

Playing with Matches

Can't seem to find the right person at that popular club...

by *Laurel George*

You're a great catch, aren't you? You finished college, got a solid education. Maybe you've worked hard the past few years to establish yourself professionally, and it's finally starting to pay off. Maybe you were a little bit too focused on your career. One day you look around, suddenly all your friends are in serious relationships, married, starting families. Now you're thinking to yourself, "It might be nice to have someone to share all this with." God knows you'll never meet the future mother/father of your offspring at a foam party. So, where to begin? You're lucky- you live in Phoenix and you have plenty of choices. From the basic match-up services provided by most local companies, to on-line services that cater to those with very... shall we say specific interests, Phoenix has it all. If you're looking for a little help in your search for Mr./Ms. Right, we've done the research for you right here. If the dating thing doesn't work out, you can always try mail-order.

Admittedly, the least expensive (read riskiest) option is the on-line service. There's a plethora to choose from, all of which seem to specialize in definite "types" of humans. They range from the girls and guys next door found on Match.com, to the slightly more bizarre. The questionnaire at the adultfriendfinder website allows you to choose from a variety of hobbies and interests including "bondage" and "cross-dressing". Mostly though, online matchmaking services encourage people to define themselves in terms of goals, education, religious preference and type of relationship sought rather than fetishes. As diverse as the range of people these services cater to, they do share a few commonalities.

Obviously, there's no security screening whatsoever. Convicted felons, stalkers, really nice people, Star Trek fans, your soul mate-they all have the same access. For safety reasons, people who use these services should have common sense enough not to reveal any personal information such as address or phone number and to meet any potential dates in a public place. In addition to the safety issue, here is one other small hitch-the photos. For the most part they seemed to depict decent, normal enough looking people engaged in their favorite recreational activities. Think men posing next to marlin they'd just caught in Hawaii and chicks on their mountain bikes or in scuba gear. Are members of these services actually represented by the people in these photos? It's anyone's guess. It's not too far-fetched to imagine that once in a while a woman will use a photo that was taken before she gained that last 40 lbs, or that a man would prefer to post a picture that was taken when he still had hair. Most online services charge around \$30.00 a month, although a few are actually free. Your monthly fee generally buys you web space for your photo and profile, the ability to send and receive e-mail from other members of the service, and lists of the other members that "match" you in terms of interests etc. The mother of a girl I know posted a picture of her daughter on one of these sites, poses as her when answering the mail that rolls in and even arranges her dates. So far my friend's mom has scored her dates with an emotionally unavailable millionaire, a guy who told her he'd like her better with different colored hair and a triathlete (Not such a great match considering her decidedly vice-rich lifestyle.) If you and your mom have a lot of time on your hands and a great

deal of patience however, this may be an option.

We've all been the recipients of mass mail from Great Expectations. Typically, an envelope will show up addressed to "Single Resident". Inside, a questionnaire that asks only the broadest questions about habits and interests. Apparently these questionnaires were written 60 years ago, or are specifically aimed at retirees. What would be the percentage of today's 20-30 year olds who enjoy "ballroom dancing" and "playing bridge"? Sadly, we may never know. When I called, I got put on hold for 5 minutes and then disconnected. Now that's customer service! I imagine they were fielding a rush of calls from waltzing, card-shuffling 70 year olds that day. According to the company website, Chuck Wollery of "Love Connection" fame promises you "Dating with dignity!" Call them yourself if you're curious about rates and services.

Stepping up, in terms of service as well as cost- there's "It's Just Lunch!" When I call, a person identifying herself as "Sheryl, The Director" explains that typical clients are "busy professionals", who don't have a lot of time to spare for a task as trivial as finding the love of their lives. After an hour-long (a whole HOUR? Well, that's the kind of sacrifices one must make) in-depth interview, the folks at "It's Just Lunch!" will match up clients based on interests for short lunch, happy hour or dessert dates. Although you meet your date sight-unseen, ostensibly you won't have to spend more than an hour or two with the person, which is a damn good thing if you find yourself at happy hour with someone you don't click with. Because the entire date takes place in public, and no personal information is released besides first names," It's Just Lunch!" does not conduct any type of background or criminal checks. \$1500.00 gets you 16 dates.

How about a first date with 5 other people? That's what you'll get with Dinner For Six. "Roxanne" (apparently the use of first-names only is de rigeur in the match-making world) tells me that according to the latest research, "six is the best number for interaction" around a table. Just one couple can be high pressure, two couples is too much like a double date and a table for eight is just too big. When joining the service, clients are interviewed regarding interests and a copy is made of the client's driver's license to discourage misrepresentation. Three men and three women are then matched by age, interest and goals and dinner is arranged at a local restaurant. Again, no photos are exchanged pre-date and no personal information

is released other than first name. Unlike most other dating services, Dinner For 6 also offers 3-month trial memberships.

Black Book, the newest service in town, is also the most surely destined to piss off local feminists. Membership for men is determined on the basis of financial security, and in the case of women "physical attractiveness and personality". After an interview (and submission of a financial statement), the male client selects potential dates from photographs, videos and biographical sketches of female clients. Membership for female clients is determined by invitation and a personal interview. Criminal and background checks are done by client request. Memberships for men start at around \$3000.00 for six introductions, but women are charged significantly less and may have unlimited introductions. A company representative, speaking anonymously, said that the company has a strict confidentiality policy, and no names could be mentioned, but that "...our male clients are typically high-profile businessmen, politicians, and professionals who don't want the world to know they are looking for a girlfriend or wife." He added that the main purpose of Black Book is to, "Introduce the valley's most successful men to beautiful, intelligent women who have outgrown the meat-market bar and nightclub scene."

In a more traditional vein, there are a few old-school matchmakers around town. According to Bonnie the Matchmaker "It's not about getting a date, it's about getting the right date." Working solo, she spends two hours interviewing potential clients and "...turns down almost as many" clients as she accepts. Bonnie's main requirements are that you be educated, height/weight proportionate and a non-smoker. Smokers, are as she puts it, "Too hard to place." She performs criminal checks, and networks with other matchmakers all over the planet. Apparently she's got a knack- her stats: thirteen marriages, a wedding planned for October and three couples currently livings together. Bonnie will spend up to eighteen months of her life looking to hook you up for approximately \$3,500.00. Now this may sound a little pricey, but it is very competitive for a personal matchmaker. In fact, from what I have heard, her company is the most competitively priced here in this 'Valley of the Sun'. However, take heart, she does have a much lower priced program, "The Registry" for professionals like teachers, social workers, working moms, or any educated professional

I that is in lower paying professions. She say: “I don’t want to lose these really terrific people because their industry just doesn’t pay well.

And finally, for the born-again Christians that make up the majority of our readership, there’s even a special dating service just for you: “Equally Yoked”. Sounds just a bit kinky to me, but if we’ve learned anything, it’s that there’s a special somebody out there for everyone, and someone else who’ll be happy to help you find each other.

Bonnie The Matchmaker, Inc.

Bonnie Wills

13835 N. Tatum Blvd #9-222

Phoenix, AZ 85032

Phone: 602-996-0056

Email: bonnie@bonniethematchmaker.com