

Frumster hits 250th wedding

By Shayndi Raice

The Talmud states that finding a mate is harder to accomplish than the splitting of the Red Sea. For Orthodox Jews who almost exclusively date for marriage, this process can be especially difficult with the pressure to get married young and to get engaged after a short dating process.

An Orthodox Jewish dating Web site, set up for the purpose of dating-for-marriage only, has just passed the celebration of its 250th marriage, making the Talmudic dictum just a little less true.

Frumster.com, an Orthodox pun on the popular Web site Friendster.com, passed this momentous occasion only days before its fourth anniversary.

When it began, Frumster.com was a free dating service that had unique privacy controls to allow Orthodox Jews to maintain a degree of modesty in the dating process, according to Derek Saker, director of marketing. "Frumster started as a service addressed to the needs of observant Jews who were looking for a more modest dating environment, an environment where people are looking to get married as opposed to looking for a boyfriend or girlfriend," said Saker.

To that end, Frumster keeps a close watch on its members, including an initial phone interview before accepting a new member's profile, as well as a careful monitoring of its member's profiles. Saker said that if they notice a member is contacting people from every different age group and background they red flag them and follow-up by making sure they are serious about marriage. "That's a warning sign that it's a joke or it could be somebody looking for something other than marriage," explained Saker.

If the company receives complaints after dates about a member and their level of seriousness and commitment to finding a marriage partner, the applicant is suspended

from the site. Saker said that it's essential to his clientele that the site be known as a dating-for-marriage website only. "Our yardstick is marriage," he said. "To us, a good member is one who stays the least amount of time."

Rena Berger was living in Brookline when she met her future husband on Frumster. Richard was living in Seattle. After two weeks of phone calls, Richard came to Brookline to meet Rena and only four weeks later the couple got engaged. They were married in December of 2003 and now live in Seattle with their six-month-old son.

Rena said that her mother had initially signed her up for Frumster as she neared her 30th birthday and was still single. "There aren't a heck of a lot of [Orthodox] people in Boston to date," she explained.

For many observant Jews who live outside of New York or Los Angeles, which are considered hubs of Orthodox Jewish dating, finding a partner who is similar in religious background can be especially difficult. So although the couple lived so far apart, they were willing to date long distance because of their strong commitment to getting married.

Other dating Web sites, like Jdate.com, allow members to pick from a list of options regarding their dating goals, and those can be anywhere from marriage to just activity partners or even friends. "I wasn't looking to meet a guy just to be friends with," said Rena. "I had plenty of friends. There was a purpose to this and it's very obvious what the purpose is."

The emphasis on marriage to the Frumster community is important in obtaining rabbinical approval. With a membership base of over 21,000 members, spanning traditional, modern Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox, some rabbis have expressed religious concerns over Internet use.

"There are the good and bad of the Internet," said Saker. "We latched onto the good side and the tremendous amount of joy that can be harnessed from the Internet."



Rena and Richard Berger met on the Web site Frumster.com.

