



## 13 the luckiest number for happy couple

By Pamela Eadie, The Ottawa Citizen

February 10, 2009

Sharon Hartwell was pretty green when she hit the dating scene after more than a quarter century of being married to her high school sweetheart.

The mother of two, 51, dated a few people but nothing really clicked. Until she saw an advertisement for *Misty River Introductions* on TV one night. "Something tweaked me to make that phone call," she says.

Clark Derrrough's second marriage had lasted over 20 years, but when it ended he found it difficult to meet women.

"I sat at my house up in Palmerston Lake all summer and my friends kept telling me to go look for a girl," he says. "I sat there all summer and there were no mermaids jumping out of the lake!" He too saw an ad for Misty River, and decided to give it a shot.

Both Sharon and Clark, 57, met a handful of people through the service, but never felt that elusive spark. Their own meeting almost didn't happen: Clark had Sharon's profile and photo, and was dying for her to give him a call (with Misty River it is up to women using the service to make the first contact). Sharon tried for weeks, but issues with the phone line kept her from getting through.

Finally, the connection was made on Thanksgiving weekend, 2007.

"I was making Thanksgiving dinner for my family, and he was doing the same. We didn't lack for conversation," Sharon says. "After the first phone call I knew this was going to be it." They met up for dinner the following weekend on Oct. 13, and talked for eight solid hours. "We talked and talked, and we haven't stopped talking since!" she says.

You can meet a really nice looking woman and she can be interested in the same things you are, but if there's no spark, there's no point, explains Clark. "But with Sharon, I was in love right away. She walked into the room, and I just looked at her and was like, wow. She sat down, and we started to talk, and it was as if we were friends for years," he says.

The couple celebrates monthly anniversaries; on the 13th of every month they go for dinner, or Clark buys Sharon a gift or sends her flowers. "Thirteen isn't an unlucky number for me! We laugh about it and say it's a good day for us, and if there's a draw on the 13th we buy a ticket," Clark says.

They're both completely smitten with one another. Sharon says her favourite thing about Clark is his kindness. "He can't go anywhere in a store, down the street, without stopping to talk to people," she says. "In the grocery store, I'll be looking around for him and he's talking to someone he doesn't know. He's helpful; if he sees someone in trouble he'll be there to help out. And every morning he tells me I'm beautiful." "She has all the qualities that I was looking for. She's outgoing, good with people, has a great rapport with people, and I think she's just absolutely gorgeous. Plus, she likes my dog! And he loves her," Clark says.

Clark and his rescued German Shepherd recently moved into Sharon's Kanata home after his back condition deteriorated (relating to a broken back when he was a child). He owns an island a couple hours out of town, and it will serve as the couple's own private summer resort.

When Clark's condition began to deteriorate, Sharon offered to take care of him, an offer he was uncomfortable accepting at first. But, he says, they take care of each other.

The couple has faced challenges, such as blending their families. Sharon as a 26-year-old daughter and 22-year-old son, and Clark's two daughters are 23 and 25. Having lived on an island for many years, Clark was not accustomed to having so many people around all the time. Sharon also has seven brothers and sisters, whereas Clark is an only child. "He loves the family gatherings!" Sharon says.

The future looks bright for the happy couple, who is thrilled with Misty River's match making services.

"I definitely know we're going to live together from now on. I'm as happy as I've ever been in my whole life! I just think she's wonderful. She's kind, considerate and loving; all the things a man could ever ask for," Clark says.

"We were both looking for someone to spend the rest of our lives with, and I have found her.

I know she feels the same."

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## **It's a jungle out there**

### **Exploring the future... and present... of finding love online**

By Pamela Eadie, The Ottawa Citizen

February 10, 2009

In our fast-paced, technological society everything has changed, and dating is no exception.

Sure, people are still meeting people the old fashioned way - through friends, family, activities, and work - but the Internet has emerged as a major resource for people looking for love. It's widely available, an efficient way to have access to a wide variety of potential love interests, and in some cases, dating sites are free.

But with all good things, there can be a dark side. Online dating can be frustrating and time consuming. Ottawa resident Sarah (not her real name), 24, had a profile on plentyoffish.com off and on for nearly two years, and met about a dozen people through the site.

"I would try for a few months, give up, and then try again," she says. "I would also get frustrated because I didn't meet anyone online that I clicked with."

Her worst experience was meeting a man who proceeded to make condescending remarks towards her. "He said I wasn't smart," says Sarah, who has earned a Bachelor of Psychology. "He talked about his lack of ambition and poor work ethic. And he didn't even buy me lunch!"

Her best experience had a dubious conclusion. "We had stuff in common, good chemistry, and we got along well. But he got rid of me by ignoring me and not speaking to me anymore, which is cowardly," she says.

Sarah thinks that while there are some good people online, the Internet makes it easier for people to hide and not treat people very well.

"I do prefer to meet people in person but I figured it couldn't hurt to look online because it gave me access to people who I otherwise would not have crossed paths with," she says. She met her current boyfriend the old fashioned way though, through a writing class, and couldn't be happier.

Joe (not his real name), 38, can be considered a veteran of the online dating world, having been part of it for nearly five years. "I wasn't meeting many people through my usual circles. When I went on the number of people I was meeting increased exponentially. I want to meet someone and fall in love," he says.

He has met quite a few people through online dating using Plenty of Fish and Lavalife, estimating the total at easily over 50. "You can talk for a bit but I usually try to get a face to face right away to see if there's chemistry," Joe explains.

He says some people, particularly women, lie about their age. Men are more likely to lie about their height. Others use old photos on their profile.

While he hasn't found the love of his life, he says it has been a positive experience. "People have angst regarding the online experience, but to me it's just an efficient avenue to meet people. You can find out someone's age, if they want children, what they're looking for... all before you even have contact with them," he says.

According to Joe, sometimes having too many options can be a bad thing. "If they hit a bump in a relationship they go back online too soon, looking for another option when they should try to work it out," he says. "People try to go online to find someone custom made... but love isn't like that."

It certainly isn't, says **Linda Miller, president of Misty River Introductions**, which is a paid match making service. "You're really going to eliminate some very good people if you base it just on criteria," she says. She sometimes has to convince her clients to give someone a chance who doesn't match the criteria they've set out in their minds for someone. Often, it's with great results.

She estimates roughly 90 per cent of her clientele has tried online dating at one time or another. "I think it's a good place to go when you just want to have fun and not make a commitment to anyone. It tends to be the first course for people because it's free," she says. "A lot of people who go on there are fresh out of a relationship or marriage and they're just getting their feet wet. Initially it's fun and it's affirming.

"But people come to us because they have met a lot of people and have dated for a while and it hasn't worked out, and it seems to be the same story every time."

She says it's important to meet up with potential love interests fairly quickly because you can't know if there's chemistry or not until you meet someone in person... even if they do meet all of your 'criteria.'

"That's what I find really different from before I was married. Back then it was about a cute guy across the bar...but today it's so different," she says.