

Monday, March 23, 2009 - m4w (Harlem)
 HIPSTER CHICK WHO PASSED GAS ON (A) TRAIN



It was dusk and the party had just started when you walked in. You were wearing a black hat and a grin so cheeky it made me look thrice. You shook my hand and gave me a Ryan Gosling-esque stare that made me feel like Carey Mulligan in *Drive*. We shared a dance and a dalliance in the doorway before I had to leave. You told me you lived in Tokyo, I told you I was from Cape Town, so chances are our paths won't cross again. But if you'd like them to, so would I. This is probably how my own advert on Craigslist's 'Missed Connections' page would've read if I had posted one after meeting 'Tokyo'. We had both travelled to the UK on holiday and, although our meeting was brief, the connection felt real. Being an incurable romantic, I felt compelled to contact him and see if there was some way our worlds could collide again. Luckily, because we knew each other's full names, Facebook came to the rescue and our story has a happy ending. We've been together for a year now.

But what happens when you meet an alluring stranger, share a fleeting conversation or even just a smile – one that's enough to make you think 'Wow, they could be The One' – and you don't have any way of finding them again? Thanks to internet pioneers like Craigslist founder Craig Newmark, we now have websites that can help us track down our

'missed connections'. The basic formula is this: boy spies dream girl in coffee shop, boy places ad on site, girl reads ad and recognizes her description, girl's heart flutters and she replies to ad. (Note: 'boy' and 'girl' can be used interchangeably.) After noticing 'I saw you' messages popping up in the 'personals' section of newspapers, Newmark and his colleagues created the Craigslist page in 2000 but there are similar sites such as Missedconnections.com and Wemetonaplane.com. So far, the Craigslist Missed Connections market is biggest in the US – the New York site alone receives about 7 000 ads per month – but Europe and Asia are catching up. South Africa hasn't quite embraced the trend yet, although

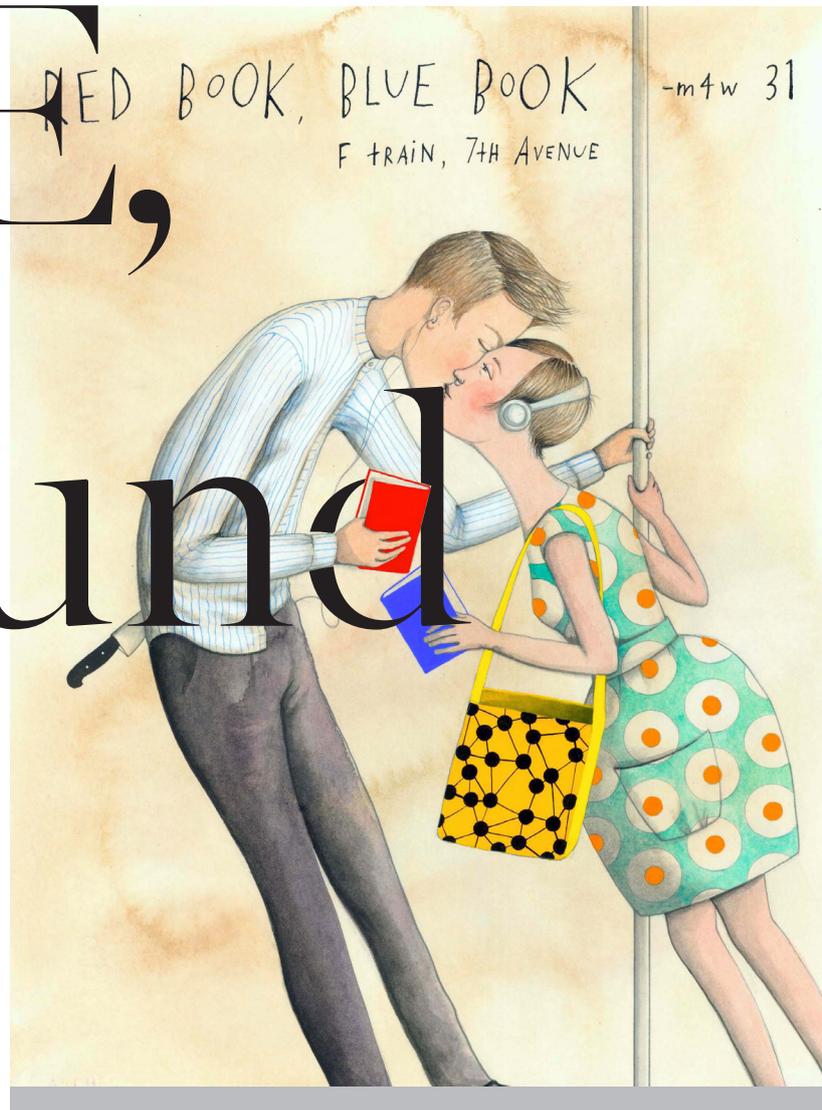
'It allows us to believe that, for love, time does not exist and it can overcome all odds'

a quick search on Gumtree.co.za reveals 22 posts in the Missed Connections category. None are as eloquent though as 'N Train Monday Evening Rush Hour', which the editors at *The New York Times* liked so much they published it in June last

LOVE, lost & found

DOES THE RISING POPULARITY OF PERSONAL ADS PROVE WE STILL BELIEVE IN LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT OR **ARE WE JUST LONELIER THAN EVER BEFORE?**

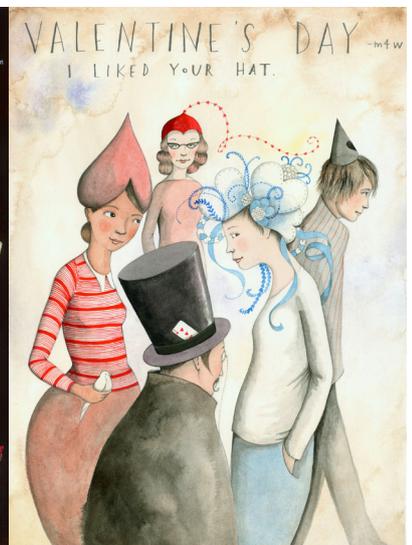
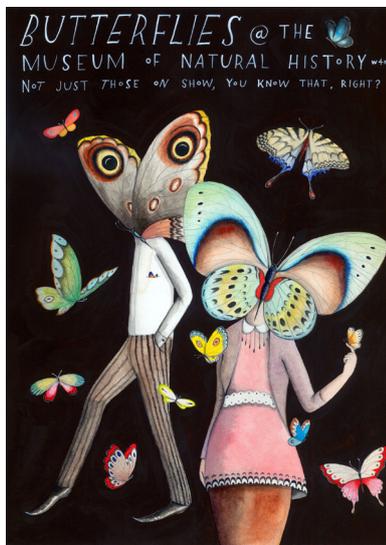
WORDS ANNEMARIE LUCK



Sunday, April 26, 2009
- m4w - 24 (Williamsburg)

COLOR CHANGING DRESS AT BBQ

You wore an awesome color changing dress to the BBQ on Skillman Ave in Williamsburg, but someone spilled wine on it. You left too quickly...

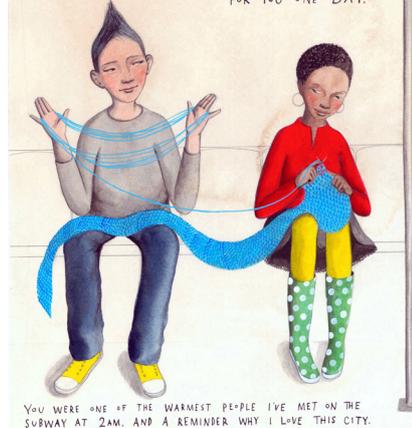


year: 'You looked beautiful in that blue and green summer dress. You fidgeted, flipped your hair, and looked at your nails. I admired the red strap of your watch, even before the mother and her son forced me to fall into you at Canal Street. Respond and tell me what I was wearing/holding. Maybe we can go out... end up in bed together, jail, the river, listen to Metallica, eat popcorn, or all of the above.' Of course not everyone's a poet or brave enough to even post an ad in the first place. Canadian blogger Ghada Khoraych had her doubts, commenting how 'a number of Missed Connections ads are a lot more about being physically attracted to someone... One was by a guy who saw a gorgeous girl and was "thinking of all the things I want to do to you"', but she bit the bullet and posted her first ad on 25 October 2013. She shares the experience on her blog, *Unlearning the Fear*, explaining that after meeting a 'cute guy' outside a restaurant, she realized how rare it is for her to 'feel a true connection with someone'. When I followed up with her in November about whether she'd found her missed connection, she told me she hadn't and that 'some of the responses were pretty rude and vulgar'. A couple of days later, however, she wrote back to me and said her missed connection had replied: 'He saw my post and described himself and our conversation so I know it's him.' She was still deliberating whether she would respond or not as she had just started seeing someone else.

But the ads are not just for those seeking to reach out to their missed connections or to respond to them; there are voyeurs who admit they can't go a day without scrolling the ads. For some it's pure entertainment, for others, it's about the intrigue and romance. One voracious reader who calls herself 'Sussurus' commented online: 'What I wanted was to see that some things are too important to let go [of] and that there is always hope.' Australian artist Sophie Blackall was so moved by the wistful posts that in 2009 she began creating illustrations based on the ads and then publishing them on Missedconnectionsny.blogspot.com

KNITTING GIRL ON 7 TRAIN To Sunnyside -m4w 28

NOT ONLY DID YOU INTRODUCE ME TO THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF KNITTING, I QUICKLY FOUND MYSELF SMITTEN WITH YOU AFTER CHATTING FOR A FEW MINUTES. DESPITE YOU MENTIONING YOU HAD A BOYFRIEND, I CAN ONLY HOPE HE IS TERMINALLY ILL SO THAT I'LL GET A SHOT AT KNITTING SOMETHING FOR YOU ONE DAY.



This spread and opener illustrations from Sophie Blackall's book *Missed Connections: Love, Lost & Found* (pictured opposite).

WE SHARED A BEAR SUIT AT AN APARTMENT PARTY Saturday Night -m4w



(her work is now in print as *Missed Connections: Love, Lost & Found*). In an interview with Rumpus.net she says, 'Part of the enormous appeal of Missed Connections, for me, is the mystery and ambiguity. Nothing is known for sure, even the person who was there isn't entirely sure he or she had the same response as the other in that moment. But, mostly, I think two people do share a moment, and we all know that feeling, and it can put a spring in your step for the rest of the day.'



Essentially, the Missed Connections phenomenon reminds us that human beings are always searching for that very rare and very extraordinary moment, but what does the increase in the popularity of websites like these say about the way we're connecting to each other in this globalized, digital age? Does it point to an increase in our feeling of isolation as our lives become busier, stretched across continents, and more virtual?

Nicola Cooper, a senior trend analyst at Jo'burg-based Flux Trends, says, 'the recently published book *Alone Together* tackles this precise issue. That in an era of insurmountable connectivity via BBM, Whatsapp, e-mail, Facebook, Twitter etc., individuals have never felt so alone. This has a direct pendulum swing and creates a longing for the "offline" experience; the actual connectivity of the human touch and the actuality of human emotions.'

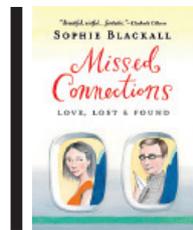
American photographer Andrea DiCenzo, who contacted and photographed dozens of people who posted on Missed Connections, says she got the feeling that theirs was 'an attempt to defend themselves from being isolated'. Dr Claire Hart, a counselling psychologist at Clarity Psychology Centre in Jo'burg, was less sure about the role of the advances of our times: 'While there is a great debate around whether we are becoming more isolated due to technology, current research shows that the extent of social isolation has hardly changed over the last 20 years. That said, real connection is often lacking in our current day-to-day experiences. In the absence of connection, we feel lonely, isolated and unaccepted. Missed Connections allows us to believe that there is one important relationship that can change the course of our lives. It allows us to believe that, for love, time does not exist and it can overcome all odds.' And there are plenty of success stories to buoy up this hopefulness, like Rachel Mickenberg and Jon Baker's, two New Yorkers who made eye contact one afternoon on a Brooklyn street and began dating after he responded to her ad that said: 'To the cutie with the skateboard on Flatbush Avenue'; and Allyson Falor and Perry Rosenbloom from Colorado, who married in 2009 after finding each other via the site. 'It was on a whim,' says Rosenbloom about posting the ad that helped him find his future wife. 'I couldn't get her out of my mind so I figured, "What the hell."'

Although the digital age is changing the way we connect with people, it seems our motives are the same as they've always been. 'The main question that we are trying to answer through Missed Connections is "who will love me?"' observes Hart. 'To seek out love requires courage to stake everything on the value of connection. This connection comes with approval, protection and admiration from another person. What we seek may also be a desire for social acceptance that we feel can only be achieved by being in a relationship or having someone love us. Perhaps the connection we should really be seeking with such desperate pursuit is the missed connections with ourselves.' **mc**

LOVE GONE VIRAL

How social media helped Capetonian Andrew McKintosh track down his love

'I met Sofia at a bar called Unico in Palermo. We spent the evening talking and later she invited me to her flat for a drink. She had an uncanny insight into me, but given that I'd recently come out of a toxic relationship I opted to hoof it without taking her number. Two days later I kind of recalibrated myself and realized the connection I felt with her was very rare, so I decided to visit her. Except I couldn't find her apartment! I spent nearly three days looking for her. I felt like I'd made the biggest mistake of my life. When I returned to Cape Town, I started Googling every angle I could think of but to no avail. I only had her first name so it was like trying to find John Smith in New York. Twitter and Facebook delivered nothing either. After weeks of searching, I registered a Spanish domain called WhereisSofia.com and wrote a brief synopsis of how we'd met and how I'd "lost" her number. I also registered a Twitter account and Facebook page and started following people in her area (suburb of 1.5 million people). Luckily I had one photo of her to post online. Initially I got responses like "Freak/stalker/psycho", but eventually people warmed to the idea and started retweeting. It started going viral when the Latin American correspondent to the *The New York Times* tweeted the website link. Site traffic spiked from tens to hundreds a day, and after about seven weeks of intensive searching, right when I was starting to think I'd never find her, I got an e-mail saying "Here I am!" Without the kind strangers who supported me in looking for her, I'd never have seen her again. For someone who used to be a misanthropist, that was a profound life- and worldview-altering experience. I still believe it was fate that we met and reconnected, even though social media was involved. I also believe one can influence one's fate. And how does our story end? Sofia moved to Cape Town in 2012. We did a commitment ceremony in Thailand and marriage plans are looking likely for next year.'



MISSED CONNECTIONS IN THE 1800s

The *New York Times* recently ran some classified ads from the late 1800s, which were exactly like the Craigslist ads.

Here is one:

If the young lady wearing the pink dress, spotted fur cape and muff, had light hair, light complexion and blue eyes, who was in company with a lady dressed in black, that I passed about 5 o'clock on Friday evening in South Seventh Street, between First and Second, Williamsburg, L.I., will address a line to Waldo, Williamsburg Post Office, she will make the acquaintance of a fine young man.

19 Jan 1862