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WOMAN NEWS

Unorthodox dating site draws Orthodox Jews

By **Rebecca Santana**

Associated Press

Published March 22, 2006

ELIZABETH, N.J. -- Batsheva Frankel was tired of being told she should be happy simply to find a husband who was breathing, let alone someone with a good sense of humor or similar to her in age.

But thanks to a Web site called Frumster.com, the Elizabeth schoolteacher proved them wrong and met Yossie, the man who later became her husband.

"Yossie and I think about it: Could we have met another time or another way?" said Batsheva Frankel, speaking at her Elizabeth home while balancing their 8-month-old son on one knee. "There's no way. Our worlds don't really intersect."

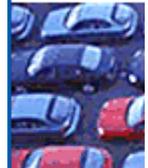
While there are plenty of Internet dating sites -- including many that cater to Jews -- Passaic, N.J.-based Frumster ([www.frumster.com](#)) is different in that it focuses on Jewish singles looking for marriage with someone who shares their religious values. The name comes from the Yiddish word "frum," which means "modest" -- no relation to the word frumpy, said Derek Saker, the site's marketing director.

Many clients said they turned to Frumster after being disappointed with mainstream sites or other methods of dating in the Orthodox community, such as using a matchmaker or being set up by friends and family.

Batsheva Frankel, who was 37 when she joined Frumster in 2002, was older than most Orthodox women looking to get married. She was told by other matchmakers that she would have to lower her standards to find a husband.

Other dating sites featured profiles of people who didn't seem to care much about religion, said some Frumster clients.

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"A lot of the profiles said, 'I'm Orthodox, Reform, Conservative,' and if you put up a profile that says 'I'll accept any of these people,' then you don't know what you want in life," said Rachel Schranz, of Fair Lawn, whose husband, Jerry, described himself in his online profile as the "Jewish Lloyd Dobler" based on the goofy-but-sincere John Cusack character in "Say Anything."

"Frumster was very different because it was very geared to the Orthodox," Rachel Schranz said.

In many ways, Frumster works like other Internet dating sites: Clients create a profile with information about themselves, sometimes with a photo, and state what they're looking for in a mate. They can comb through other people's profiles and send an e-mail to anyone they find interesting.

But Frumster has some aspects that make it unusual. Pictures that are posted have to be "modest," meaning no women in bikinis or men showing off their peccs.

Frumster also asks detailed questions about religion: How often do they read the Torah? Does a woman cover her hair? Does the person pray three times a day, just on holidays or never?

The site was started in 2001 as a free service by a Canadian man living in Israel. In 2003, a group of investors purchased it and turned it into a fee-based system that charges up to \$14.95 a month and has about 21,000 members, Saker said. The site is open to everyone; about 80 percent of the users are Orthodox Jews, he said.

The company said it has matched 576 couples, referring to people already married or who plan to marry who met through Frumster.

About 55 percent of the matches are initiated by the women, which is unusual in the Orthodox world.

Stacey Katz, an event planner who joined Frumster 2 1/2 years ago, went to Frumster looking for a physically active man in his mid- to late 30s who enjoys large sabbath dinners.

"You can take dating into your own hands," Katz said.

In the early years, there may have been a stigma or embarrassment about using Frumster, but many say that has dissipated as more people successfully use the site. Katz, who sometimes sorts through e-mails with her mother, says online dating is accepted.

"Everybody knows one person who's met on Frumster," Katz said. "So that makes the singles feel like [saying] 'Maybe I'm not so odd for being on there.'"

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