

Move over Garrison Keillor. Columnist Joanne Palmer imparts hilarious insight to real life in a ski town. This writer possesses a knack for making us laugh at the idiosyncrasies of living at 6,990 feet with 10,000 neighbors and 1,000 dogs.

Life in the 'Boat

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## Life in the 'Boat

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# **Life in the 'Boat**

How I fell on Warren Miller's skis, cheated on my hairdresser  
and fought off the Fat Fairy...true tales from Ski Town  
U.S.A.

**Joanne Palmer**

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## **I Cheated On My Hairdresser**

**I**n a small town, secrets are hard to keep—especially beauty secrets. Which is why I was a fool to do the unthinkable.

I cheated on my hairdresser.

I swore I'd never do it. There was no third party. It was finances, not fickleness, that made me stray. My bank account was lean, my roots were long and I slipped. I decided to buy hair color in a box and do it myself. It seemed easy enough. But as I stood in the aisle looking at all the boxes, I was instantly confused. Of course there was ash blonde, strawberry blonde and champagne blonde. But Dulce de Leche Blonde? It sounded more like a Starbucks drink than hair color. I furtively selected golden blonde, and snuck out of the store.

That night, I pulled on plastic gloves and went to work. It was lonely. It was too quiet. I missed the buzz of blow dryers in the salon, the free cookies, the pitcher of water with lemons floating on top. There was no swirl of conversation as women waited for their color to brighten, their nails to dry, their heels to soften in the pedicure tubs.

“Did you see Suri Cruise on the cover of *Vanity Fair*?” I asked the dog. She cocked her head and scratched.

I shook the tube, squirted on the color, bundled my hair on top of my head, then called a friend,

“In 20 minutes I'll either be golden blonde or blind,” I said.

“What?”

I explained that, according to the directions, if I got any of this smelly goopy golden blonde color in my eyes it might make me blind. My friend thought it served me right for committing hair adultery.

“What if you run into Sally at the grocery store?”

“I'll go to the other one.”

Of course I knew where she shopped, and whether she was a post office or cluster box kind of gal. I knew the names of her kids, her dogs and her husband's birthday. What I couldn't remember is how we met. No matter, once we did, we stayed together for seven years. She changed hair salons twice, and I followed behind her like a puppy. She left for the Front Range for a year, but as soon as she returned, so did I.

She saw me through champagne highlights with red lowlights. She politely refused (thank heavens!) when I asked her to cut my hair like Winona Ryder's. She layered my hair after my divorce, and then patiently waited with

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me until it grew out. When I begged, she changed me into a brunette and then never said, “I told you so” when she transformed me back into a blonde.

Only Sally knew I was a closet curler. My fine blonde hair needs more than product. I have to apply product, blow dry it upside down, apply more product, spend a few minutes rolling my limp locks around squishy curlers, blow dry it again, take the curlers out and then mist it and the bathroom with hairspray. An hour later, it’s flat and goes into a ponytail.

Sally laughed at my hair follies as she willingly shared her parenting tips and her recipe for funeral potatoes. She never caused me to kick the sink and run out of the salon in tears as I did once in Washington, D.C. That hairdresser, who had a fake French accent and wore his shirt unbuttoned to his navel, cut a foot from my hair when I’d asked for a trim.

“Trust me bab-eee,” he purred. “You’ll love it when it’s blown dried.”

I did not.

Hairdressers know—even more than Santa Claus—when you’ve been bad or good. So I figured Sally probably already heard about my home hair coloring fiasco. But would she forgive me and take me back?

I’ll have to call and find out.

## **Keeping Time with the Refrigerator**

**I**t's hard to forget something you are reminded of 31 times a day. If my child reminded me of something that frequently I'd go berserk. But the Zen-like hum of my refrigerator is something else, indeed. That something else, frankly, is my hard drive. Truth is, my refrigerator organizes my life. Totally and completely. I've tried "Week-at-a-Glance," Post-it notes, and even a razzle-dazzle cell phone complete with calendar and calculator but nothing works as well as the low-tech door of my refrigerator.

The door holds my on-going grocery list, the school lunch menu, and inspirational quotes. My favorite by Emily Dickenson, "We turn not older with years but newer every day." It has a reminder notice for my high school reunion, emergency phone numbers and displays all of my appointments and a "to-do" list.

Two magnetized bins on the side are crammed with take out menus from local restaurants, receipts, bills, household budget, class schedules from the gym, and coupons, which I faithfully clip and fail to use. The door displays magnets that wonder where my hormones went, proclaim my status as a chocoholic and two that dare me to follow my crazy ideas. Every time I open the door to get milk I laugh at the cartoon that reminds me I'm under the care of two therapists, "Ben and Jerry."

According to an in-depth study conducted by, "Me, Myself and I" the average family of four opens the refrigerator door 31 times a day; 48 on weekends. This excludes holiday and diet periods when rates can soar. This means I am exposed to all my reminders 251 times a week—which is precisely the number of times I need to schedule an appointment to rotate my tires or schedule a bone density screening.

When I was single, I had no trouble carrying a planner and keeping track of my schedule. I exercised three times a week, remembered birthdays and got eight hours of sleep a night. I even flossed my teeth. My refrigerator door held concert and movie schedule, a list of food high in antioxidants, and my astrological compatibility guide. As a newlywed, the compatibility guide surrendered to decadent desert recipes and a list of romantic getaways. Once I crossed the threshold into motherhood, I discovered what all mothers know but medical science doesn't—all memory cells are destroyed during childbirth. New mothers carry planners that weigh 7 lbs. 8 ozs. and keep them up half the night. Reminders stuck on the refrigerator door are the only hope of getting somewhere in the lifetime you're suppose to be there. After a

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particularly maddening day with three children under the age of five, one frustrated mom I know posted her last will and testament smack in the center of her refrigerator door.

Interestingly, fatherhood enhances memory. New fathers never forget bowling leagues, poker nights or tee-off times. Their contribution to the refrigerator door will most likely be the stat sheet for the football playoff pool, a sale flyer for a new power tool or mulch.

Beware the individual with nothing on their refrigerator door. They suffer from a rare condition known as, "fridgafreakaphobia." They are under the misguided notion that the sole purpose of a refrigerator is to keep food fresh. The adjusti-temp shelves are perfectly positioned to maximize air circulation. They date and label leftovers, alphabetize condiments and arrange them in descending height order. These people should never be invited to join your potluck group.

Somehow in this jumble of magnets, paper, photos and bins I find whatever I need and get where I'm going on time. Since I've given up on plastering Post-it notes reminders on all available surfaces and just used my refrigerator door I haven't had an overdue fine from the library or the video store.

And my hard drive never crashes.

## **Dating and the Single Mom**

When I got divorced, I thought about child support, custody, and my ability to weather the split, but I never once considered my dating. I just assumed it would happen-eventually.

A year passed. That's 365 days and what seems like twice as many nights without so much as dinner and a movie.

"I could fix you up with Killer," a friend volunteered. "It's just a nickname and he has a snowmobile." While contemplating how I'd ever introduce him to my mother, my son started waking up at 2 a.m. Instead of worrying about the haystack-size piles of unfolded laundry as I took the 16 steps to his room, wondering how will I ever have date or be intimate again when I might be interrupted by: "Mommy, I have a booger." Somehow, Killer didn't sound like the kind of guy that could handle it.

When I was single, I had a list of thirty-four qualities I was looking for in a man: tall, funny, successful, wants kids, and is a good dancer were some of the things on my wish list. Now I had a new list with only one criterion: can help a small child use a tissue.

I reversed my policy on personals and answered one. It read: "Take a chance on a decent, responsible man, 43. Non-smoker with a good heart." It was two weeks before we could get together. In the meantime we exchanged twenty-five e-mails, each revealing another detail of our lives. As soon as he got out of his SUV, he started complaining about the price of snowshoes, the price of the cheese he'd packed for our picnic, the cost of gas...you get the idea.

A friend counseled, "Just go slow and remember, it isn't you, it's every bit as depressing as it appears." My next blind date, a 6:30 a.m. breakfast, proved her right. Before I even sat down, he started reading the newspaper and ate two soft-boiled eggs without looking up, just like we'd been married for twenty years. It was, indeed, depressing—even if my married friends insisted I was lucky to sleep alone at night.

It was time to go on the offensive. I'd run my own personal ad. I hesitantly entered the newspaper office and began, "Communicative male...."

The woman on the other side of the counter began to laugh. I looked up and she laughed even harder. She grabbed a tissue and started dabbing her eyes as she said, "That's an oxymoron. Lemme tell you about my fiancé." I left.

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I tried a party. When you live in a small Colorado mountain town, people think it's fun to have outdoor parties in the winter. I bravely stood outside in a blizzard, endured a blowing wind and smoke from a bonfire. After one hour, in the initial stages of hypothermia, I left. On the way out, the hostess said: "Why leave now? Bow-Wow-Chow the dog trainer I wanted to introduce you to isn't here yet."

I highlighted my hair and got a bikini wax. I strapped on ankle weights and did leg lifts. Surely rock-hard cellulite would counter the fact that I was a hormonally challenged, 48-year-old woman. It didn't work. The next date lasted just 20 minutes.

Desperate, I consulted a specialist in Feng Shui, the ancient Chinese art of paying someone to rearrange your furniture. She arrived in a black Saab turbo, her briefcase bulging with mirrors, bells and wind chimes. She placed a ba-gua (pronounced as if you're gargling) chart on top of a floor plan of my house. "I see the problem," she said in her clipped British accent. "It's the loo...I mean the toilet. It's positioned right in your relationship sector." I did as I was instructed: kept the lid on the toilet down and bought red bath towels.

The bath towels must have been the key, because my next fix-up was perfect—a New Age Nick Nolte look-alike. David burned incense incessantly and although he had no furniture he seemed to have an endless supply of CDs of monks chanting. Instead of working, he spent his day in meditation so I figured he could handle my consumption of EstroPause. But after a few dates, David announced he was redirecting his sex drive into his third chakra and left town.

Maybe it's time for Botox and a few more red towels.

## **I've Got the Genes for Embarrassing Moments**

**T**here are two kinds of people in this world. Those who can wear a white shirt and eat spaghetti with marinara sauce and those who wear marinara sauce on their white shirt when eating spaghetti.

I think it has something to do with chromosomes. Either you get a gene labeled "Embarrassing Moments" or you don't. I know I have such a gene because embarrassing moments happen to me with alarming regularity.

I have had so many embarrassing moments while wearing ski clothes that you will never, ever see me skiing underneath a lift. I've tried to forget about the dozens of crossed ski tips and spectacular crashes but there is one incident that registered 9.9 on the Richter scale of memory. It happened a dozen years ago when I skied with Warren Miller. I was certainly not going to audition for a part in the movie. I am your basic advanced intermediate skier—good on high-speed cruisers and lousy in the bumps. At the time, I worked in the marketing department for the Steamboat ski area and I was assigned to make sure Miller and the folks he was skiing with had a good time.

On the last run of the day and I finally had a chance to ride the chair lift with Miller. I panicked. What would I say to this legend with the build of Schwarzenegger and the eyes of Paul Newman? Worrying instead of watching the approaching chair I barely heard the lift operator yell, "You're going to get hit." I looked over my shoulder and realized he was right. The swinging chair struck my left leg and down I went.

I can tell you Miller skis on very long, very black K2 skis because my face landed right on them. I stared at those skis a long time before I had the courage to lift my head. I tried to stand; lost my balance and fell again. The laughter from people in the lift line was deafening. "Put her in a Warren Miller movie," someone shrieked from the back of the lift line." That suggestion made the liftie light up like a pinball machine. He eyed Miller. "Are you Warren Miller?" he whispered reverently. Miller nodded. "Oh my God," cried the lift operator. "Warren Miller is riding my lift. I'm so glad she fell."

No one offered to help me up, as they were all too busy gawking at Miller. I no longer had to worry about what we would discuss on the lift as I spent the entire time apologizing while he gallantly insisted it was all his fault.

I sat next to Miller that night at dinner and watched the bus boys in

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the restaurant jockey for the chance to clear his plate. One bold one asked for his autograph and he signed a menu for another person at our table. I was grateful that all eyes were on him and not me as I stumbled on my way back from the salad bar. I kicked the cherry tomatoes under a chair and gave thanks that I wasn't down there with them.

I used to be embarrassed by my embarrassing moments. But recently I remembered a phrase that has helped me put it all in perspective. Once I heard someone say, "Angels can fly because they take life lightly." It made me realize that embarrassing moments are really a gift. They make us laugh at ourselves; they force us to lighten up and take life less seriously.

I've decided I want to fly with the best of them. And who knows—the next time I discover lipstick on my teeth, I may sprout wings.

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