

LIFESTYLES

STRIKING A

match

Lonely hearts hope it will light up their livesBy Sandra Coulson
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The only experience most Canadians have with a match-maker is watching Fiddler on the Roof.

The notion of using a third party to find you a mate seems like letting a busybody run your life.

Or a strange custom from a foreign place.

Or an admission you're so desperate you, have to pay someone to find you a date.

But quietly for the last eight years, one match-maker has been traveling Ontario as a broker

between lonely people.

"I've always had a knack for it," says Linda Miller, who runs Misty River Introductions from the Ottawa-area town of Carleton Place.

Growing up in rural Manitoba, she would match friends with dabs. She matched her sister with the man who became her husband.

She says she dreamed one night she was doing it as a business. She told her sister the next day and her sister, citing Miller's record of success, told her she should do it.

The business did well on the prairie, where people could be isolated on their farms.

Eventually, Miller sold out and moved to Ontario, but here, her clients' isolation is not physical.

"They have busy lives, she says. "Some of the clients have children, some have a business.

London has been a consistently good market, she says. "There's a lot of very educated people as well as a lot of people who are self-employed."

But many clients would rather not tell people they met through a matchmaker.

"We get a lot of teachers and nurses and they have a huge volume of people they see on a day-to-day basis...and they don't want parents and others knowing about

their personal lives.

Gary Cherneski of Learnington and Diane Cudney of Blenheim met a year ago and have since built a house together in Learnington.

"People said if we can make it through building a house, we'd probably be OK," Cudney says.

Cherneski was the fifth man she met through Misty River. Clients are allowed seven meetings for their fee of almost \$700, so she likes to kid she got her money's worth.

(Clients can talk by phone with as many people as they want; only a face-to-face meeting is considered a match.)

But she was Cherneski's first match. "I said, This was a very expensive date. Diane," he recalls joking when their relationship turned serious.

It took about two months for Misty River to connect them because Cherneski, a trucker, didn't want to put an many more miles going to meet women. He also didn't share the interest in line dancing that Cudney expressed in her biographical information.

But they had other things in common - children and grandchildren, enjoyment of simple pleasures enough experience to be able to stand on their own, Cudney has kept her office job in Blenheim since moving to Learnington.

Both divorced, they had tried other ways of meeting people before trying Miller.

Cherneski had tried another dating service ("It was a total, 100-per-cent disaster"), a companion ad ("You meet some wackos") and bars ("I'm not really a drinker"), Cudney had also joined groups. They had good social outings, but she didn't meet anyone special.

After they met, she and Cherneski went away for a few weekends and then he invited her on his annual winter vacation to the Caribbean.

He had been living in an apartment and was thinking of building a house. In February, he said, "I would like to build it with you."

Cherneski advises others using an introduction service to be honest about what they're looking for. "If you're a 50 year-old man and want a 32-year-old woman, tell them."

Another couple, now married and living in St. Thomas, had almost given up on Misty River when they met.

Lynn was down to her seventh and last match. Most of the men she had met were divorced and bled about it. But Lynn, widowed two years ago after 18 years of marriage, says, "I came from a happy marriage and I'm very tap on men."

Sam, widowed in 1999 after 37 years of marriage, had met three or four women through Misty River, but hadn't clicked with any of them. Miller had said smokers like him were harder to match, so he quit in February 2001.

"We (he and Lynn) struck it off well at the beginning and never really faltered," Sam says. "But it's not easy, I would tell someone if they thought they were going to meet and then going to get married. 'Don't count on it.'"

Lynn and Sam requested their last name not be used for family reasons. But they say how they met is no secret and they'll tell anyone who asks.

"We were basically very lonely and looking for someone to get along with for companionship," says Lynn, who has no children.

She had gone to a singles dance and answered personal ads, but didn't care for either experience.

Sam was determined not to sit at home all day after his wife died, but didn't want to impose on his five adult children. He asked friends to suggest datable women but found it "highly embarrassing."

He took out a personal ad, but had been matched with Lynn by the time the responses came in. As a lark, they went through them together. One woman wrote she was married but wanted a lover, it made Lynn realize the advantage of having Miller screen clients before matching.

At Misty River, the women contact the men. Lynn always insisted on first meetings at restaurants or coffee shops. "Caution in this day and age is very important," she says.

She and Sam talked by phone several times during the first weekend in April 2001 and they met in Sam's city of Cambridge. After Lynn went home to St. Thomas, they talked more by phone.

"We decided on Wednesday night that we were serious," Lynn says. They married three months later.

"We were lucky because we got along well," Sam says. "I wouldn't advise other people to move that fast." Lynn adds.

They found they shared experiences and interests. Both worked hard for what they have acquired over their lifetimes, both believe in the importance of marriage, both are church-goers, enjoy bus trips and like to socialize.

They planned to sell both their houses and build a new home in Kitchener. Sam's house sold first, but while waiting for Lynn's to go, he came to feel comfortable there. He thought about all the stress of overseeing a builder and decided, "I'm not a puppy any more." So St. Thomas became their home.

Miller says matchmakers take out the middle step but aren't miracle workers.

"We all have this fairy-tale idea that if we have a flat tire, Mr. Right will stop and fix it for us or the one we're looking for will come and borrow a cup of sugar at the door."



MATCHED PAIR: Diane Cudney and Gary Cherneski embrace in front of their new Learnington home. The two found each other last year through a matchmaking service.