



Brown: When a matchmaking service works, it's a wonderful thing

By Dave Brown, The Ottawa Citizen February 27, 2011

OTTAWA — For those who can't wait for spring and the thoughts of love that come with it, here's an attempt to rush the season.

Sometimes a man and woman meet and there's an instant "click," and each walks away convinced that this time, beyond a doubt, each has found "the one."

Kateri Clark and Harold Westendorp first saw each other at the Bruce Pit pooch park in September 2009. Sitting in their Borden Farm suburban home recently, they talked openly to a reporter about how each experienced a this-is-it first impression. They had an advantage in that they were using an introduction service, so each knew the other was on the same search.



Kateri Clark and Harold Westendorp met in Sept. 2009 through an introduction service and are engaged to be married.

Photograph by: Julie Oliver, The Ottawa Citizen

"It was magical," he said. "I saw her in the crowd near the entrance, and something in me started pleading. Pick me! Please, please, pick me."

Kateri said she recognized him as soon as he stepped out of his truck. "I planned to play it cool, and when I saw him, I knew it wasn't going to be easy. I knew instantly this was the man I was looking for."

Pressured by the interviewer to focus on exactly the moment when he knew she was the woman he wanted, Harold said: "When she removed a sweater." Pressured to find the same moment, Kateri said: "When he watched me remove the sweater."

That stalled the interview process while the two males at the table adjusted to the idea that when a man scopes out a woman, she is scoping out his scoping.

Their dogs liked each other. Her miniature poodle mix, Princess, sniffed out his keeshond, Sophie, and the two were happy to hook up for a walk. Meanwhile, their owners went through the more sedate human process of sniffing with words.

In this case, the man and woman were part of a relatively new societal phenomenon. They were both part of half-time families. Both had come out of marriages with an agreement for shared custody. Courts routinely now order this kind of custody agreement, meaning the children have two homes. They spend a week with mom, and the alternate week with dad. Kids seem to adjust to the arrangement easily. Adults, not so much. Both found the off-weeks difficult. Neither was comfortable with, or looking for, impermanent relationships. Without their kids they were lonely and rootless. The no-kids weeks crawled by. He experienced panic attacks, sought professional help, and became convinced they were caused by a feeling of being trapped in unhappiness. She's in the public service, and he's a construction site superintendent. She has one child. He has two. Both parents believe that one of the greatest things they can teach their children is the importance of a solid and loving adult relationship. They have that now and intend to make it formal and legal soon. Neither had anything negative to say about their former partners, and both believed they had married too young and for the wrong reasons.

He was 21 at his wedding, and Kateri was 23 at hers. Both said they wanted to get on with life, and getting married seemed the thing to do. Love would happen. They now know that's backwards, and this time they believe they have it right.

His description of love: "Every morning the first thing I do is fall in love again. I wake up and realize where I am and who is with me, and it's awesome." Her definition: "That nagging emptiness I seemed to always have, is now gone."

Linda Miller of Misty River Introductions says her business, one of the most successful in the capital area, enjoys steady growth and doesn't see the Internet as a threat. "Most of the people that come to me have tried the net, but it doesn't offer security. Through a service like ours, they first get professional profiles of the people they will meet."

Couples can read about each other, but only the woman can initiate telephone contact, and only through a phone with a blocked number. If the first chat goes well, they meet in a public place.

The nervous part of this meeting was when they returned their walked and empty pooches to their cars, and Harold, trying to act nonchalant, asked: "So. Do you think we could meet again?" And just as nonchalantly, Kateri said she thought so.

At the table, she broke into laughter and said: "But inside I was saying: Oh yeah! Count on it!"

Last word to Harold: "I did cartwheels all the way home."