



## Matches Made in Heaven or...Online?!

BY MIRIAM COHEN

The term matchmaker used to evoke archaic images of pushy Yentas à la "Fiddler on the Roof." Today, matchmaking with the advent of the Web has had a much-needed modern makeover. Web sites and online dating services have gained credibility over recent years, and are for many young Jews intent on walking down the aisle in the near future (and not as a bridesmaid yet again) the answer to their prayers.

Started in 2001, Frumster, a "Jewish dating for marriage" online service, boasts an average of 16 married or engaged members monthly. This December, Frumster is proud to celebrate a major milestone—the marriage of 500 members.

### A Web site made in heaven?

Derek Saker, director of marketing for Frumster, explained the unusual success rates. "It's a very

labor-intensive and personalized formula that brings success." The formula includes rigorous screening: thorough profile evaluations, telephone interviews and a comprehensive questionnaire that covers, among other concerns, the individual's Jewish background. A modesty-enforced dating environment is achieved by having controls against "red flags" such as overly sexual language or pictures. There is also live online help and immediate complaint resolution.

Of course, not all complaints are entirely reality-based. "Whenever we receive a complaint, we look at both parties involved. Once, a guy reported a complaint about a girl using sexual

language. We investigated, and as it turned out, all she had said was that she wasn't interested," said Saker.

While Yenta may only catered to the Orthodox, Frumster, despite its name suggesting otherwise (frum, meaning religiously observant), has opened its doors to Jews of all backgrounds and varying levels (if any) of observance. "We were inundated with non-religious singles looking to get married that were fed up with other dating services, so we integrated this new category," said Saker. "It has gone very well so far." Faced with the problem of a site called Frumster that is not exclusively frum, Saker laughed, "Put it this way: They are religiously trying to get married!"

"I think it's nice for someone like me, who does not observe Shabbat and doesn't keep kosher, but feels that Judaism is a big part of their life," said a Frumster member who is not observant. "When you sign onto Frumster, you find people who also view Judaism as a big part of their lives."

Traditional dating set-ups often place young Jews, particularly women, in a passive position. On Frumster, over half the matches are female-initiated, putting notions of demure feminine submission to rest. "In the religious world, women are often passive in terms of match-making, explained Saker. "The levels of security the site offers,



Rachel and Jonathan Strauss

as well as the anonymity of online dating, allows women to take the lead."

Online dating sites that offer more "traditional" matchmaking, such as SawYouAtSinai.com, often leave singles feeling at the mercy of the matchmaker.

Naomi Spira, a matchmaker on Saw You at Sinai, argued that many seek out conventional matchmaking.

"People like it because it's confidential. Especially the girls; they don't feel like they're being shopped around, or that everyone is looking at them," said Spira.

Rachel and Jonathan Strauss met via Frumster and were married May of 2005. They experienced Frumster as the antithesis of "being shopped around."

"You are in control. You don't have to go through three people all trying to convince you to go out with someone," said Rachel. Her husband agreed. "I had friends set me up before I went on Frumster. But they set me up with who they thought I should be with, not what I wanted. They think they know what's best." With a wry chuckle he added, "I think I know what's best."