

Suburban Life

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Dates, not mates

THEY'RE LOOKING for dates, not mates. Concerned about falling health, finances and domestic adjustments, most Oakland County senior citizens interviewed by the Observer are reluctant to marry. They would rather find a companion than a spouse.

"It would be a terrible blow if you got married again, and it didn't work out like you pictured," said Macfield Kaganac, 75, of Bloomfield Hills.

She prefers not to play the dating game. "Men are looking for a nurse and a purse," she quipped.

"The retired ones stay at home watching football games while you trip over them with a vacuum cleaner."

Kaganac, who has been a widow since she was 55, spends her time planning activities for Mature Mingle, a Bloomfield Hills-based seniors group.

Still, she admits "it's nice to have a dinner companion, but I just haven't been lucky enough to meet anybody to take me."

The following senior couples discussed their dating experiences with Carol Azizian and Shirlee Iden.



Grace Frassrand of Rochester learns pool pointers from her boyfriend, Jim Bishop of Sterling Heights.

Flirting like 'first love'

"My name's Grace. Amazing Grace."

That's how Grace Frassrand, 74, of Rochester first introduced herself to Jim Bishop, 73, of Sterling Heights.

It wasn't long before she found herself in his good graces.

When they met — in a bridge group at the Rochester Older Persons Commission Activity Center — they were dating other people.

"But I was fast enough to ask for her telephone number," Jim recalled. More than a year later, he remembered the number and dialed it.

"I guess I wanted to be around an old Tennesseean, someone from God's country," Jim joked. Both Jim and Grace hail from that southern state.

Did she accept? "Well, can't you tell how irresistible I am?" Jim quipped.

Grace, who affectionately calls Jim "hillbilly," admitted she found him attractive. "He was witty, nice-looking, fun to be with and intelligent."

"I'll give you the quarter I owe you for sayin' that," Jim responded, then added in a more serious tone, "she was one of the amiable people I ever saw."

FLIRTING like young lovers, they seem to be reliving a high school romance. "He's romantic," sighs Grace. "He sends flowers and candy and calls often."

Even though they were both devoted

to their former spouses, they enjoy playing the "dating game" again. A retired East Detroit schoolteacher, Grace was married 40 years. Jim, a retired field service engineer for Chevrolet, was married 49½ years. Grace has been a widow for seven years and Jim, a widower for five.

Some things have changed since their early courting days. "When I used to have a lot of get up and go, but my get up and go got up and went," admitted Jim.

Still, they remain active — going out to dinner, movies and dancing, performing in musicals, visiting their children and playing bridge. He hopes to teach her how to golf this summer.

One of their favorite pastimes is to reminisce about the "good old days" in Tennessee.

"We get to talkin' about old times. We were both from rather poor families, a log cabin background," Jim said.

Added Grace, "I taught at a school in an Appalachian mining town. We like to laugh about the people we knew back then."

The lovebirds have discussed marriage, but aren't taking the plunge yet. "We would have to make domestic and financial adjustments," Jim said.

"I'd be happy dating her the rest of my life," he added.

Waiting until kids leave nest

A Birmingham widow waited more than 15 years after her husband died before she started dating seriously again.

"It just wasn't my cup of tea," she said. "I was (holding down) a full-time job to support my large family."

When her youngest child left the house, she "was at wit's end," trying to figure out "what to do with myself."

"It must have been delayed grieving," she reflected. Moving to Scottsdale, Ariz. (to be closer to two of his daughters), she attended classes for widowed persons at a Franciscan Renewal Center.

"I put on (holiday) parties and people told me I was good at it."

Returning to Michigan three years later, she applied her newly acquired skills to another group for widowed persons and later became president of the organization.

"I dated a lot of people then," she recalled. "It was like being in high school again."

A year ago, (she was 62), she met someone "special" at her church. "He's a very, very nice person. We play golf together, go dancing, attend branches and theater parties."

"I don't know why I like him. I just do," she mused. "He's important looking."

Whether marriage is in their future is uncertain. For now, they're content to date each other.

Dancing the night away

They may not be Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, but Alex Kalosky and Billie Hatty love to dance.

They enjoy ethnic, round and ballroom dancing a few times a week at the Farmington Hills Senior Adult Center.

"I usually pick her up in the mornings and we practice different (steps) with 10 or 15 couples," said Kalosky, 73, of Farmington.

"In the evenings, we go to the Elks lodge for dances," he added. And they trip the light fantastic together in musicals performed at the center.

The couple met five years ago at the center, but didn't go through an elaborate courtship. "I just decided to call her and ask her out for dinner," Alex said nonchalantly.

"She was friendly . . . nice company," he mused.

ALEX, A retired tool and gauge inspector, is separated from his wife, Billie, 71, of Farmington Hills was married for 40 years. Her husband died nine years ago.

Admitting she had another "steady gentleman friend" before dating Alex, Billie confessed that she finds her new beau "charming."

"He buys flowers or little gifts from the store that catch my fancy. And he calls me up at 7:45 a.m. every morning to see how I'm doing."

Even though they see each other every day, they rarely argue. "Once in a while, we disagree," Billie conceded.

She has introduced her "fella" to her children. "They love Alex. My oldest daughter always says 'thank God' for Alex."

They don't use romantic words like "madly in love" to describe their relationship. "When you're young, you're infatuated. We take it easy," Billie said.

The couple has no marriage plans. "I'm too damn old to get married," said Alex, with a laugh.



Billie Hatty of Farmington Hills dances with Alex Kalosky of Farmington.



Mary Amati of Southfield and Bob Cattalano enjoy each other's company but are reluctant about getting married.

'I'm 77 and he's 80, what's the point?'

Mary Amati's life hasn't been made of ribbons, bows and red satin hearts.

Seventeen years after her marriage in 1929, her husband suffered a stroke, leaving her with the responsibility of supporting her two sons and daughter.

"My husband never worked again, but I worked three jobs at a time," she said. "Although he lived for 23 years, I never looked at another man after he was stricken."

It wasn't until Amati was a senior citizen that she was able to enjoy "another man's" company.

Amati, 77, a resident of McDonnell Towers in Southfield, has found a companion in Bob Cattalano.

no. 80.

"We go to church together and that means everything to me," she said.

Are they contemplating marriage? "Well, I'm 77 and Bob's 80, what's the point? He's my good friend."

The couple met four years ago because Amati needed an escort to a dance. "I wanted to find a fellow who would like some home-cooked Italian food. So I asked and he came."

"Dating" again is a big change for this petite, grey-haired woman who has been independent most of her life. "I worked for 48 years, in business and in hospitals," she said.

Now, she supervises lunches and writes reports for the Oakland-Livingston Human Service Agency.

Amati remembers her childhood in Trieste, Italy, her marriage and the birth of each of her children.

"When my son was in college, every Saturday a houseful of young people — Chinese, blacks, every nationality — used to come," she recalls. "I would get five pounds of flour and make pizza. I can make the long, homemade noodles, too."

But she isn't content just looking back. She looks forward to watching her nine grandchildren grow up and feels secure knowing that she can lean on Bob's shoulder.

— Shirlee Iden

Southern gentleman pours on the charm

Max Williamson, a southern Casanova, has been on the dating circuit for two decades.

"My wife left me for a guitar-playing hillbilly 24 years ago," the Troy resident said. "I stayed home and cried for a while. But a guy I worked with convinced me to go out again. I met a pretty blonde nurse at a singles club and I said, 'Hey, baby, you're not a fickle woman, are you?'"

Years later at another singles dance, Max, 61, charmed Anna Marie Holstein, a sweet 62-year-old from East Detroit.

"I seen she was pretty so I winked at her," Max recalled. "But she didn't wink back. I said, 'Hon-

ey, I'm glad you asked me to dance, and I got away with it."

Anna Marie says Max embellishes his stories a little. Her version of their first encounter is slightly different.

"I met Max through one of my girlfriends. I was grieving over the loss of my second husband, and I wasn't interested in dating anyone."

"But he made me feel alive. He's got a terrific sense of humor, and he's a southern gentleman."

A Kentuckian, Max is almost as feisty as he was 40 years ago. He plays cards every day at the Troy Community Center and takes Anna Marie out for dinner and dancing. They've been dating about two years.

"I had to beat out the competition," Max joked. "A pretty gal like her has more than one fella. So I bought her a mikrowave and a ring and took her 91-year-old mama some candy. That didn't work too good. Mama wanted to marry me then."

In return, Anna Marie gave Max a suit and wristwatch.

"I'm not a gold digger," she said. Max admits he's "crazy" about his "main squeeze," but isn't in a hurry to tie the knot.

Neither is Anna Marie. "Max has so many good qualities. But I'm still grieving over my husband, Albert. It'll take a couple more years."