

Wanted: Lost Connections

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Reading some of the appeals on Doski.ru sometimes feels like intruding on a stranger's pain. Luckily, at other times you just intrude on wild, hopeless optimism.

A man posts a photo of himself — hopefully not one of his best, and probably not one of his worst — and shouts in Cyrillic capitals. “HELLO, ANASTASIA. IF YOU KNOW HER, HELP ME FIND HER.”

There are a few of these kinds of messages in the provincial areas of the “Lost Connections” section on Doski: a man usually looking for the woman of his daydreams.

There aren't any of the “I saw you on the metro; you were wearing leopard skin; I was wearing moose fur” ones that you see in Moscow.

One is in Portuguese: a photo of a man, Yuri, and an oblique message about him having a daughter. Are they looking to reunite him with his daughter or shame him into paying alimony?

Others are of the nostalgic, schooldays type.

Eduard rambles on about two children, Irina and Denis, whom he knew in kindergarten when he was 5 or 6. He's only 20, but has drifted back to those soft days of his not-so-distant youth in Ulyanovsk.

“My cupboard had a corncob drawn on it. One of my bosom buddies was Denis and the other, Irina; I don't know her surname. Me and Irina often fought; our cupboards were close together. She was a dark-looking girl. Apart from the cupboards, our beds were also close together. Ah, yes, and in the courtyard, there was a girl, Katya.”

Meanwhile, others just send messages to people who don't want to speak to them.

“Lena,” writes Volodya, who explains who he is by saying the “son of Auntie Shura.” He scolds her: “You were in town, but you didn't pop in. That's not good.”

But a lot of them are just stories of relatives separated, lost in a vast country by family strains or economic necessity or desire — or just missing in the brutal way of walking out the door one day and not returning, as one seeker tells.

A woman looks for her sister whom she lost contact with 14 years ago. A woman in her 80s looks for relatives in Kazan. A father for his daughter, “How can I get in touch with you, my little daughter?”

The messages are a basic version of one of Russia's most-famous television programs, “Zhdi Menya,” or “Wait for Me,” which brings together lost relatives, friends, mothers, daughters and fathers.

The country's history has torn many a family apart in Soviet times, and tens of thousands of people go missing in modern Russia each year. So people start looking.

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