

# Mad Men, Indeed: The "Real" Don Draper Is Somewhat Disturbing



Sadie Stein

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Behind *Mad Men*? Yes, there's a fascinating, in-depth look at the show's meticulous production in [this month's \*Vanity Fair\*](#). But if you're looking for the *real* story, check out this essay by the woman married to the "[real](#)" Don Draper.

Draper Daniels was a legend of mid-century advertising, the maverick creative head of Chicago's Leo Burnett with a string of iconic campaigns to his name, including Marlboro Man. It doesn't take a genius to see that "Dan," as he was known, influenced Jon Hamm's character – and Matt Weiner, the show's creator, admits as

much. And like the character, apparently he had more regard for female intellect than many. Writes Myra Janco Daniels in *Chicago*,

At 38, I was executive vice president—the first woman to have held that position for either firm. Our company was growing but we were in need of a top-notch creative person. When Vivian told me about Draper Daniels, I thought he might be the ticket. I also figured I could learn a lot about the business by working with him....I learned a lot from Draper Daniels. He wasn't a great businessman, but he was a brilliant wordsmith and conceptualist, who taught me to state my ideas clearly and concisely, as if I was talking to one person. That was his philosophy: Advertising should talk to one person at a time. We worked on a number of memorable campaigns together, including Motorola car radios, Freeman shoes, Derby Tamales, and many others.



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Daniels apparently respected Myra as a colleague and was eager for her to become more involved. They had a pleasant collegial relationship, nothing more. And here's where the account gets...weird.

I asked, "Are you going to sell me with the next merger?"

"Not exactly," he said.

He showed me the card. On one side, he had written out his own best character traits. Then he turned it over. On the other side he had written out mine. Mine were better than his, so I knew he wanted something. I thought, What in the world has got into him?

"I've been thinking about this for nine months, Myra," he said, "and I think we would make a great team."

I said, "I think we are a great team. Think of what we've accomplished so far this year."

"Oh."

"Yes, I've decided I'd like to marry you."

I lost my voice for a moment, because I had never thought of the man that way before—and had no idea he had thought of me that way. Dan was twelve and a half years older than I and had been married before. I was against divorce in those days. But more importantly, I was happy with my life. I told him that.

"All right," he said. "Let's talk about it again tomorrow." And then he walked out whistling—which, to me, was one of the most maddening things anyone can do, particularly under the circumstances.

Although she's engaged, he talks her into considering it for a year. Then he tricks her into getting a blood test. Then this:

The next day, August 19, 1967, he picked me up to go to an Edna Arnow pottery show. On the way, he asked if he could stop for a minute at the courthouse. I told him okay; I would wait in the car while he went inside and conducted his business. He said, "No, I can't leave you alone in the car in this neighborhood. Won't you just come along?" So I did, and we got off on a floor with a sign that read "Marriage Licenses." I had assumed for some reason that he was at the courthouse for a fishing license.

"Myra," he said, "I'm not getting any younger and I think we should get a license."

"But we have a year."

He just looked at me. I went up to the clerk at the counter and said, "We're not getting married. We have a year to wait. If we got a license, this wouldn't be published, would it?" The clerk said, "If you request that it not be published, no, it won't." So that's what we did. But it didn't matter: There was a large room across the hall where marriages were performed and Dan said to me, "Myra, let's go ahead and do it." I couldn't speak. But the next thing I knew, we had done it. We were married. And I started to cry.

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Um, *what?* We've heard of high-handed, but this story is appalling! Weirdly enough, it's not the first one of its kind that I've heard. I used to have a dear friend who lived in London, an older lady, now dead. Anyway, once I asked her about her wedding and she recalled a similar situation: being told to buy herself a new dress, having flowers thrust at her and being driven to a courthouse. "My mother never forgave me," she said sadly — and at least in that case the pair was romantically involved first! What's

so odd is that, for her time, Myra would have been an unusually independent and successful woman; did he regard it as a tribute to her femininity or a conquest to bully her like this? One thing's for sure: staying single was not an option. And her closing words are even more upsetting:

Looking back now, I realize I never regretted marrying him, even though I resisted pretty strongly at first. I think it shows that sometimes we don't know what's best for ourselves. I had been so work-oriented and had resisted so strongly that Dan saw no choice but to come after me. I'm grateful that he did.

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Remember when *Mad Men* took off and everyone started swooning about Don Draper's masterful manliness? Well, dreamy though Jon Hamm might be, it's worth remembering that for many men of the era - including Don's inspiration, a man unusually open to working with and respecting women - it wasn't a facade. No, men like this knew best - and apparently it was easier for women to believe that too. Of course, maybe it went both ways; says Myra, "The Draper Daniels I knew became a one-woman man after we married. He also quit drinking, when I told him I didn't want to work with a lush." Well, that's all right then. We're guessing Matt Weiner chose not to include this plotline; a shady past and some suspicious deaths are more palatable.

[I Married a Mad Man](#) [Chicago]

[Don And Betty's Paradise Lost](#) [Vanity Fair]

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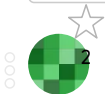
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I disagree with you entirely, Sadie. Calling this situation creepy is just so dismissive and reductive.

Myra didn't lose her agency (not the ad agency, or her personal ability to make her own choices), and it sounds as though she had an incredibly successful professional

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