

## **I do. . . . A Marriage Made to Fit**

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My mother freely spoke of nearly every subject from her past except romance. But there were hints that before she married my father, she had her eyes set on another boy and apparently the feeling was mutual. My mother never said why the relationship didn't work out. She did, however, tell tales about other romances in the community. Some were sad and some were humorous.

If my parent's marriage was made in heaven, I cannot say. In those days, the marriage bond was carved in stone. You either fit (naturally) or you fit in (by adjustment). The rules were simple. Boys had permission to elbow their way in or out of a situation, to get tied down or not. Girls had no such choice. Girls back then were kept under a watchful eye.

Falling in love was no different in Teplitz than anywhere else. If a young couple started to hold hands, parents, God-parents and God knows who else, stepped in to separate them from flirting and to make sure they focused on the facts of life. Rather than romance, marriages were made via the tradition of /kuppla./ The important goal of marriage, in the eyes of the Elders and the Wise, was to upgrade the standing of the young people through good marriages that would protect them from any faults that might come down from inheritance.

Even if the parents of the couple agreed with the relationship, that was not the end of the discussion. That's why we have Godparents, remember? As additional people became involved, the fight over opinions started to heat up. To make a point and substantiate one's objections, people often stirred up dirt from the ancestral past to show how a particular young man or young woman was not suitable. Many broken hearts were strewn by the roadside because of this. The parents knew best, and so did everyone else in the clan. What worked in the past, works now. Case closed.

Now comes a true story "from the horse's mouth." My wife Helgard and I are both from Bessarabia. Our families knew each other back home. One day, my mother suggested that I write Helgard a letter to let her know, well, that I'm still to be had. At the same time her parents were thinking the same thing, that, well, she was ready to meet someone. Both families were in the same groove, but in different time zones.

I wrote my letter. She answered -- about the nice weather they were having. I wrote again and then was told, in a nice way, to get lost. I packed my suitcase and went to visit her. Something about her grabbed me, and her photograph didn't look out of place either. With a hope in hell, I walked into their place and said Hello.

Everyone looked me over and gave me a welcoming smile. After some refreshments, I made myself comfortable and told them why I was there and that I only had 2 1/2 weeks on my return ticket. At the same time, I gave the family a statement of my possessions, which included a home with a small down payment and a business I didn't know if it would still be there when I got back. The family looked on, while Helgard thought this was a rather unusual start. I couldn't say the truth more clearly. Saying everything up front so bluntly got her attention. We went for walks and we were on our best behavior.

I ended up extending my return ticket for a while until Helgard was ready to make up her mind. Eventually she came around and decided to move to Canada. We learned to know each other after we were married. I really had to pull up my socks and stand by my family's reputation. It was worth the sweat. We have now been married for 46 years and have two grown children with families of their own. Helgard is such a supportive wife and makes me look good to this day. I am proud that she stands beside me. In our case /kuppla/ worked out very well.