

Love comes naturally

Finding love in a dating challenge may seem contrived but Jackie Goh and Mint Leong share that it has come very naturally to them. by SHERENE KANG

Love is not without its challenges but that's not necessarily a bad thing for Jackie Goh and Mint Leong, both 26. Sparks first flew when they were faced with one. Both parties, who were single then, were participants in The New Paper Dating Challenge organised by the Social Development Network (SDN) in 2009.

Throughout a span of five weeks, the eight finalists, four women and four men, were tasked to perform a series of challenges in different couple teams. These challenges included building a sandcastle, pizza-making and laser combat.

"Mint and I just happened to be teamed up together most of the time," says Jackie, an air traffic controller, who had been single for two years at that point. "When we first met, I learnt that she was juggling work commitments and studies at the same time. Her diligence caught my attention... and I found her attractive too," confesses Jackie.

However, Mint had her reservations. "I had been single for a year and met many guys who were very playful," says the professional blogger and video jockey. "I was also sceptical about whether such matchmaking events really worked and merely joined for the purpose of making new friends," she says.

NICE GUYS STILL EXIST

Mint soon warmed up to Jackie's personality when they were paired during the sandcastle-building

challenge at East Coast Park. The activity not only brought them together, but also helped them to reflect on the effort it took to build a relationship.

"We realised that building a successful sandcastle was like building a lasting relationship — both require a strong foundation. When Jackie described himself to be fun-loving, filial, honest and open-minded, it struck me that this fitted the qualities that I was looking for in a partner," Mint notes with a smile.

Jackie quickly seized the opportunity to accompany Mint for a manicure after the challenge. "Even though it was our first date, it was more of a spontaneous thing," says Jackie. He had wanted to get to know Mint better outside of the challenge.

Even though their first date was a brief one, Mint was touched by Jackie's earnest and down to earth personality. "I thought I would never meet the guy-next-door or be in a relationship again. Then, Jackie came along," quips Mint.

FANNING THE FLAME

It was not long before Jackie and Mint realised they were meant for each other. By the third week of the challenge, the rest of the contestants realised that these two were a lot closer than when they started out. "When they found out that Jackie and



I were seeing each other, they were happy for us and encouraged us to continue hanging out," adds Mint.

After the challenge ended, the couple continued to explore activities together. "I'm open to the new things that Mint suggests," says Jackie. He had taken up Mint's offer of trying the Sentosa MegaZip on his 25th birthday.

The adventurous couple also rediscovered Singapore together by having dates at the Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve, Singapore Science Centre and East Coast Park.

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

However, it wasn't always a smooth journey for both Jackie and Mint as the couple had to deal with personality differences. "I am more outspoken and Jackie tends to be more introverted," admits Mint. "At times, I may get flustered when I find that he is too quiet or passive."

Fortunately, the couple has received strong support from family and friends. "There was once we had a quarrel and I was reconsidering the relationship," Mint recalls. "His friends came all the way to my house to help me work it out and I was touched by their gesture."

The couple now has a new common interest — Bubble, a two-year-old toy poodle which Jackie bought two years ago to cheer Mint up when she was getting too stressed at work. The pair enjoys taking turns to bring Bubble for grooming sessions. They also organise regular 'dog-meet'

sessions with their friends — it's a chance for them (and their dogs) to catch up over a cup of coffee.

THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

For Jackie who is calm by nature, one of the most nerve-wracking moments in his life was when he proposed to Mint in January this year, at the Singapore Zoological Gardens.

"I noticed he was not himself that day and was looking very pale," says Mint. "He was vomiting and even lost his appetite for lunch!"

Prior to the actual proposal, Jackie's plans had already been thwarted twice. "I had planned to propose during a cable car ride but Mint told me she was afraid of heights. Then I wanted to get down on one knee at the end of The New Paper Big Walk but Mint said she was not interested to join this year," says Jackie.

But Jackie's persistence paid off and he found the opportunity

to propose on Mint's 26th birthday. Knowing how much his girlfriend loves dogs, he arranged for the birthday girl to be called on stage during a dog show at the zoo.

"I hid my hair band in one of the boxes and the performing dog not only uncovered it but also found a love letter written by Jackie. It was then, in front of 300 people, that Jackie appeared and popped the question," says Mint.

The couple will be tying the knot early next year and they are looking forward to the completion of their flat in 2014. As both Jackie and Mint were single for some time before they found love, they agree that keeping an open mind and an open heart are important aspects in helping them find each other. "I was sceptical about finding love in a dating challenge but I came to realise that love, regardless of the context, happens very naturally," says Mint.



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