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Going out

Everyday zeros

Where 'Z'-listers meet the not-so-elite

By JEFF NICHOLS

IT'S Valentine's Day and my love life is no bed of roses.

Part of my predicament is that I look like a cross between Jeff Van Gundy and Rudy Giuliani on crack.

But the biggest problem is, like many New Yorkers, I don't have much social exposure. We're so far of the 'A' list that we're hitting Z.

Maybe you're down here, too. If that's the case, don't feel bad — there are plenty of places to go where you don't have to worry about guest lists and Lizzie Grubman. You might even meet someone you like.

If you're the sort who can barely get past the velvet rope at the local cineplex, try these ideas:

DRIP COFFEE SHOP
489 Amsterdam Ave., between 83rd and 84th streets.

You need a date, right? At this coffee shop, you can fill out an application, hand it in and at no cost, the good people at Drip will put your written profile in a catalog (try not to embellish too much).

Then, if someone likes you "on paper," Drip will arrange a casual meeting.



Writer Jeff Nichols sits in a Starbucks on Broadway and 60th Street hoping to meet a girl.

Mary Allaller

Granted, filling out an application for your love life is like waving the white flag. I myself used to laugh at those poor "desperate" people who were filling out applications as I walked home to make love to a pint of Haagen-Dazs.

DT-UT: 1626 Second Ave., between 84th and 85th streets.

One quick glance here makes it clear why velvet ropes and guest lists exist. But there are some hip-looking folks mixed in with the randoms. Pity there's no liquor license to help you loosen up. Maybe the guitar guy bellowing

out his original songs will make you sound good by comparison.

CRASH A FUNERAL: Desperate times call for desperate measures.

GO TO ANY COMEDY CLUB: No A-listers here — not where "The Sopranos" crowd meets the South Bronx over tiny tables. A-listers would rather tell their own jokes than hear some guy on stage do East Indian cabbie impressions.

OTB: OK, so they smell a little like urine — but it's fun betting on horses. And with the Enron fiasco going on, the only differ-

ence between a guy betting on a horse and a guy betting on a stock is that one guy has a cleaner suit on.

THE ROADRUNNERS CLUB: They're more self-absorbed and insufferable than any 12-step group; still, it's a good place to meet people. You can go to a cheap Italian restaurant and load up on carbs as you prepare for the next 10k. You don't even have to run — just sit on the sidelines and scream "Go! Go! Go!" like a mental patient.

CHURCHES & CULTS: They rarely discriminate.

EAST SOHO: Some people who go to this neighborhood (formerly the Lower East Side) are so cool it's contagious (or we can only hope). Collective Unconscious (145 Ludlow St., at Stanton Street) and Surf Reality (172 Allen St., between Stanton and Rivington streets) have open-mike shows that cost \$3 each, and if you want to participate, just add your name to the lottery.

Maybe you'll be discovered — and won't need this list anymore.

Do you qualify?

ARE you a Z-lister? Take the following quiz:

■ Your alumni phone-a-thon qualifies as a "major party."

■ You handed out flyers in the street for your own Super Bowl party ("Free wings!").

■ You're sitting at a Starbucks Saturday night with your laptop out, hoping some pretty girl will ask if you're working on a screenplay — trust me, she won't — but she does ask if anyone's sitting next to you. When you euphorically reply, "Why, no!" she takes the chair across the room to sit with her friends.

■ You saw Russell Crowe in "A Beautiful Mind" and thought, "Wow, I'd take John Nash's friends over the crowd I run with."

■ You enter Papaya King ("2 bucks gets you 2 dogs + drink") so many times that regulars yell out your name a la Norm in "Cheers."

■ You know your best friend only by his/her AOL handle. — Nichols