

NOTHING BORING ABOUT

This Bingo

WORDS BY FREDRICKA MAISTER

Unlucky in love, even unluckier in Bingo. Still, hope springs eternal when I walk through the doors of the Fire Hall in Boring, Maryland, to play Mason Dixon Bingo. Yes, the town is really called Boring, but as the sign says, *"Welcome to Not So Boring Bingo."*

For the past few years I've made a twice-yearly visit to my sister Jody and her family in Owings Mills, a Baltimore suburb. Mason Dixon Bingo is like eating crab cakes, a trip downtown to the Inner Harbor or a visit to the mall — a must-do. Joining Jody and me are friends Pam and Nancy who would never drive to rural Boring to try their luck at Mason Dixon Bingo were it not for me, a Bingo-deprived girl from New York City. As instigator, I therefore take full credit for their cash winnings and, with the exception of me, one or more in our quartet always wins.

Just as I still believe my prince will appear after I've kissed all the frogs, I keep telling myself that one day my win will come and my pent-up longing to shout "Bingo!" will be released.

I can't be a Bingo flunkie forever!


In the meantime, trying to ease my frustration, Jody offers a positive sisterly spin each time I lose. "You know, it has nothing to do with skill and all to do with luck. If you had bought your cards right before Nancy or right after Pam, you could have won," she tells me. I find little consolation in her post-mortem analysis of my losing streak, especially the times when I come close to a win. Let's face it, even being only one number away from calling "Bingo!" gets you nowhere at game's end. With Bingo, the quintessential numbers game, you need all the right numbers to claim victory. »



I sometimes think that if I could handle more cards, I might exponentially increase my prospects for winning. I'll never forget the woman who won four times (four times!) in one evening; she looked like she was playing at least 30 cards! How did she keep up, dabbing all those numbers as they were called? Unlike such hardcore Bingo folk who purchase 24 or more card packages, we dilettantes find 12 cards our limit.

Even though we've played before at Mason Dixon, we can't help but stand out as newbies. A dead giveaway is that we each use only one or two Bingo daubers — those spongy ink markers found at Bingo halls everywhere — while the regulars have a whole arsenal at their disposal. Some even bring along Bingo totes or carousels with dauber pockets.





Playing regular Bingo with its single verticals, horizontals, and diagonals: either four corners or full card, is familiar, easy and a no-brainer. Other winning, less-conventional patterns in the Mason Dixon Bingo repertoire, like Letters Y or X, Crazy Kite, Small Round Robin, Top Hat, or Double Postage Stamp can leave us Bingo-challenged. Sometimes we figure them out with a group discussion. More often than not, a regular who is sympathetic to our plight will step in to enlighten us. When the Large Diamond comes up to play, the four of us feel compelled to draw the diamond shape with a ballpoint pen beforehand; the regulars just watch us and smile.

Serious Bingo requires undivided attention and mindfulness. That's why there is no texting, no chitchatting, no indulging the backache from the uncomfortable chairs, and no obsessing about anything but the numbers as they are called. It's no mean feat, especially for our gang of four, to keep pace with the caller or the display screen as it lights up with the numbers already called. We are always whispering among ourselves, "What number did they just call? I can't see ... is that G60 or 060?" "Uh-oh, I think I missed a number." No wonder the gentleman who walks the aisles selling special bonus games just passes us by. He knows who his customers are ... certainly not us!

After three-and-a-half hours, over 30 games, several "close calls," a win or two among our group, and me lamenting yet another loss, we leave the rarefied world of Bingo and head home.

In the interest of full disclosure, I must confess that the last time we played Bingo, I won a door prize. My raffle ticket number was called and I now possess a \$10 coupon to help finance another Bingo game. Maybe next time, despite my odds, I will finally get to shout "Bingo!" at the top of my lungs, my triumphant cry heard clear across the Mason-Dixon Line into Pennsylvania.

Fredricka Maister's essays have appeared in a variety of print and online publications, such as The Writer, Baltimore Sun, Miami Herald, Chicago Tribune, New York Jewish Week, Baltimore Jewish Times, Long Island Woman, Big Apple Parent, Coping with Cancer magazine, Travel Thru History, Huffington Post, OZY and in the anthologies, The Man Who Ate His Book: The Best of ducts.org, Volume II and Wising Up Press' View from the Bed/View from the Bedside.