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## Never too late to find first love

By Dave Brown, Citizen Special

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**Dave Brown**

**Photograph by: The Ottawa Citizen**

It took almost 50 years for Howard Crump to get up the nerve to take a chance on love, but on Saturday he will mark his first St. Valentine's Day as a married man.

The Chesterville farmer says he married the first girlfriend he ever had, after waiting until he was 58 to start dating. After spending the past year in a couple for the first time, he doesn't hesitate to recommend the arrangement.

As a dairy farmer, Mr. Crump spent his life being too busy to be lonely.

In 2004 that changed. His father, Halford, died. His mother, Dorothy, had died in 1997. After his father's death, Howard no longer had anybody to care for. His days remained as busy as ever, but it was the end of the workday that was now different.

"The evenings," he said.

"Sitting alone in the evenings. They were not times I looked forward to. Evenings were longer than they used to be."

He lived alone in the 1850s-era home on a fifth-generation farm on a road named for the family: Crump Road.

He never dated.

"I went to North Dundas Technical High School. Back then it was all boys. I didn't go to dances."

He had no doubts about his future. He would work the farm. He had three brothers. One died young and the other two moved from the family farm. Howard at 58 was not a computer user and had no interest in practising pick-up lines.

He turned to an Eastern Ontario success story; **Misty River Introductions**, one of the biggest and most successful businesses of its type. It was founded in 1996 by Linda Miller, whose business card identifies her as "matchmaker."

At the same time, in nearby South Mountain, Theresa Bergeron, then 56, was finding life on her farm getting too quiet. Divorced, she had a wide circle of friends and family visiting frequently, but she too was finding evenings difficult. Hers is a goat farm, and she produces angora wool.

She also signed up with Misty Rivers.

The service arranged a few introductions for Howard. He says they were pleasant women, but he didn't feel anything special. When Theresa read his profile and said she was interested, it took weeks to connect. Without e-mail, a hard copy was sent to him and went missing. Eventually, things worked out and he was given a phone number. He called.

"I broke the rules," Theresa confessed. "You're supposed to arrange the first meeting in a public place. But I read the man's profile and didn't feel threatened, so I invited him to come to the house. He was the only man I was interested in and the only one I had contact with."

It was mid-December 2007.

She baited her trap.

"I baked a pumpkin pie -- from scratch. Real whipped cream. Not that spray can stuff. I timed it so the house would be filled with the smell."

Howard this time had a special feeling, probably from a belly full of warm pumpkin pie. They ate while looking out a window at her busy bird feeder. She was impressed.

"He knew the names of every species of bird that came to the feeder. He knew a lot about them. That told me a lot about Howard."

Howard: "It seemed to impress Theresa that I knew birds." (Oh, come on. All you noticed was the pie.)

"It was very good pie. But I can read, and anybody who can read can use a recipe. On the next visit I took her a plate of date squares that I made. She thought it was apple crisp."

Things moved fast. They watched a lot of birds and ate many meals together.

Howard had a new home built on his farm. They married Dec. 20 and their new house last week was filled with the smell of baking bread. Theresa Bergeron believes a house should smell like a home.

She also believes special events require special details. When they married at her home, she excused herself after the official ceremony, saying she wanted to change into something more comfortable. Moments later, she came down the stairs wearing a belly dancer costume, and treated all to a display of her skills.

"I thought it important to remind Howard his life had changed."

Another reminder was the wedding cake. It was a two-tier carrot cake made by Theresa. On top, instead of a bride and groom, there were figures made of marzipan -- a cow and a goat.

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