

Fall in Love for a Good Cause

By STEPHANIE ROSENBLOOM NOV. 4, 2007



HEARTS AFIRE Pari Livermore at home in San Rafael, Calif. Darcy Padilla for The New York Times

ON the spectrum of aspiring Cupids, Pari Livermore ought to be categorized somewhere between the hundreds of professional matchmakers and the millions of meddling grannies, bubbies, nanas and nonnas.

Ms. Livermore — a motherly bowl-cut blonde who is married to Putnam Livermore, an attorney and one of the founders of the Trust for Public Land — has facilitated the affaire de coeur for a number of high-profile singles: a hedge fund executive, a beauty pageant winner, a neurologist, even a princess. There are matchmakers who charge thousands of dollars for this sort of thing. Ms. Livermore, on the other hand, attempts to kindle sparks free of charge.

Well, sort of.

She said she does not personally profit by arranging set-ups for San Francisco lonely hearts. Rather she asks those who seek her assistance to donate money or time to one of a dozen or so charities. In the last 19 years her introductions and singles parties have resulted in more than 200 marriages and raised about \$3 million for nonprofit organizations including the American Cancer Society, the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation and the American Heart Association.

“If I think I can help them,” Ms. Livermore said, “I make them help in some charitable way.”

She does not advertise her services, which generally attract singles 30 to 60. A majority are friends and family of couples she has united. The rest are fetching women she spots around town, be it in Whole Foods or at the gynecologist’s office.

“I met her in the salon that I work at,” said Laurel Emminger, a hairstylist who met her fiancée, Richard Katz, through Ms. Livermore. “She was getting her nails done. She overheard me saying: ‘Oh I just broke up with some boyfriend. I’m single again, how do I meet somebody?’ She said, ‘Excuse me, I’m having a party in three days.’”

Ms. Livermore raises money in multiple ways. About 60 male clients are designated as patrons, meaning that they usually donate up to \$10,000 a year (though it can be much more or less) directly to a charity.

“She kind of sizes you up for what you can afford and extracts it from you,” said Mr. Katz, a lawyer and onetime patron.

Ms. Livermore then arranges dates for them and invites them to parties. “If they don’t like what I do for them, I will often refund their money, which a matchmaker will not do,” she said. “That’s maybe only happened two or three times.”

Additionally, she finds about 100 women who, instead of donating large sums, volunteer to be on a committee for Ms. Livermore’s Red & White Ball, a singles charity event held every other year in San Francisco that attracts up to 1,000 attendees. Other singles contribute by buying tickets to the ball and other parties. Then there are the parents who surreptitiously make a charitable donation with the hope that Ms. Livermore will find their children a match. (Ms. Livermore said these conversations usually begin: “Couldn’t you please call Robert up and say you’ve heard of him? I don’t like the women he’s choosing.”)

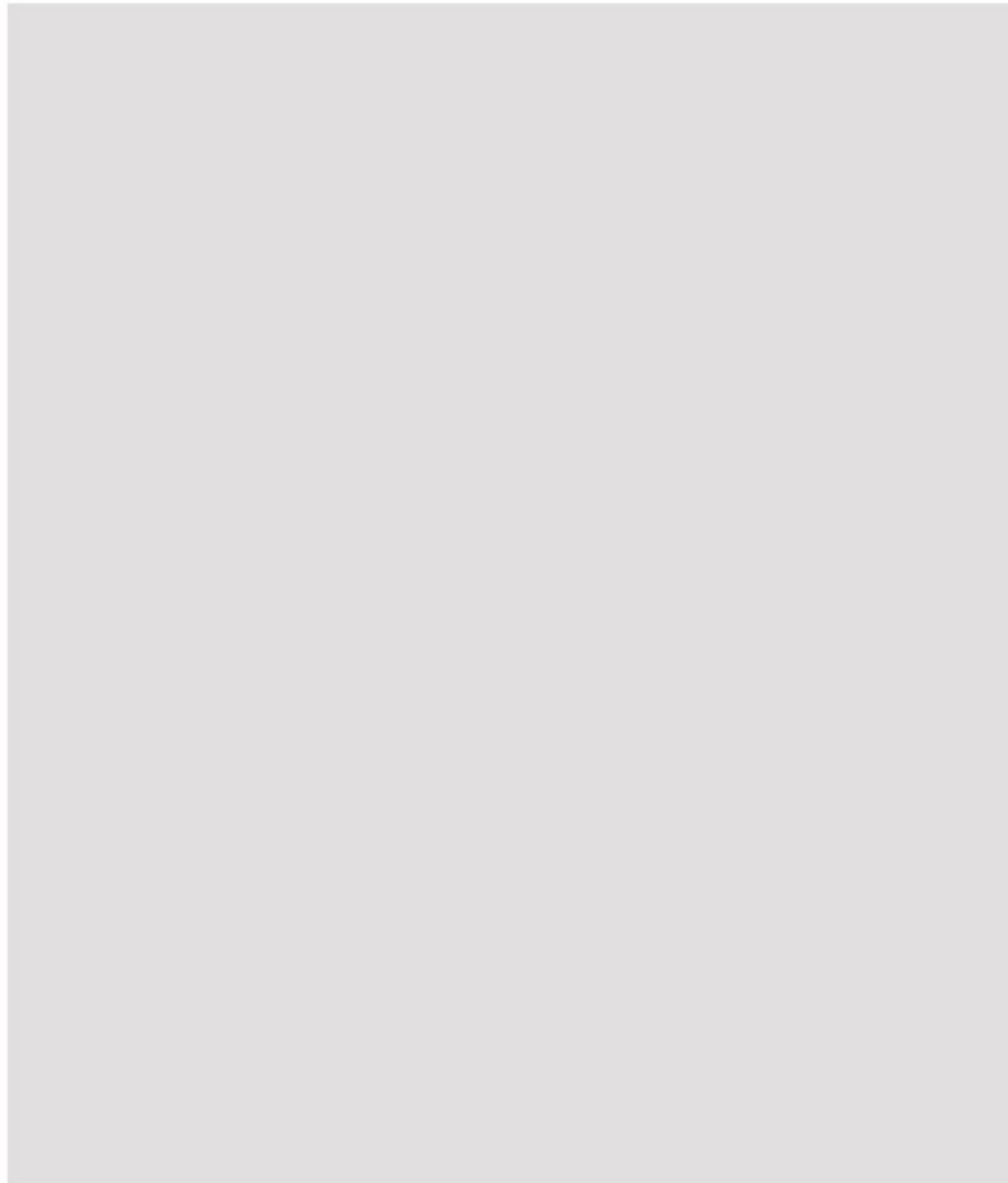
Friends of Ms. Livermore attribute her success to the time she takes getting to know people, her refusal to judge them for the things they want in a mate and the X-factor: her intuition.

When Irina Gerhard met Ms. Livermore, she found her to be startlingly upfront, asking about her interests, her goals, her job, even her weight. “She’s asking a lot of questions that some women wouldn’t appreciate,” Ms. Gerhard said. “But you know what? That gets her a database.”

Ms. Gerhard worked for Ms. Livermore for a couple of years but practically had to be coerced into accepting a date. “I thought I didn’t need any help,” Ms. Gerhard said. To get Ms. Livermore off her back, she said, she agreed to one. But only one. That man is now her husband.

“I thank Pari every day,” Ms. Gerhard said.

Ms. Livermore began setting people up to garner popularity when she was in high school. She sat on the opposing team’s bleachers during football games so she could meet kids from other schools and introduce them to her classmates. A Jane Austen fan (naturally) who believes that “every nice girl should get married,” she is decidedly feminine.



But her husband was not keen on her working as a professional matchmaker. “He said, ‘You know, in our family we don’t have businesses like that,’” she said. “His family didn’t do that. Most of the women didn’t work.” He gave his blessing, though, to matchmaking for charity.

Ms. Livermore’s latest enterprise, the book “How to Marry a Fabulous Man,” will be published on Tuesday (30

percent of the proceeds go to charity), and it includes advice about the merits of cooking for and otherwise being indispensable to a man, saying “I love you” (“Don’t say it first”) and never revealing one’s age.

“Men have very clear ideas what age they’re looking for,” she said. “If I see someone that’s right for him, I never lie but the way I avoid this is I say to women: ‘Don’t tell me your age but I’m going to guess you’re probably in your early 30s. That’s what I’m going to tell people.’”

Ms. Livermore — whose husband of 19 years does not know how old she is — tends to pair attractive younger women with financially successful men. Many have been married before.

MS. EMMINGER, 48, met Mr. Katz, 69, at the Red & White ball last April. She was volunteering as an escort, leading men into the ballroom. Mr. Katz found her dress appealing. He complimented her, danced with her, then told her to dance with other men because she looked too young. He wanted a woman with whom he could talk, one who had some “water under her bow,” one old enough, he said, to be utterly comfortable in her own skin. Besides, he had been burned before. When a 42-year-old woman he had been dating learned he was 24 years her elder, she said, “I can’t bring a guy home who’s older than my mother.”

“When I took the dagger out of my heart,” Mr. Katz said, “I said, ‘I ain’t ever going through this again.’”

But Ms. Emminger and Mr. Katz did not stay away from each other for long and, as Ms. Livermore advised, they did not discuss age until their relationship — which now includes golf outings, horseback riding and wine tasting — blossomed. By then, the years didn’t matter. They became engaged last week.

Ms. Livermore’s advice also came in handy for Gretchen Schomer Wendel, an author of children’s books who attempted to transition from girlfriend to wife by using what Ms. Livermore calls “the velvet hammer” — giving a boyfriend a sweet but serious one-month ultimatum.

“When a year rolled around he gave me some nice pearls and I was like, ‘That’s very nice but I don’t want pearls, I want a ring,’” said Ms. Wendel, who had met her noncommittal boyfriend through Ms. Livermore. “He turned white.”

He wanted six weeks to decide. Ms. Wendel gave him four.

“He waited to the last day of the four weeks,” she said.

She married Hal Wendel on May 20, 2000. They are the parents of Clayton, 5, and Megan, 2.