

facebook fairy tales

BY GINA SALAMONE

Yes, they do
sometimes
come true



Peter Shankman found vital contacts for people — and also found a thriving Web business.



Triathlete Karin Linner kept in touch online while recovering from a stroke.

As the world's most popular social networking site, Facebook must be doing something right. Its 400 million users log on regularly to share photos, keep in touch and track down long-lost friends.

But for some, the site has changed lives in much more meaningful ways.

Westchester author Emily Liebert features 25 of the most compelling connections in "Facebook Fairytales: Modern-Day Miracles to Inspire the Human Spirit," on sale Thursday.

She joined the site two years ago. "First, it was purely voyeuristic," Liebert admits. "I was really there to stalk people and just see their photos. I started thinking in general about the concept of Facebook, and realized that there were these hundreds of millions of connections," Liebert adds. "I said to myself, 'There has to be some cool stories that are coming out of all these connections.'"

She was right. From a Brooklyn couple who reconnected and married years after a summer camp fling, to a woman who got a kidney from a stranger, here are the most gripping stories out of New York.

Miracle: Brooklyn couple Sarah Brysk and Michael Cohen found each and married years

after meeting at camp.

They were just teens when they met at a seminar before working as counselors at a Pennsylvania summer camp in 1990. "We made out," Brysk, now 36, remembers. "So we definitely hit it off right away."

But they fell out of touch after that. In 2007, Cohen was living in Manhattan, and Brysk and her then-husband left New York for Seattle. But she soon decided to get out of her troubled marriage and moved near her family in San Diego in 2008. A few weeks later, Brysk was showing a friend how to navigate Facebook when she came across Cohen's profile on their old camp's alumni group. "You have to reach out," her friend said. "Maybe he's single!"

So Brysk tried to chat with him over Facebook, but Cohen didn't respond. She tried a few more times, and finally he got in touch. A few weeks later, they met up in New York and had a great time. Cohen visited her in San Diego two weeks later, and the couple confessed their love for each other. Brysk eventually moved in with him in Brooklyn.

While walking home from dinner last March, Cohen pulled out his BlackBerry to show Brysk his Facebook status. It

A site for social networking can forge relationships that transform people's lives.

read, "Michael thinks Sarah should say yes." When she looked up, he was down on one knee, proposing. They married at City Hall on March 9, 2009, and later held a big reception in October near the site of their old camp. Cohen, 39, believes there's no way they would have ever crossed paths again without Facebook. "None whatsoever," he says.

Miracle: Karin Linner communicated over Facebook after a stroke in her Brooklyn apartment left her unable to speak.

A triathlon competitor, Linner was in great shape while gearing up for a

full-length Iron Man race last year. The challenge included a 26-mile marathon, 2.4-mile swim and 112-mile bike race that took place in July in Lake Placid.

But Linner never made it there. On Feb. 8, 2009, she noticed a dull pain in her head in the middle of a 75-mile bike ride. She went home and hours later was hit by seizures. Linner understood she was suffering a stroke and managed to call an ambulance. At the hospital, she was told that the inner wall of her carotid artery had broken apart. Part of a blood clot had ended up in the brain area responsible for speech.

"I couldn't talk," says Linner, now 35. "And I couldn't really text, either."

But she could go on Facebook. "I kept people up to date and I would post on Facebook, 'Does anyone have time to visit today?'" A year later, her speech is almost fully recovered and she's again training for the Lake Placid Iron Man.

Miracle: Manhattanite Peter Shankman launched a million-dollar business.

Part of what made his Manhattan-based PR firm, the Geek Factory, so successful, was that Shankman would help reporters find sources, even if the

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Onetime summer campers Sarah Brysk and Michael Cohen (r. and above) reconnected via a chance Facebook meeting. Below r.: the two at camp in 1991.



contacts weren't his clients. "Reporters were always calling me, saying, 'I need a source. You know everyone,'" says Shankman. "It was time-intensive. It was taking me like six hours a day to find people."

So in 2007, he started a Facebook group and posted queries to help journalists find sources. It grew from 30 members to the Facebook limit of 1,200 members in three months. Outgrowing the site, Shankman launched Help a Reporter Out (HARO), sending out the first query in 2008. Currently, HARO sends out 200-300 queries a day.

The site is free to use but makes money from ads. "I never thought this could become a million-dollar business, which it did in a year," Shankman, 37, says. "What Facebook did was smack me in the head and say, 'Wake up! You just proved your model. Go make a business.'"

Miracle: Beth Abramowitz of Scarsdale got a kidney from someone she never met.

Two years ago, Abramowitz was battling kidney disease while raising her two young kids. Only one of her kidneys was working, functioning at just 10%. Twelve people had already offered to

donate an organ, but all were denied after failing health-screening tests.

More than 1,000 miles away in Florida, Cathy Schroeder spotted a Facebook post by her ex-boyfriend. It read: "I have a friend named Beth who needs a kidney donor. If you have type-O blood, please visit her Web site." Being type O, Schroeder clicked and learned more about this woman she'd never met.

"Have you found a donor?" the Floridian asked on Abramowitz's page in August 2008. "I'm so sorry you're sick. I can't imagine, especially as a mommy." The women exchanged messages and Schroeder decided she wanted to be a donor. But she hadn't told her husband yet. "This is nuts!" he said. "This isn't a family member or a friend you've known forever!"

She eventually gained his support and flew to New York to meet Abramowitz, underwent several rounds of tests, and went through with the surgery three months after their first Facebook exchange. Now 35, the Scarsdale mom is doing well with her new kidney and still stays in touch with her newfound friend.

Miracle: Barnard graduate Ariel Schwartz let friends and family know she was okay during



the Mumbai attacks.

In July 2008, Schwartz flew to Mumbai, India. A recent graduate of upper West Side institutions Barnard College (at Columbia University) and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, Schwartz sought to help members of Mumbai's Indian-Jewish population in need. She planned to stay a year, working for a nonprofit, but after four months, the city fell under attack by terrorists from Pakistan. She called her parents to let

them know she was okay, but had trouble keeping up with everyone else.

"Everyone that I was even remotely friends with on Facebook got in touch to ask if I was okay or say that they were worried," says Schwartz, now 23. With one post, she was able to get back to all of them: "I'm okay. ... We're hiding out in our apartment." She also used the site to get info about the attacks while she was holed up, and updated again when she was eventually evacuated.