

## [Still Seeking Special Someone]

I knew I needed professional help. Counselling wouldn't cut it; I needed matchmaking. Eventually I signed up with a dating service. But first I bought a pack of Clorets and prepared to cruise the personals.

Scientists recently discovered a certain type of worm that mates only inside a hippo's rectum. Soon the worms will have their own section in the personals. There is something frightening about this particular jungle. That FBM (fur-bearing mammal) seeking a mate could be tiger or sloth. It's wide open, democratic and unscreened. With that in mind, I decided not to place an ad myself (leaving that savoury task for Pamela Swanigan, whose experiences are recounted opposite), and to respond to women's ads instead. But thumbing through the *Buy and Sell* seemed to highlight the comparison to appliance-shopping a little too clearly for comfort, and other publications left me fretting about my insufficient horseback-riding experience and my inability to figure out what a head game was, never mind whether I was into playing them. So I stuck to the *Georgia Straight* and the *Sun*.

The *Straight* offered the better deal. Had I decided to do so, placing an ad would have been free, versus regular classified rates in the *Sun*. And a week of unlimited response time cost about \$15, versus \$2.19 a minute in the *Sun*. For these sums, after listening to voice personals on the phone, I could leave messages for anyone who sounded interesting.

I was immediately attracted to an ad that described its author as a "SWF, intelligent, active, attractive, university educated, emotionally stable, financially secure, sense of humour, 34." I saw instantly that we had something in common. I'm in my 30s too.

SWF's voice message said she wanted to hear from a man who would be described as a nice guy "by someone other than his mother." My message to her response box assured her that I could obtain sworn affidavits to that effect, and that Mom would also play along, if she knew what was good for her.

Unlike most personal-ad veterans, I did not set up my own response mailbox. These are recommended so that you can receive voice messages without giving out your home phone number. But I just left my home number in SWF's mailbox. I was less worried about wackos phoning me at home than I was about having to describe myself on a mailbox intro: I really couldn't think of what qualities to shamelessly exaggerate.

Having taken the plunge, I sat back to wait. I didn't have to wait for long. The phone rang. I lurched upright in

# THE 4 FACES of PAM

— BY PAMELA SWANIGAN —

*One woman places four personal ads,  
and the results make her head spin*

**M**Y JOURNEY INTO THE WORLD OF PERSONAL ADS began several months ago, when, while toying with my calculator, I figured out that I have been single for 28.2 of my 32 years. Discussions with friends and relations ensued; theories abounded. I posited that I am the victim of an unsolvable discrepancy—that the one kind of man who is attracted to me (i.e., blind drunk) is not among the kinds of men to whom I am attracted. An embittered friend, who believes that men can only think with one of their heads, and it isn't the one on their necks, said cynically, "No loss. All men are pigs anyway." A coworker, after hearing my complaint, proffered kindly, "Has it ever occurred to you that you're basically unlovable?"

Determined to find out which theory was correct, I placed four ads in the personals section of the *Georgia Straight* (they don't cost anything to run). Composing the ads so as to illuminate the many facets of my sparkling personality was easy enough, but I stalled a bit when it came to saying what I wanted in a man. I'm not as fussy about looks as my companion in misery, Steve Burgess (but then, he has to get an erection, and I don't); on the other hand, just because I'll go out with anyone who asks doesn't mean I have no sense of discrimination. I ended up stipulating kindness and introspection.

After taking my ads to the *Straight* and receiving four box numbers, I went home and recorded four more or less identical voice-box introductions. My working hypothesis: The options aren't all they're cracked up to be.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
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## Date Lines

TO JUDGE VANCOUVER BY THE classifieds, every Starbucks in town could be replaced by a stable; such is the insatiable demand for horseback riding. And sunset at Spanish Banks must see standing room only along the surf, with romantic couples jostling for space. • Not all of the ads are typical, though. We culled this sampling from Lower Mainland and northern Washington publications.

### FROM MEN TO WOMEN (Poor man)

My old girl friends all started out as nice, respectable, proper girls. Then something happened. As each relationship progressed, they evolved into insatiable, lust-blinded, subhuman monsters. Communication became increasingly non-verbal. The more rigid I became in my resolve to satisfy their every craving, the more primal and feverish their urgings became. If not for my Italian-bred

✧ **PHYSICAL ME** 38-20-38, 5'3", 120 lbs. Cute face, brown eyes, curly hair, sensuous touch, full lips. Seeks great kisser with slow hands, 25-40.

IT'S A SAD REFLECTION on society that everyone assumed going in that the "vital-stats" ad would get the most responses. As it turned out, it got more than the other three put together: 50 in the first 10 days. "See?" said my bitter friend triumphantly. But I still wasn't sure all men are pigs. Most respondents described themselves in such genteel terms as "friendly" and "sincere." Several called just to quibble about my waist size. (Never did I dream that so many people were walking around with an image of 20 inches burned into their minds.) "I picture it as kind of an extreme hourglass," mused one man, sounding more pensive than excited. Inquired another, dubiously, "How do you get a 20-inch waist without removing ribs?"

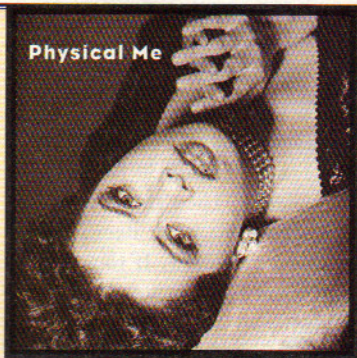
Many respondents said that the directness of this ad appealed to them most. "They wouldn't like it so much if you were direct and 25-25-25," grunted my friend. Still, intrigue seemed to figure strongly. In one fairly typical response, a man wrote, "Any woman who publicly announces her vital statistics is either an exhibitionist or a professional. Yet your voice-ad betrays neither of these." No one mentioned penis length or Cool Whip: the most explicit it got was one man who said with an embarrassed laugh, "I could caress you slowly—maybe you'd like that." Well, I did ask for slow hands.

✧ **SPIRITUAL ME** Strong-minded, soul-searching Aquarius woman, with affinity for animals, ocean, night sky. Would love to meet a sensitive, insightful man, not too flaky but spiritually evolved, 25-40.

I'VE ALWAYS SUSPECTED IT, and now I know it: flakes don't like me, even when I want them to. Though the "flaky-girl" ad attracted the second-largest number of respondents (21), most simply tacked their signs onto the usual height-weight-interest description. Only one responded with the obvious "Hi, I'm a Leo, and I'm really into dating air-signs."

Indeed, the type of ad didn't seem to be in sync with the type of respondent in any particular way. One man informed me that he was the brother of the wind. He was Dancing Soul. He danced around others' souls and sometimes they would not let him in, yet he turned always to the dance and the light. He was responding to the vital-stats ad. Sometimes the responses weren't in sync with themselves, either. One mystically inclined Australian fellow described himself as on the self-improvement path, into alternative medicine, a lifelong vegetarian. What he was looking for, he said, was a woman who was very good-looking and very feminine, with a great body.

Physical Me



Spiritual Me



Active Me



Basic Me



✧ **ACTIVE ME** SF, early 30s, likes board games, long walks, good conversation, watching sports. Musical tastes from ABBA to Chaka Khan. Lowbrow film tastes. Reads Harlequin Romances, Derek Walcott, T.S. Eliot, children's lit. Seeks kind, affectionate, articulate man, 25-40.

THIS WAS THE ONLY AD I created in bad faith. I've always wondered what kind of people really think they'll meet their match by listing their preferred activities. Searching for someone who enjoys dining and the outdoors? Well, that narrows it down to 3.5 billion. Find someone who *doesn't* enjoy dining—that will be a prize. I sardonically dubbed this the "I have no interior life" ad, and concocted a truthful but deliberately contradictory list of activities. The most appropriate response to this mélange came from a man who said that he liked to live on the edge but be conservative at the same time, "if that makes sense." I understood perfectly. Like Walt Whitman, he contradicts himself; he contains multitudes. That was my

point. No one got it. And the other rather generic responses (17 in all) did nothing to shake my belief that a mutual love of Parcheesi is not a basis for a lasting relationship.

✧ **BASIC ME** Pretty SF, ND/NS, 32. White/black/native ex-Californian, extremely smart, direct, curious, passionate; caustic sense of humour. Financially and emotionally stable. Seeks intelligent, introspective, loving man, 25-40.

I THOUGHT OF THIS AS A REPRESENTATIVE mix of personality, looks, interests and background. Everyone else took it to be a list of character flaws, with "emotionally stable" thrown in for levity.

It got nine responses. According to one colleague, my mistake was saying that I was financially stable. "You're telling them you don't need them," he explained. "I'm not telling them that I'm not going to make them wine me and dine me and buy me gifts and then marry me so I can hit them with an alimony suit that annihilates their life savings and leaves them shattered men?" I asked sadly. "That too," he conceded. "But men don't like it when women don't need them."

I was deeply wounded by this rejection of my essential self. But, by the same token, I got the most validating and interesting responses from this box—often from ad-browsers who had twigged to something odd. "Are you writing an article or what?" one asked bluntly. And another wrote, "It seems to me that the ads with box numbers 8232, 4394, 3556, and 8842 were all placed by the same person, or perhaps by a group doing some kind of psychology experiment. Among the four I would choose you, because you are 'extremely smart...direct...and emotionally stable.'" It made getting a callous on my phone ear seem almost worthwhile. ♥