

# A Matchmaker in Boston?

Judi Ehrlich

When people learn that I am a traditional Jewish matchmaker it invariably evokes a smile and a variation of the following: Really? A Matchmaker? Like in Fiddler on the Roof? I didn't know anybody still did that.

So let me tell you how it happened. Jewish matchmaking has its origin in Biblical times and has been a part of our tradition for centuries. It found its way into the modern Jewish world in the 1980's when Jewish dating services popped up in major American cities in response to the difficulty that many singles were experiencing in finding Jewish partners. In Boston, New Possibilities was launched by Linda and Bill Novak. Two years later they donated the service to the Jewish Community Centers of Greater Boston. Serendipity had it that I would call the JCC asking if they had any job openings in counseling, only to be asked if I had ever considered becoming a matchmaker. Matchmaking was not on my career path, but I needed work and I was willing to give it a try until I found a real job. That was 14 years ago.

It is an enormously gratifying experience to help two individuals find each other and fall in love. The process begins with a free personal interview that lasts for an hour to an hour and a half. I give each person frank feedback and let them know what I think I can do for them. If they feel comfortable with what they hear they can join the service and I start looking for people who fit their criteria. When I have a match in mind, I call both people and describe them to each other. If they agree to meet, I provide names and telephone numbers. After meeting, they each call me back with feedback.

I'm often asked how I make matches. There are two categories of criteria I consider. First, there are the objective factors such as age, geographic location, physical attributes, education, occupation, interests, dietary habits, religious practices, marital history, allergies to cats, etc. Then there are the intangible qualities that have to do with personality, life experience and goals. I try to include as many compatible qualities as possible in each match and always let people know if there is something that does not fit their expectations, so that they can make their own decision. I do my best to ensure that, at a minimum, my clients will have a positive experience when they meet each other. Unfortunately, I cannot guarantee chemistry.

New Possibilities members range in age from 22 to 75, although the oldest was a man of 85. They represent a cross section of the Greater Boston Jewish population, mostly college-educated, many with advanced degrees -- nice, normal, busy people, who have their lives in order, but choose to rely on a consultant to help them network with other like-minded singles. Almost all of my clients are looking for a serious, committed relationship, not just casual dating. While the matching itself is based on my personal familiarity with each member, I keep track of who's who with the help of a database and a digital camera -- tools that Yente in Fiddler on the Roof would have appreciated.

It says somewhere in our tradition that bringing two people together in marriage is as difficult as the splitting of the Red Sea. I've never split the Red Sea, so I'm not in a position to compare. But I can tell you that, while the challenge is indeed great, the rewards and satisfaction are equally wonderful, as attested to by the dozens of wedding pictures and photos of babies that light up my office walls.



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