



Finding Romance in Retail

Do you buy the idea that stores are good places to find love?



If you're aiming to find love on your next shopping trip, stay on your toes because any question can pop up in the cereal aisle or at the perfume counter.

By Geoff Williams

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If you're single and interested in meeting Mr. or Ms. Right, you've probably heard the following advice a million times: Grocery stores and bookstores are great places to meet other single people.

It sounds plausible – possibly because many people are influenced by how frequently TV and movie characters "meet cute," as the phrase goes, in grocery stores and bookstores. For instance, in the 2009 comedy romance "He's Just Not That Into You," Bradley Cooper's married character meets Scarlett Johansson's single yoga instructor in a grocery store, and a relationship ignites. In the classic 1989 film "When Harry Met Sally," Harry and Sally meet (for the second time) at a bookstore. In fictional storylines, it especially pays off if one half of the couple works at the bookstore: On F/X's series "Louie," the title character falls head over heels for a clerk at a bookstore, and bookshop owner Hugh Grant is smitten with Julia Roberts the moment she walks into his store in "Notting Hill." You can probably think of many more examples.

But is it really sound advice to seek romance in the produce department at Piggly Wiggly or approach a fellow book browser at Barnes & Noble? After all, if you're in a public setting like a grocery store, the object of your affection is presumably there because he or she wants to stock up on food. You are in a meat market, not a meet market.

Of course, anything goes when it comes to love and romance, and there are some real-life success stories. For those who think retail romances never happen, here's your ray of hope – and a few strategies to consider.

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Shop where you'll find like-minded shoppers. Obviously, you could shop until you drop, hoping to meet the person of your dreams, and only come away with a lot of merchandise, debt and receipts.

But if you shop in smaller, niche shops that fit your personality, whether it's a comic book shop or an antique store, you may have more luck.

For instance, Cassandra James, a self-help author in Montclair, N.J., has been in a committed relationship with her boyfriend, Frank, since they met while buying groceries three years ago.

However, their first encounter wasn't at a typical supermarket. They met at a health food store. When they locked eyes, and James found herself walking over to Frank, who immediately shook hands and introduced himself, it wasn't quite the same as meeting among boxes of Froot Loops and Cap'n Crunch in a giant chain grocery store. They at least knew the other was interested in health and nutrition, and it gave them something to talk about during their first conversation.

"We talked about how long we want to live. I said 82; he said 100," recalls James. "Our conversation was not trivial, to say the least."

If a conversation starts, work it in quickly that you're single. After all, you may think you're doing a great job flirting, and they may think you're just really interested in finding out if arugula is as good as everyone says.

David Bakke, an editor at the personal finance blog [moneycrashers.com](#) and contributor to the U.S. News My Money blog, began a four-month relationship at a department store where he was shopping for perfume for a relative. She worked there; he didn't.

"The conversation was pretty generic at first, until she asked me who the purchase was for," Bakke says. "Once she realized it wasn't for my girlfriend, she really warmed up to me."

They began chatting, he asked her out for coffee and happiness ensued – for a while. "We eventually broke up, but we still stay in touch from time to time," Bakke says.

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It helps if you have a purpose. That is, a reason for the conversation. As a customer, Bakke was easily able to strike up a conversation with the salesgirl at the perfume counter. Jason Geisler, 30, a portfolio advisor at Merrill Lynch, met his wife, Shawne, 29, a loan administrator, in September 2002 when she was working in a clothing store in Bloomington, Ill. He was in town visiting his father. He liked Shawne from the start.

"At first she wasn't interested, but then she found out that I was visiting from Florida, and we started talking about that. We kept laughing, and I just remember thinking that she was one of the most beautiful girls I had ever seen. I found out later that she had a boyfriend, which explained why she made every attempt to avoid talking to me," Geisler says.

Geisler left, saying to his friend, "I'm going to marry that girl."

If she had just been another customer, he probably never would have run into her again. As it turned out, he found more excuses to shop for clothes. Four years later, they married. The couple just found out they're having their third daughter.

Orly Telisman, owner of a public relations firm in Chicago, was a TV news reporter in Merrillville, Ind., in 1998, working on a story about the final episode of "Seinfeld." She wound up in a Best Buy parking lot, and when she approached a young man and his brother, she says she was simply "shopping for 'man on the street' interviews."

As luck would have it, she wound up shopping for a future husband that day.

If you don't have a reason to talk to a fellow shopper or man on the street, make up a reason, urges April Masini, who runs a relationship advice website, askapril.com.

"Asking someone about interesting luggage, a sweater, their purchase or where they got that corn dog they're eating hardly qualifies them as a stalker. And yet many people are simply afraid of being labeled such and let the moment go, only to regret it later," Masini says.

She adds that when someone is shopping, it might be the best time to flirt or introduce yourself. "People have their guards down when they're shopping – they're not suspicious or looking for reasons to filter you out the way they might be in an alcohol-infused event," Masini says.

Be ready for anything. That can be hard, especially if you're the one being approached and are occupied with whether tonight's dinner should be pasta or pork chops.

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Shannon Battle, now a licensed counselor who owns a foster care and outpatient mental health agency in Fayetteville, N.C., could have easily waved off her future husband when he approached her.

She is now 37, but at the time she was a freshman in college, wearing old sweats and a hair wrap, when a man, five years her senior, approached her with a friend at his side. He simply asked: "Do you have a boyfriend?"

She fired back: "Do you have a girlfriend?"

She later learned that her future husband, Kelsey, and his friend had dared each other to talk to the first female they saw. Kelsey wound up talking to an elderly lady first, asked his pal for a do-over and then met Shannon.

"My advice to others is to be yourself in all settings. I wasn't looking for love, but I paid attention," Battle says. Today, they're happily married and have five kids.

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