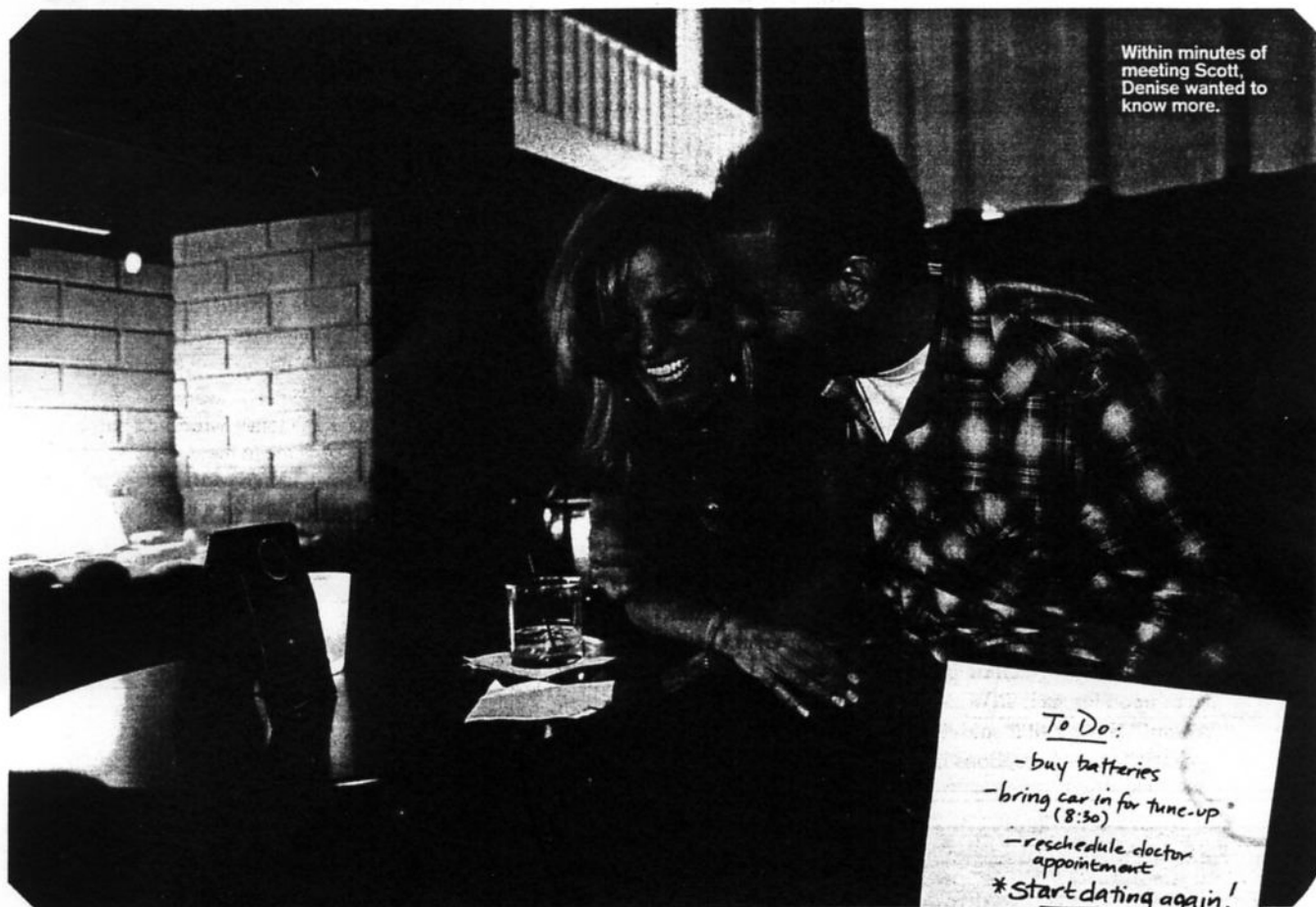


# REDBOOK

SEPTEMBER 2006

live your dream



Within minutes of meeting Scott, Denise wanted to know more.

*To Do:*  
- buy batteries  
- bring car in for tune-up (8:30)  
- reschedule doctor appointment  
\* **Start dating again!**  
- take kids clothes shopping  
- defrost chicken

## dating *after* divorce

Taking chances in life is scary, but it also helps you grow. For one divorced mom, the challenge was tackling the singles scene.

Let her story inspire you to step out of your comfort zone—and never look back.

by Sarah Elizabeth Richards

Four years after a tough divorce, Denise Deissler, 40, was missing having a man in her life. Since the day her husband of nine years moved out (and moved in with the woman he'd been having an affair with), this Long Island, NY, dental hygienist had just one relationship that fizzled, plus a few disappointing setups. She was ready to meet someone new but was terrified to get back out into the singles scene. And Denise also had her 12-year-old daughter and 9-year-old son to consider—she felt guilty about taking time away from them.

Besides, she thought, who wants a woman with two kids? She worried about dating at her age, and she was clueless about where to meet guys and the new rules of dating. Should you see more than one person? Can you call a guy? "I didn't know where to begin," says Denise.

So REDBOOK hooked her up with New York City matchmaker and dating coach Lisa Ronis. When they met last fall, Lisa explained that lots of great guys want to meet single moms. "So many people marry two or three times," Lisa said. "Male clients tell me, 'I want a woman who understands when I need to be with my children.'" As for adjusting to dating again, "You'll learn about yourself," Lisa told Denise. "You'll have fun!" ▶



### STEP 1 Get ready—inside and out.

Lisa's first move was to help Denise cultivate the right mind-set by giving her "homework": Denise had to buy some new date outfits that made her feel pretty and sexy, and start a "flirt journal" to keep track of her interactions with men. "Pay attention to guys checking you out at Starbucks, the gym, even the grocery store," Lisa advised. "And remember to smile back."

Later that week, Denise stopped by Banana Republic. She'd been wearing her "mom uniform" of sweaters and khakis for so long that she didn't even know what was in fashion anymore. And she was scared of looking ridiculous by dressing too young. She scanned the racks for good date outfits—things that were feminine, classy, and not too revealing, as Lisa had recommended. She found a cute, stylish black top, tried it on, and thought, Wow, I look good!

Now, it was flirting time. While at lunch with coworkers one day, Denise caught a guy nodding at her from across the restaurant. She responded with a sly smile, and he was so distracted by her reaction that he stumbled over a step! Apparently, men *were* checking her out. Maybe this won't be so hard after all, she thought. Simply being more aware of the people around her helped Denise realize that men were aware of her, too.

#### • STEP 1 •

### action plan

#### ■ be ready emotionally.

"You should be in a good place," says Lisa. That means being over that ex-husband or old relationship.

#### ■ look your best.

Buy some new date outfits and makeup. Get a manicure. Have your hair done. Maybe get your teeth whitened. Lose a few pounds, if you need to. "When you feel sexy and beautiful," says Lisa, "you convince the world that you are."

#### ■ create time to date.

If you're a mom, try to set a regular child-custody schedule with your ex so you know when you'll be free, or find a sitter or friend to help you out on a regularly planned night.

#### ■ keep a flirt journal.

"It helps get you out of your shell," says Lisa. "Plus, it's really nice to know when you're admired."

#### ■ commit to making dating a priority in your life.

Set a goal of meeting two new guys a month.

### STEP 2 Be sure to spread the word.

Denise was ready to meet some men, so Lisa told her to list friends and family members who might be able to set her up. "Be your own matchmaker," Lisa advised. But Denise felt like almost everyone she knew was married and knew only married people.

"What about your patients?" Lisa asked. Denise was constantly chatting with clients, so *someone* had to know someone she could meet. A few days later, when Denise heard a patient mention her recent engagement, she chimed in. "That's wonderful! Does he have a brother?" He didn't. But her patient *did* know someone: Steve, a 41-year-old electrician who'd recently asked if she knew someone *he* could meet. Bingo!

A few days later, Steve called and invited Denise to lunch. He was really nice, and she was impressed at what a good dad he was to his daughter. Their first date continued over coffee and drinks, and lasted six hours! Denise was thrilled to feel a connection with someone.

Next, Lisa told Denise to suss out the social hot spots in her area and go with single girlfriends. Denise didn't think bars were a place to meet someone serious, but Lisa urged her to get used to going out and being social. So Denise and a friend went to a bar in a nearby town. She didn't expect much when Chris, a 38-year-old computer specialist and divorced dad of two, started talking to her. But then he asked for (and got) her number. Denise couldn't believe it—she'd made just a few small moves, and she was back in the game. ▶

## Love Coach



For this month's Live Your Dream story, REDBOOK enlisted the help of New York City matchmaker and dating coach Lisa Ronis ([lisaronismatchmaking.com](http://lisaronismatchmaking.com)).

• STEP 2 •

action plan

■ ask friends and family to set you up.

This is no time to be shy—you want some dates! So tell everyone. And follow up: Sometimes folks need a little nudge to get a fix-up in motion.

■ find other girlfriends to go out with.

Note: You'll want to limit that group to three pals—a large pack of women can be intimidating to guys.



**PARTY ON**  
At this singles event, Denise actually started to enjoy working a room.

STEP 3 Really get out there.

Meeting men was easy for Denise when they came to her, but she didn't know what to do when they didn't. She'd usually sip her wine and giggle with her friend—a tactic that wasn't exactly filling up her weekends. So in December, Lisa met Denise at an after-work hangout in Manhattan to show her some tricks. "Invite him over!" Lisa urged, noting a Brad Pitt look-alike. Denise was panic-stricken, so Lisa took over. She lifted her wine-glass, toasting the guy from afar with a big smile. As if on cue, he came over! "How are you?" he asked shyly.



**CHEERS!**  
Denise and a friend practiced their flirting at a bar—and met this cutie.

"Great! It's girls' night out," Lisa said. "We want to meet cute guys!" He gave an embarrassed smile, chatted for a few minutes, then excused himself to meet his friend.

Denise looked disappointed, but Lisa was unfazed. She approached two guys eating at the bar and asked them how they liked their shellfish platter. "Yeah, it's good," one said, then turned toward his friend.

"Did they brush us off?" Denise asked Lisa.

"Don't take it personally," Lisa said. "They're just not on the prowl. If you're rejected, it's no big deal. You're just asking him a question."

Later that night, Denise and a friend tried out some of Lisa's tactics at another bar. "I don't think that I can do it like Lisa! It's hard to take on someone else's personality," Denise confided, as she reviewed Lisa's instructions: Spit out your gum. No folding your arms. No talking to your friend. See who's looking at you. Go near them and start a conversation with a comment such as, "This place is crowded," or "Gosh, it's hard to get a drink around here," or "Wow! I love this ratio: four men to every woman."

The guys seemed occupied in small groups, so Denise perched on a bar stool and took note of who was notic-

ing her. When her friend tried to take a photo of her, Denise made eye contact with a tall, jocular guy nearby and

• STEP 3 •

action plan

■ do social stuff you like.

Volunteer for a cause. Take a cooking class. Check out wine tastings, charity benefits, spelunking treks—whatever interests you and gets you socializing. And if you're meeting a friend at a bar, arrive a half hour early to mingle; you'll be less self-conscious if you know your friend is on the way.

■ go online.

Approximately 40 million Americans visit dating sites each month, so why not you? Many sites offer tips on how to write a good profile.

■ transition from mommy mode to date mode.

"Take a bath. Put on some nice music. Have some wine," says Lisa. "You're going to look and feel great."



**TUNING IN**  
Denise learned to take notice when guys checked her out—and to smile back.

smiled. He offered to take their photo, and his pal soon joined them. "Where are your husbands?" the photo-taker asked. The women laughed. Denise was getting good flirting practice.

Lisa also advised Denise to join an online dating site. Denise was hesitant, but Lisa persuaded her to try it just for a month, so Denise reluctantly posted a profile and a few photos on Match.com. It worked! Within the first week, she received 17 e-mails and 23 "winks" (the online equivalent of flirting).

## STEP 4 Keep at it.

At first, Denise was overwhelmed with all the Match.com responses she got, but she wrote back to a handful, including a 39-year-old divorced dad and law enforcement officer. They decided to meet for a drink.

Denise loved hearing how he thought she was sweet and easy to talk to. Her enthusiasm quickly faded, however, when he said he'd never been on a second date. She soon learned why: He never asked for one. "E-mail me or I'll e-mail you," he said at the end of the evening. Was she supposed to make the next move or was he giving her the heave-ho?

Denise wasn't sure how to read these situations. She'd been out six times with Chris, the computer specialist, but after every date, he waited several

weeks to ask her out again. "I'm thinking he's not interested," Denise said. When she met her ex at age 22, she knew right away that he was crazy about her. He asked her out every week, and by the second date, he asked her to be his girlfriend. "Now, everyone wants to date and not commit," Denise complained.

"It's all part of the process," Lisa reassured her. "You're doing great. You've barely been out there."

### • STEP 4 •

#### action plan

##### ■ expect bumps along the road.

Guys will fade in and out or stop calling for no reason. "He could have stuff going on that has nothing to do with you," says Lisa.

##### ■ date more than one man at a time until one becomes a clear winner.

##### ■ enlist your friends as wingwomen.

No one's saying you have to relive high school, but just like back then, sometimes a simple "My friend thinks you're cute" works wonders.

But Denise felt like she was wasting time on dates that went nowhere. She worked until 7:30 p.m. two days a week and often had to hire babysitters. And when she was out dating, she couldn't eat dinner with her kids or help them with homework. She worried that she was shortchanging them. She also felt like she had to screen her dates extra carefully, since she didn't want someone in her life who wouldn't be a good fit for her family.

"It's like a job, and I'm exhausted," Denise said. "I don't think I'm so good at this dating thing." Still, Lisa urged her to meet more men. "The more you meet, the more you can choose from. If you don't focus on just one, it won't matter if he doesn't call," she said. "It will happen. It just may take time."

So in January, the two went to a steak house on Long Island; Denise had heard the place was hopping on Thursday nights. Lisa became Denise's wingwoman, making introductions for her. "Are any of you single?" Lisa asked a small group of men at the bar, placing Denise in front of a handsome guy with smiling brown eyes. "Could you talk to my friend?" Lisa asked the man, who seemed surprised. "She's a little shy."

Denise wanted to slink away, but he took her hand and held it for an extra moment. "I'm Scott," he said. Denise liked the laid-back, confident vibe of this 43-year-old divorced dad of two. He told her about his job as an assistant principal at a high school and that he played hockey. He smiled at her as he talked. Denise was charmed.

Then Lisa returned, saying, "We've got to go—give him your number."

"You can't leave yet," Scott said.

"We've got to go," Denise responded disappointedly. He pulled out his cell phone and punched in her number.

That weekend, Denise went on a third date with Steve, the electrician. And she met another guy from Match.com. She had fun on her dates, but nothing was sparking. She wondered if Scott would call. ▶

A few days later, he did. Denise beamed when he asked her out to dinner the following week. They hadn't talked long at the bar, but she was curious to learn more about him.

## STEP 5 Enjoy the journey.

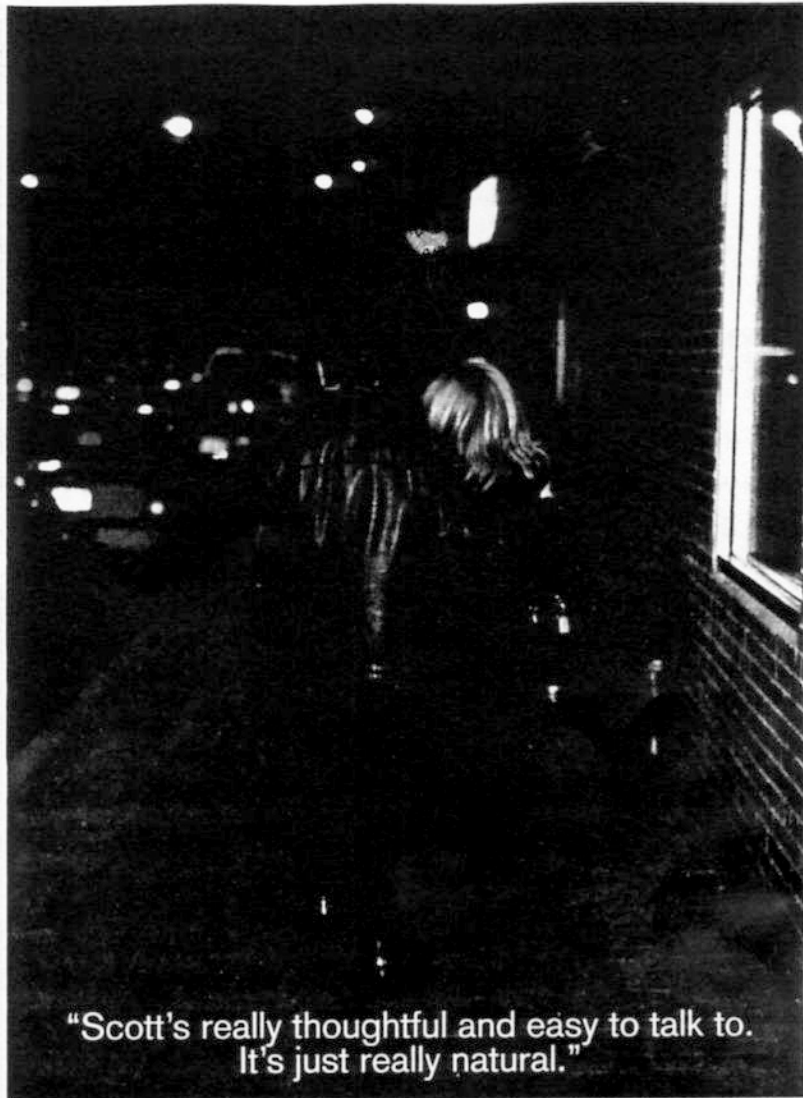
Within a few weeks, Denise and Scott had been on several dates. She was falling for him—and fast. He had fixed her fence, brought her a dozen pink roses on Valentine's Day, and was even talking about taking a trip with her to a local resort.

"He's really thoughtful and easy to talk to," she gushed. "He treats my kids nicely. And it's just really natural." She was relieved when Scott said he didn't date more than one person at a time. She didn't like to either, even though she remembered what Lisa had said about not dating just one guy. "Of all the people I've met in the past few months, nothing has been like this," Denise said. "If it doesn't work out, *then* I'll get back out there."

So when Steve the electrician called to ask her out again, Denise politely declined. And she stopped caring that she'd never heard from Chris again.

Denise did, however, accompany Lisa to a singles party in Manhattan. She wasn't interested in meeting new men, but the now more social Denise enjoyed working the room. She noticed how much easier it was to talk to guys. She started conversations and gracefully exited them with the simple phrase she learned from Lisa: "I need to say hello to some friends. It was so lovely to talk to you."

Denise felt confident that she could easily meet new men if she wanted to. "I would never have pushed myself to do half the things that Lisa made me do," adds Denise. "I went through a whole new life experience." She also stopped feeling conflicted about being away from her kids. "I learned that



"Scott's really thoughtful and easy to talk to. It's just really natural."

I'm allowed to have a life for myself, too, and it won't hurt them," she says. "They see their mom smiling more."

### • STEP 5 • action plan

#### ■ have fun.

Just enjoy meeting people. You'll take the pressure off yourself, and men will be attracted to your positive energy.

#### ■ discover the surprising benefits of dating.

You'll learn what you like and don't like in men—and you'll learn more about yourself.

So does Scott. One night at dinner, he whispered in her ear, "We're going to grow old together." Denise blushed and flashed a shy grin. "I see now that there are people who want the same things I want. I'm not the only single mother out there; there are lots of divorced men and women who want to meet people—just like I do. No matter how it turns out, I've learned how to balance my life better—I'm a working mom, but I have a social life, too." **R**

### what's your dream?

Are you ready to make it happen? Tell us about it! Write to us at Live Your Dream, REDBOOK, 300 W. 57th St., New York, NY 10019 or [redbook@hearst.com](mailto:redbook@hearst.com) (type "Live Your Dream" in the subject field).