

caught in a

Bus r♥mance

It gets as weird as you suspected. It gets more normal than you think.

The only thing the Hysmiths both remember about their first conversation is where they were sitting at the time.

Cheryl was in the front seat on the right of the 77 bus. George was behind the steering wheel.

She remembers one other thing, too: At some point he definitely mentioned his wife.

Oh, well, Cheryl said to herself as she swung out.

She was 35, divorced, with two sons. He was 37, soon to be separated, with five.

The 15-minute ride soon slipped from Cheryl's mind. But the tall, outgoing, dark-haired woman his age stuck in George's.

It was "just one of those things where you have a lot in common," George recalled. "Things just click."

So when a golf buddy dragged him to a party a year later, George was shocked to see the woman he remembered sitting at a table, sipping wine and trying to find a domino partner.

He was still wearing his TriMet uniform. "You were my passenger!" he blurted out.

It was, Cheryl said, pretty romantic.

"He remembered me," she said. "I was just amazed."

The track was set. Their first date was a few weeks later, at Old Town Pizza on



portraits by
Michael Schoenholtz



Valentine's Day, 1984. By the next winter, they'd blended their huge family.

The pair retired to Trout Lake, Wash., five years ago and celebrated their 23rd wedding anniversary in September.

George declined to comment on his two other attempts to date passengers, before reuniting with Cheryl.

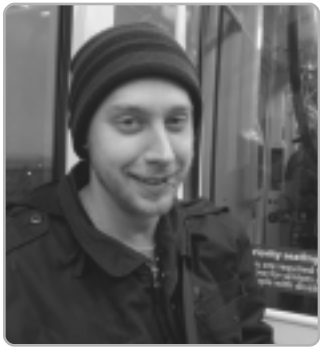
"You meet a lot of people when you're driving the bus," George said. "I guess I can be selective."

A few words from the experts

There's the guy who scored a woman's number on the MAX by **asking to borrow her cell phone**, then secretly calling his own. (They're still together, last we heard.) There's the 23-year-old who likes to meet her girlfriends on the bus by **passing them notes**, so they won't be too embarrassed to say yes. (Her happy hunting ground: "The 19, past Reed. Lots of smart lesbians.") Portland's roads and rails are full of **folks who work their game on TriMet** – for richer and for poorer, for better and for worse. **Here's what they told us.**



Be exotic. Tigard graphic designer Robert Lambert, 44, was just enjoying singing a Sioux folk song with his friend on the MAX. But his friend walked out the door with a date and he walked away impressed. "He's a better singer than I am," Lambert confided.



Take it easy. "Meet on neutral territory," said Joe Shriner, 28, of Northeast Portland. "It's like if you met them online. Never let them know where you live on the second date – three to five dates. I'm paranoid, though."



Be brave. Edward Gromysh, 20, of Gresham, met one ex when she grabbed him by the sleeve and pulled him off the MAX after her. They stayed together for a month and still get along. On TriMet, he said, "What do you have to lose?"



Watch out. John King, 47, was engaged. It didn't matter. He couldn't resist the smell of the woman he kept running into on MAX. Despite their "crazy chemistry," the two split after a two-week fling. "It was one of the worst things that's ever happened to me."



Know your type. A comic-book chat at Beaverton Transit Center turned into a "painfully shy" romance for Gohma Schwartz, 22, of Beaverton. But she's got no time for non-geeks, she explained. "They're not going to get why you like to pretend you're an orc." 🐉