

Bereavement doesn't have to break your heart forever

Elaine Keogh

For those who have been widowed, a dating agency can help in the search for a new relationship

Looking for love can be a perilous journey at the best of times but if you have been widowed and reached the point where you feel you are ready to start another relationship, you may find the challenge of trying to find the right person, perhaps for the second or third time, particularly daunting.

For Jennifer Haskins (51), relationships are literally her bread and butter. It was her own experience that led her, with her now life and business partner Bill Whelan (62), to start Two's Company, an introduction agency for professionals, in 2008.

They carefully interview clients before matching them and Haskins says, "We never get people looking for a one night stand or a fling."

They trade on confidentiality and among their 500 or so clients aged between 26 and 71 years are politicians, celebrities and other high-profile names.

Haskins says they have experience in introducing people who have been bereaved and are aware of the issues that can accompany the search for love in such circumstances.

"There can be other issues with their family; sometimes they feel they need per-

mission from others to move on and there is no set timeframe for this, each individual is different.

"The person can feel guilty that they are moving on and their family may not accept that. If they have children, they may feel it is something the children do not approve of and they don't want to discuss it with them.

"They don't want the children to feel they are being disloyal. Or it may be that there hasn't been the perceived time lapse."

Proactive in love

As a divorcee and mother of three, Haskins believes we should be as proactive in love as we are in other parts of our life.

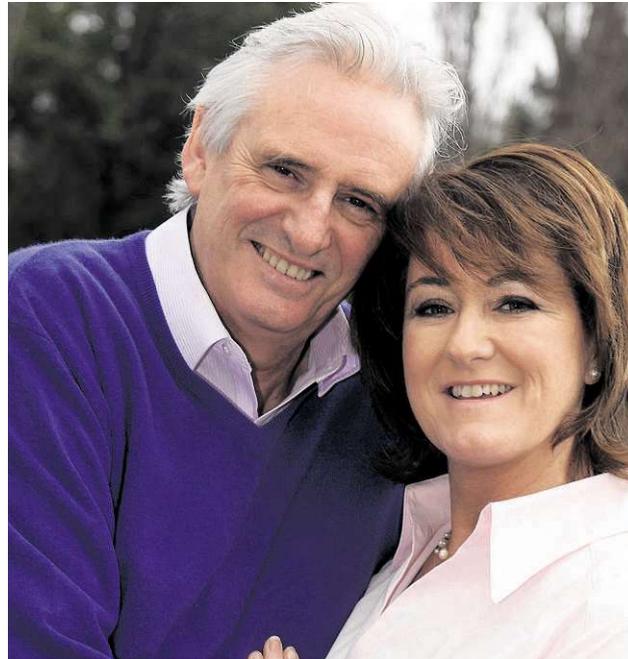
"If you want something in life, you have to be pro-active whether it's sport, your career or love. When it comes to our love-lives we are taught as children to believe that love 'happens' to you rather than you making it happen."

Her experience is that widowers tend to look earlier for another partner than widows and, "I think it goes back to the fact that women have girlfriends they can discuss these things with and men generally don't.

"Men only really tend to discuss personal issues, emotional issues with women so if they have had a wife or a partner for all those years, that link to them being able to express themselves emotionally has been severed so there is no other outlet unless they have a good female friend to talk to."

The perceived emotional baggage that comes with someone who has been bereaved can mean different things to different people, she has found.

A number of years ago Haskins was intro-



■ Jennifer Haskins and Bill Whelan: life and business partners who started introduction agency Two's Company.

duced by a dating agency to a widower whose wife had passed away six months previously. "When I met him I almost ran a mile because my attitude was I really don't need somebody who is only six months bereaved. He did get emotional. He was wearing his wedding ring. He had children. To me it was different baggage but still baggage."

However, a girlfriend of hers had a similar experience some years ago when she was introduced to a man who was also wid-

owed for a number of months.

"She said that when she first met him he spoke incessantly about his deceased wife and his children and my comment was most women would run a mile at that. My friend had been through a very bad marriage and she thought it was brilliant the way he spoke about his wife with such love and about his children with such tenderness.

"She looked at him and thought 'I want that, I want to be loved and cherished in that way and if that man is capable of doing it once, he is capable of doing it a second time.'" The couple are now happily married.

Foundations for future love

Haskins believes bereavement after a good marriage can lay the foundations for future love. "On the plus side it can be that they believe in love. If they had a good marriage, they believe in love."

Someone who has been through a protracted and bitter divorce, "may not necessarily believe in the love the same way as someone who had a very good marriage and the other person died. The bereaved don't see anything wrong going forward and doing it again because, for them love exists, it is possible and it is probable."

The agency has a wedding this spring of a widow and widower who Haskins introduced last March.

She says that they also meet people who are not ready to move on and they have put them in touch with the grief support group Beginning Experience.

Two's Company has clients from all over Ireland but holds its interviews in Cork, Dublin, Galway and Limerick.