

## **Just That Into Me**

I moved to the mountains from the East with a totally legitimate Master's Degree in counseling and social work. So naturally, one of the first things I did was to forget about it and pursue an Associate's in Outdoor Recreation Management from the local college. The classes were exactly what I wanted—fun! But then I was standing in lines at the resort's job fair, pulling the neck of my sweater up and over my nose to block the contact high billowing Peanuts' Pig-Pen-style around my fellow applicants. I was competing for a spot running the cash register at the mid-mountain Nastar booth, and I felt like my career prognosis began to dim a bit.

With my tail between my legs, I ran back to counseling and I took a job at the high school in a very old mining community. A town with more than a century of dirt beneath its nails, people mostly worked for the mine. They drank and drugged away the generations-old conclusion that there is nothing more. Or they commuted to work at the ski resort—the long drive was a good excuse for not having figured out anything better to do with the rest of their day. I found that my remote mountain town was where people lived who wanted to get away, permanently. They walked among all that came who wanted to get away for the weekend. They were reclusive sorts with problems to hide, and problems they hid in their kids. As a school counselor, I always found them.

It became too much to bear and seemed like an exercise in futility so I moved to the resort town itself—bright lights, big city of four thousand! By now, I was a thirty-cough-cough-something. I got another job counseling high school students. My life became much less about skeletons in closets and more about whether there were designer clothes or thrift store clothes hanging from the students' rods, that is—haves vs. the have nots, part of my job being to level the playing field, or at least create the illusion of one, before they were given their diplomas and began sticking around to work for their moms and dads as Heirs Apparent or left with the hope they'd one day be able to come back as a carefree visitor, unburdened by their parents' 3-job, 60-hour work-week schedules.

My social life took a big step backwards, or forward—depending on what you're going for. Resort culture is party culture. There was suddenly something to celebrate, or at least honor with a round, eh...most weekends if not also most nights of the week. Somebody coming. Somebody going. Something opening. Something closing. A festival, a fest, a parade. They say Hallmark is behind certain "extra" frivolous holidays like Valentine's Day, but if it's got nothin' on the town's marketing department trying to pack in as many events and parties they can into a year, which locals gladly celebrate as well. Someone is always on

vacation, making it easy to think that you are, too. Ski town culture is never-grow-up culture, men and women living as boys and girls in a 24-hours-a-day theme park.

My teacher friends and I could be found bellying up to a shot ski, or “networking” at pro tour receptions and ski movie premiers. Funny...nobody ever seemed interested in discussing district standardized testing or the self-esteem of adolescents.

But it was okay. For a long, long time.

Boys and men and men and boys. Men that were boys and boys that were,...er..no. Scratch that. Suffice it to say, the odds were good. Very, very,...good. My friends and I gradually began realizing that we were getting significantly older, but without significant “others”. About the same time, it became a matter of us getting older, but the guys all staying the same age. And not in a good way a la *Dazed and Confused*.

All of us were in our 30s, some of us nearing 40. We gals were all cruising bravely into middle-age. Our parents were wondering if [whispered] *maybe we were lesbian*, what with the being perpetually single and our love of technical outwear, low-maintenance hair and Yaktrax.

One of my newly married friends began recommending books. Top of the list? “He’s Just Not That Into You”, naturally. I read it and did her one better, delving next into “Date Like a Man”. Apparently she’d tapped into some kind of voracious appetite for self-help that I didn’t know I had, leaving me with the feeling that nobody’s into me and that I’d better be satisfied hooking up on a roommate’s couch after free happy hour chips and salsa at the local apres-ski cantina. But at least with that mindset, sleeping with a twentysomething liftie was completely in-bounds, no strings attached, and it was fun as long as I expected nothing more.

And then it happened—one night, I was being ferried around by this same friend to all of our favorite watering holes. I think my singledom was getting to be a serious issue for her; maybe she was tired of being the one married girl in the group. I felt like a wrinkly, old debutante trying to make up for having accidentally missed the ball.

He was an old friend of hers, who she met on a rafting trip years before. He was talking with some friends by the door, and we were on our way out. My friend

recognized him, he recognized her. Seeing as this was before the age of social media and constant appearances in each other's newsfeeds—they had a screaming reunion, well—she did. He's kind of a stoic-type, a plumber. And then she remembered that not only was I standing there, but that once upon a time, she'd put us together in her head as being a possible match—and I met Paul. I'd wanted a college graduate; Paul was a plumber who'd attended trade school. I'd wanted a "life-of-the-party"-type; Paul was a quietly genuine wallflower. We stayed and talked, closing down the place and then some. He had his own townhome nearby. I knew he was serious a few months later, when he offered me a...wait for it...a *garage door opener*! This was a way bigger deal than a key: the garage is how he mostly got into his house; the door he'd go through if he was coming back from work, but also—if he were coming in from skiing, biking, hiking, rafting. This man let me into his *mud room*. There are few more intimate areas in a mountain man's life than his mud room. He wants to DO STUFF with me!

We've been doing stuff together ever since. One of the things we did was get married. One of the things we'll do is celebrate our 8<sup>th</sup> anniversary this Fall. Needless to say...he's just that into me.