

A Gokon fairytale



Accompanying friends to the inaugural 'Let's Gokon!' event organised by SDN paid off royally for Stanley Lim and Melissa Yeong. The newlyweds tell DUET how they found true love, Gokon style. by STELLA THING



A Japanese buffet lunch party held at The Heeren's Shokudo Streets of Japan turned out to be the best lunch deal Stanley Lim, 37, ever had. "A male colleague had heard about the inaugural 'Let's Gokon!' event organised by SDN in June 2009, and asked me to join him," says the IT analyst. He got more than his money's worth that day — on top of a yummy meal, he also met his soulmate.

Although Stanley had already attended several dating events, such as wine tastings and rollerblading outings, this was his first Gokon party. The term 'Gokon' refers to 'a combined party' where friends are encouraged to bring their own friends to a gathering, while ensuring an equal mix of guys and girls. This popular networking trend started in Japan, and was introduced by SDN in 2009 to popularise the social networking concept and encourage singles to start their own Gokon parties.

GIRLS CAN MAKE THE FIRST MOVE TOO

Melissa Yeong, 38, was part of a group of six who had signed up for the same event. At first, she was overwhelmed by the 300-strong turnout, but quickly realised that this wasn't necessarily a bad thing. "I saw it as a good chance to meet different people," says the executive assistant in an IT company. "After all, my aim that day was to meet new friends, and hopefully a potential partner!"

The Gokon party had plentiful opportunities for participants to mingle and interact over fun games and a buffet lunch. Every participant was also given six specially-designed cards to record their contact details, and pass them to their new-found friends. "I actually made the first move to pass Stanley my card," says Melissa candidly. "We were not sitting at the same table but I noticed him because he's pleasant looking. Something inside me just prompted me to go up to him. I felt a little shy at first

because it was the first time I'd ever approached a guy. But I decided to be brave and talk to him. He looked shocked!" she recalls, with a laugh.

The pair exchanged contact details, but Melissa was so busy with work after the event that she did not get in touch with any of the guys who had given her their cards. Two weeks later, Stanley called instead, and asked her out.

SWEPT AWAY

After dinner at a Japanese restaurant in Ngee Ann City, they went to a café. "We ended up chatting till almost 1am," recalls Stanley. "I had a very good impression of her. She's an attractive girl and I liked her smile. I knew I definitely wanted to see her again."

Melissa was equally charmed by his gentlemanly ways. "He'd always ask for my opinion before making any decisions, even if it was something as small as choosing a restaurant for dinner," says Melissa. After dating for three months, she finally agreed to be his girlfriend.

The couple enjoyed little pleasures, like shooting the breeze at East Coast Park over a bottle of wine and touring cities like Taipei and Bangkok. "My criterion for a girlfriend was very simple — I just wanted someone who loves me. Melissa definitely exceeded my expectations. She's someone I treasure, and I want to take care of her for the rest of my life," says Stanley.

Melissa, a devout Christian, was also sure she'd been guided in her search for Mr Right by prayer. "I wanted a Christian man who is honest, faithful, generous and gracious — and Stanley is all of these. Previously, I'd always thought I'd prefer a much older guy. When I met Stanley, I didn't expect that a guy a year younger than me would be so mature. Age was no longer an issue."

OVERCOMING DIFFICULTIES

However, love is never without its challenges. Melissa confesses that before Stanley became a Christian, there were some things that he couldn't understand due to the differences in their beliefs. On the other hand, Stanley was at times put off by Melissa's untidiness. "I'm an organised person and I used to get a little irritated, but it's just a matter of compromise. I've accepted her for who she is. Now, I help her to tidy up," says Stanley.

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SWEET PROPOSAL

Nine months after they started dating, Stanley surprised Melissa by popping the question during a getaway in Phuket. "I had discussed it with a close friend about whether I should propose at the restaurant or at the beach, with soft music playing in the background. But I'm a rather private person and I didn't want to attract too much attention. Eventually, I pulled out the ring and went down on one knee in our villa."

A teary-eyed Melissa said "Yes!", and the couple celebrated their wedding last November with a reception at Goodwood Park Hotel. They are currently staying with Melissa's family while they hunt for their own home. They also hope to start planning for kids.

MAKE GOKON WORK FOR YOU

The blissful pair has the 'Let's Gokon!' event to thank. "I think the Gokon concept of having participants bring their fellow single friends to a social gathering is a good idea," says Stanley. "Having your friends around in a casual and relaxed environment will boost your confidence. They can also help keep the conversation going. Even if they tease you in front of the ladies, it's all in the name of good clean fun."

Melissa agrees, although she also points out some cons. "While you may feel more motivated to attend a Gokon event because your friends will be there too, I've noticed that some people stick to their cliques instead of mingling. A lot depends on your personality and how much you want to interact with others. My friend and I made it a point to walk around, check out potential new friends and chat with them."

If the right opportunity comes along, Melissa may also plan a Gokon gathering for her friends. "In fact, I've already been informally introducing some of my friends to Stanley's buddies though we haven't made a match yet!"

Her new hubby adds, "A colleague was so motivated by our love story that he's been actively joining singles events. He's made so many new friends and has since pulled along other single male colleagues." ■



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