

# A date with DESTINY

Romance can enter our lives when we least expect it. Three women reveal how they met their love matches in the most unusual ways

BY SHARON STEPHENSON | PHOTOGRAPHS BY NICOLA EDMONDS AND NIKKI SOUTH

**H**ow do you meet your future significant other? It's one of life's great dilemmas. Back in our parents' day, it seemed so simple; you met your husband or wife at church, through family or at a dance at the local community hall.

Now, for most of us, meeting the love of our lives happens in the usual places - university, work, a bar or at a social activity. And, of course, there's internet dating; research by Stanford

University shows one in three relationships now start online, which makes this form of dating the second most common way of connecting with someone, after meeting through friends. Figures show 40 million Americans have tried internet dating, while around 6.3 million Britons log onto dating sites each month. Here in New Zealand, a 2012 survey by UMR

Research revealed that of the 1000 Kiwis surveyed, 78% had tried, or considered, internet dating.

For some couples, however, Cupid can show up in the most unexpected place, at the most surprising time. As the following three women reveal, not only is love a many splendoured thing, it can also strike in unusual places...

## Love affair ready for take-off

A crowded airport is where the long arm of love reached out for ShuFen Koh. The animator, now based in Wellington, was returning to her native Singapore after a week's trip to Taiwan. Also at Taoyuan International Airport on January 5, 2010 was Kieran Tether, heading back to his work at a Singaporean animation company after spending Christmas at home in Canada.

"Our flight was delayed so my friend Peishan, who I was travelling with, managed to find us some seats," Koh says.

"I was dozing off when I heard a guy telling someone about a project he was working on. We started talking and I told him I was also working at that company."

It turned out they'd spent the four months prior to their holidays with only a floor separating them.

However, on the flight back to Singapore, the 31-year-old admits she pretended to be asleep every time she saw Tether, 25, approach. "I felt a bit awkward because I couldn't remember his name. To be honest, I was a little afraid to talk to him because he looked a bit fierce!"

Tether didn't share Koh's reluctance and eventually tracked her down on Facebook. A work outing to see a band led to friendship and, before long, she was won over.

"I remember writing in my diary, 'He's

six years younger than me but he's so cute and shy and lovely."

Sadly, though, it hasn't been all soft centres in the couple's box of chocolates; Koh's conservative parents objected not only to the age difference but also to the fact Tether isn't Singaporean.

"It took some time, but Kieran didn't run away from the difficult circumstances, spending time with my family until they accepted him as a good guy. A year after dating, I realised I wanted to spend the rest of my life with him, which came as a bit of a shock because I always vowed I wouldn't get married. But Kieran changed me and I've never experienced this kind of love before, nor have I ever been loved by anyone so much."

After spending time in Canada, the couple moved to Wellington in September 2011 when Tether landed a job with Peter Jackson's Weta Digital. He proposed a week later and they got married in a simple wedding ceremony on Lake Taupo on January 2, 2012.

And while the couple joke they should have held their wedding ceremony at Taoyuan Airport, Koh says they are planning on visiting Taiwan in a few months. "Peishan, who chose the seats for us the day I met Kieran, will be travelling with us. I'm hoping this time around she gets to meet the love of her life at the airport!"

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## The food of love for two fellow diners

It was Chinese food that brought Kate McKay and husband Mark together. Now based in Wellington, back in 2007 the performance auditor was working in Melbourne and, after a long day, would often stop at a small Chinese restaurant called Purple Shells on her way home.

One blustery August day, McKay, 44, had done just that when another solo diner walked in.

"Although there wasn't an instant attraction, I had this weird feeling I had to have that person in my life," she says. "It sounds a bit over-the-top, but there was this incredible pull to engage with him, so when he sat at the table next to me, I started chatting."

When Mark, a machine operator from Otago, chatted back, McKay screwed up all her courage and invited him to join her. However, their meeting wasn't without its tension.

"I'm usually pretty good with what I eat but that day I had ordered a big, battered, fatty meal and a beer. I was a little mortified when this unladylike meal arrived!"

Fortunately, Mark wasn't bothered and as the evening wore on, McKay found herself warming to the easygoing Kiwi who wasn't overly enamoured with Melbourne and was thinking about moving to Queensland. Wanting to introduce him to some "nice Melbourne people", McKay invited him to a party the following week. He countered with a suggestion they meet up the next day.

But still the penny hadn't dropped. "I rang my sister that night to tell her what a nice guy he was and how he'd make someone the best husband. I asked her who I could set him up with. My sister said, 'what about you?'"

Ironically, the former landscape gardener says if she'd drawn up a list of prerequisites for her ideal husband, Mark probably wouldn't have ticked many of the boxes. "But it just goes to show you shouldn't be too rigid about what you're looking for because you could overlook someone who is perfect for you."

The couple moved in together in early 2008 and after a brief stint in Tasmania, McKay was headhunted for a job in Wellington. In October 2009, a little over two years after they met, the couple married in Mark's home town of Maheno in Otago.

So have they ever been back to the Chinese restaurant where romance bloomed among the spring rolls and noodles? "Yes, we took various family members there to introduce them to the staff who were chuffed when they found out they'd been unwitting matchmakers."

However, on their last visit to Melbourne, the pair discovered the restaurant had closed. "It was really sad, particularly as now we don't know where to find their amazing dim sims. My mother likes to say they closed when they had fulfilled their purpose of bringing me and Mark together." □

HAIR: KELLY BENNETT MAKEUP: KAREN WINEFIELD AND KARIN STAUNTON

## Til' death do us bring together...

A funeral isn't the usual setting for a romantic hook-up, but Jacky James didn't get where she is today by being conventional.

The Rotorua PR consultant admits she had a hefty back catalogue of failed romances when she met chef-turned-property valuer Mike at a mutual friend's funeral in 2000.

"After five years of working in Wellington and Taupo, I had just returned to Auckland," the bubbly 39-year-old explains. "An old school friend, one of the healthiest people I knew, died suddenly of a heart attack and so one wet May afternoon, I attended his funeral in Devonport."

Squashed into a corner of the crowded school hall, she was anxiously looking around for someone she knew.

"I saw this guy come in wearing a really well-cut suit and thought how good-looking he was. And then I felt terrible for thinking that at a funeral!"

It later dawned on James the handsome stranger wasn't, in fact, a stranger at all.

"I realised I had gone to school with Mike. We had actually sat next to each other in calculus, which we both failed miserably. I now put that down to subliminal messages about sitting next to my soulmate and not knowing it!"

Thinking Mike had turned out "a bit of alright", James discreetly made enquiries as to his relationship

status. Luckily, it turned out he was unattached, and a few nights later friends invited Mike to a party James was hosting. That led to lunch and several months of friendship.

But although the pair were on the same wavelength, and wanted the same things out of life, nothing much happened for a while.

"Mike thought I was going to move overseas with my job and I thought he was shy."

The romantic deadlock was eventually broken at a party; Mike moved in two weeks later and the pair married in September 2003. They now have two sons, Oliver, eight and Toby, four, and James says not a day goes by when she isn't thankful she attended the funeral that day - because it brought her "the best husband ever".

"It was an absolutely tragic circumstance in which to meet someone, but that's just how it happened. Life now is great; we are both self-employed and work from home, which means we're flexible to be able to do things like train for triathlons together and get involved with our kids' events."

And although the family now lives in Rotorua, James says they make sure their sons know the significance of Auckland landmarks when they visit.

"Our four year-old is particularly taken with the chapel where we got married and mentions it often."