

God, Life, and Everything  
"First Date"

*[I mentioned earlier that I wanted to do a series of columns focusing on relationships of all sorts. This is a part of that series.]*

Do you remember your first date with that someone special? I do.

My first date with my wife was one of those moments in life when everything seemed to go wrong yet ended up right.

Let me start off by saying I was a month shy of 30 and recently divorced when we had our first date. Just asking her out was so traumatic that I had to have a friend verbally walk me through it the day before. Before I ever got the word, "Do you want to go to a movie?" out of my mouth, I had to swallow hard to keep from throwing up.

The day of the date itself had me sweating through my shirt in the middle of February.

Then it got bad.

That afternoon, it started snowing. I kept asking myself, "Why February? Why February?" But the heart acts when the heart acts.

The snow picked up as evening approached, and I stopped by the florist to buy a rose to give her. My Datsun G310 (I think that was the model) struggled in the summer, let alone in snow, but I drove home determined that nothing would get in my way.

Still, as I got dressed for the date, I kept an eye on the weather with the old black and white TV I used in those days. It did not look good.

When I climbed into the rickety old car, I began to wonder if this was such a good idea. Still, I drove on. This was down in Westchester County, by the way, so I was creeping along the Cross County, just hitting the exit for White Plains when I spun out.

The fact that I hit nothing felt like a sign. Keep going on, the sign said. Or maybe it was "You have been given a chance to return home safely before anyone gets hurt." I kept going. But by then, I was a half hour late with no cell phone (since they didn't exist). When I finally arrived, I was afraid she would slam the door in my face for being so late, but she only expressed concern.

We decided it was still safe to go to a movie since the snow wasn't so bad in the city itself, so we went to dinner, which thankfully went well. At dinner, we talked about what movie to see and decided on a nice rom-com. However, when we got to this giant complex, our number one choice was sold out. In the snow! So were our second and third choices.

In fact, there was only one movie available within our available time frame. We'd never heard of it before, but it had a gentle, relaxing sort of title, and that's what my jangled nerves needed. So, we saw, *The Silence of the Lambs*.

For two people who hate horror or thriller movies, this might not have been the best choice of movies. I will say, however, that it had one unexpected benefit. We were both so freaked out by it that neither of us wanted to be left alone. So we stayed up and talked. A lot. When it finally felt safe, we had learned more about each other's stories than most people learn in a month of dates. It was enough to decide we'd want another.

I have listened to more than a few first date horror stories from being stood up, to running into an ex, to getting into a fight. Why do we do this to ourselves? In lots of

cultures, there's no dating at all. Elders pick your future spouse, and you get married. Simple.

But even couples that marry sight unseen have their equivalent of a first date. There's this moment when two human beings come together knowing that whatever happens next may determine the course of their future relationship. Even in cultures where there's no choice in whom you marry, there is still the choice in the complexion of that relationship. Joining with someone and getting a sense of how you will get along is inherent in human interaction.

We go through these gyrations because we have to. Our endocrine systems demand it, and we obey. But we don't want to fulfill just reproductive instincts. We want relationship. We want companionship. Humans are relational creatures made for lifelong partnerships. Even when it doesn't work out, we seek it.

We will always seek it.

Which is how we are with God. Even when we give up on church - and there have been countless church horror stories - we still seek God in some way or other. It's easier to remember a first date than a first encounter with God, but you can think back to your most recent encounter as if it were the first. Remember that. Sit with God for awhile. It almost makes wanting that next date inevitable.

Just don't do what I did for our second date. I decided to cook for her.