

My Way into Community



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It's 2023 and you find yourself alone at home on a Friday afternoon because for whatever reason you ended up flying solo. Maybe it's because you are newly single, you have a condition that makes you avoid bars, or maybe it's just that the weather is giving you a hard time. Regardless, the scenario is clear: you are home ALONE, with no plans for later that night and no plans for the weekend. Sounds like I've been spying on you? Not necessarily.

That was my scenario for the past two months. I had a life changing event that left me with an empty apartment and nothing but my loneliness, fears, and sadness holding my hand. Everything changed when a lightning bolt of rage came over me on one of my lonely nights. The fighter inside of me awakened, saying: "This is 2023, there's technology for God's sake!" At first the loneliness responded, "Should we get an app to meet new people?" Before I could take a breath, sadness entered the conversation and said "I am not sure, I'm not feeling like meeting people. What if they don't like me? I'm not ready to get to know anyone yet. I'll have to explain myself, tell my story which is still painful and makes me cry even when I think about it. I don't want to pretend that I am fine online while behind my phone my tears splash the screen."

The situation was about to get difficult. I felt a lump in my throat. I couldn't breathe. There were tears in my eyes but some pride within me kept them from

rolling down my cheeks. My once rebellious soul resurfaced and looked me in the eyes. Memories flooded my heart. I started thinking, "I used to sing, I used to paint. I wasn't good but I liked it. I used to like reading and talking to people about those books." At that moment, I knew! I owed it to the rebellious soul in the mirror. I had to do something to stop this emptiness from consuming me. I had the urge to do something different.

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This wasn't only about meeting new people. This was about me remembering who I was before everything fell apart. This moment was about me getting to know myself in this new life that was coming together before my eyes. Maybe even beyond knowing myself, I realized I had an opportunity in my hands to create a new ME.

I recalled that a friend of mine had mentioned an app he used for coding meet-ups on Saturdays. Maybe an app could help after all - I went directly to the App Store and typed in "Meet Up". I wasn't sure if there were two words or just one, but "who cares," I thought. "This is supposed to be a smart phone, right?" I hit "enter," and the holy grail lit up on my screen. This cheesy logo in magenta tones, along with a two line slogan that read: "Meetup: Social Events & Groups." I didn't hesitate. I immediately pressed "Get," downloaded the app, opened it, created an account with my email, my name... the usual. Now my anxiety made an appearance.

There I was, in front of a screen, asking what my interests were. I had no idea! “Thank God there are options,” I said, staring at the bubbles that popped up on my screen. “Arts & culture, career & business, dancing, community & environment.” I selected pretty much all of them. Then, it asked me to narrow it down. “Live Music” came up right away. “Digital Photography, Poetry, Writer’s Block”... I kept selecting everything that rang a bell in my head of things I used to like. I hit “Next.” “Find a group” the screen said, and listed options: “Montreal Drawing together,” “Novice Games Club,” “Photography Lovers.”

As I continued to scroll, many more groups kept showing on my screen. Again, I hit “Next,” and the message showed: “Find your first event.” I selected “Explore,” then pressed “Today” and boom! Random and cheesy names for different events started to appear on the screen. In between so many, one caught my eye: “Randonnee sur le Mont Royal-Hiking on Mont Royal. 6:30PM.” I read the description, and said to myself “It’s free. I guess I could go.” I looked at the clock, and realized it was already 6:00PM. I selected the event and at the bottom this red button pops-up instantly: “Join and RSVP.” I didn’t think too much. I pressed it and a message showed: “You’re going.”

The familiar anxiety started to approach but this time she came with a sparkle of excitement. “I like to walk,” I said out loud. “The trees are fully green. Should I bring my camera?... No time, gotta go! Where are my running shoes?” I opened the closet

only to realize, “I don’t have running shoes!” My eyes met the hiking boots I bought a year ago. “These could do the job” I thought. I washed my face, put on some deodorant and found my leggings matching my “John Abbott College” t-shirt. “Ok, I can make it.” At 6:10 pm, I was running out of my apartment. I didn’t even have time to think if I was

bringing my water bottle, my camera, my anxiety, or my fears with me. When I arrived at the meeting point, I realized there were no fears. The sadness, loneliness, and anxiety stayed home. It was only ME there. Suddenly, a friendly “Bonjour, hi” pulled me out of my head, drawing a smile across my face.

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Use your phone to scan this QR Code & visit: [meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com)

