

I spent £27K looking for love... but met Mr Right at Tesco!

Julia Searle, 40, spent years searching for a man, only to find him in the most mundane place

Everyone has a defining moment when they realise things will never be the same again. Mine was on 23 October 2003 – the day I became a single woman after 17 years. I threw my husband, Paul, 47, out after seven years together when I discovered he'd had an affair.

It was my second marriage, but one I thought was for life. Now I was left to bring up our children, Arion, then three, and Vania, eight months, as well as two

children from a previous marriage, Tarkin, 14, and Suzan, 12.

Those first few months were awful. I felt rejected and I was terrified about how I was going to support my family.

The only way I could get through it was by focusing on the daily routine of our life in East Grinstead, West Sussex.

Gradually, friends began inviting me out. But I felt self-conscious about my figure as I'd put on weight through comfort-eating. I was 12st and a size 16, compared with 9st about 10 years before.

So I joined a gym in January 2004, and in four months I lost four stone and got to a size 10. Then, because my bust had shrunk from a 34C to an A cup, I decided to have a breast enlargement. I paid the £10,000 cost (I also had corrective surgery on a Caesarean scar) with the money that I'd invested in Paul's business.

I started working as a life coach so I could earn money working from home. Now,

finally, I had my curves back and a job to boost my confidence.

My friend Karen, 43, and I decided to go to a bar for a girls' night out. I was really nervous and worried I'd be so much older than everyone.

My heart sank when we walked in, as the bar was full of people in their twenties. I felt really uncomfortable and it was hard to even hear what Karen was saying.

But she dragged me over to the dance floor, and after a couple of glasses of wine I started enjoying myself. By the end of the evening I'd given my number to a man who was an estate agent.

The next morning I woke up hungover and swore I'd never get drunk again. To make matters worse, the estate agent rang to ask me on a date. I was so embarrassed as I couldn't even



Julia with her children, Vania, Tarkin, Suzan and Arion



After the break-up, Julia's weight shot up to 12st

'I worried I'd be so much older'

remember his name. It scared me that I'd got so out of control.

In February 2005, my friend Amy, 53, and I decided to try a Valentines party. But everyone was 60-plus and female, aside from five men in their seventies.

So for the next year, I got into a habit of going clubbing every Saturday, which cost about £70 a week. Most of the men I met were only after a one-night stand, which I wasn't interested in.

I met Matt, 26, an electrician,

REAL LIFE LOVE

My love cheque

What I spent looking for love in four years...

- Internet dating – £140
- Nights out (includes travel, club entry, drinks) – £8,200
- Singles Valentines party – £30
- Babysitting – £1,920
- Haircuts/highlights (four times a year) – £1,280
- New clothes and shoes – £2,400
- Setting up WinEntwine – £1,539
- Cosmetic surgery – £10,000
- Gym membership – £1,920

Total: £27,429

man with grey hair in his forties. We got chatting, and he introduced himself as Rolf Mears. I felt such chemistry, and I found myself giving him my business card, hoping he'd get in touch.

The next day I got an email saying how much he'd enjoyed meeting me, and over the next weeks we chatted by email and finally by phone.

He was 47 and had been through a marriage break-up 18 months ago, like me. He also had two sons, aged seven and nine, and we had so much in common.

When he asked to take me out to a restaurant near my home, I was really excited.

On our date, there was no awkwardness, he was attentive and interesting, and I found I could talk about my life without feeling he'd run for the hills just because I had children.

We've been dating ever since, and although it's only been a couple of months, we've admitted we want a future together. It's just ironic that, in the end, I met Mr Right without even trying!

● For information on Julia's events, see www.winentwine.co.uk.



Similar life experiences helped Julia and Rolf connect

PERFECT MATCH

who I dated for a few weeks. It was flattering to be desired by a younger man, but it ended after I went out with his friends. It was like being with my daughter's friends!

In January 2006, I decided to try internet dating. I joined Match.com, Dating Direct.com and Wealthy Men.com.

After emailing and chatting on the phone with Peter, 42, a scientist who came across as intelligent and caring, I met him in a bar. In his picture he looked attractive with a full head of hair, but when I met him he was bald. It was nice to talk to someone my age, though. We met a couple of times after that but it fizzled out.

Over the next year, I dated six

men. Graham, 30, was the only one that lasted for any length of time – just over three months. It ended because we were at different life stages. He wanted children, and I'd done all of that.

By the end of 2006, I'd given up with internet dating. So when my friend Neia, 41, invited me to join a wine club I jumped at the idea.

I had a fantastic night – there were married couples, women like myself and businessmen, although no one was looking for a relationship. But it gave me the idea of setting up my own wine club-cum-introduction agency,

WinEntwine, in October 2007.

It was a way of starting up a new business and also hopefully helping me to find a partner. My friends joked that I'd go to such lengths to find a man!

I spent £1,539 on setting the company up, including the website and advertising, and the first event was on 27 December 2007.

A week before, I went to Tesco with Amy to buy the wine. We were trying to decide which type to choose when a man interrupted us to give his advice. As I turned, I saw an attractive

DID YOU KNOW?

There are currently 1.2 million British women in their forties looking for love.