concentrate well enough to work again as a freelance editor and writer.

And...I dated. Lord, how I dated! I found that I dated all younger men, because they liked me, and I liked them. At one time I was 57 and was dating a 33-year-old guitarist! I met them through professional groups, classes, video dating, and other ways. Finally, in 1999, when I felt that I had pretty much healed and grieved, I made another decision.

I had been traveling all over the place to meet likely potential mates – up to Napa, across the bay to Berkeley, down to Monterey...and I was exhausted. I walked down to the Boardwalk in Sausalito, stood looking out at the bay, stretched my arms wide, and asked for something “outrageous...I would like to meet the right person, here in my little town of Sausalito.” I asked for a miracle, and for a SIGN of a MIRACLE. On the walk back up Main Street to my apartment, a taxicab passed me. On top of the roof was a small billboard, a SIGN, and it said MIRACLE Auto Body Painting. Whoever I had implored for a miracle had taken my request extremely literally!

Soon after this experience, I decided one night to see who was online on AOL from Sausalito. There was Ed, newly arrived from Miami because he had found a software developer's job in Sausalito online. We joked and hit it off, decided to meet for lunch the next day. Once again – just as with Richard exactly 30 years ago – within about fifteen minutes, we were both bowled over and knew “this is it!” Fantastic!

Ed had been divorced for 12 years, and in fact is 12 years younger than I! He has a wonderful son Jeff, a lawyer in Miami. Best of all, he has the most delightful sense of humor – just like mine! – he is bright, unconventional, and we love to be together. We married in 2001, during a four-hour luncheon/bay cruise on a yacht before 80 friends and family. I was a blushing bride at 62! Then we went to Paris for a two-week honeymoon. Neither of us had been to France before.

At this stage of the game, I know many, many women who are either widowed or divorced, and very few of them are dating at all – whether out of fear or discouragement with “who's out there,” I don't know. What I do know is, I was certain I would eventually find someone to share my life with again. And I did!



* * *