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Elena Wechsler and John Simpson

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Stew Milne for The New York Times

LITTLE COMPTON, R.I., MAY 10 The couple with their wedding tent in the background.

By ANN HOOD Published: May 18, 2008

IT came as no surprise to anyone who knew her that Dr. Elena Wechsler would find herself with a man who won her heart with ducks. Her childhood home in Glen Mills, Pa., was often referred to as the zoo by friends. Besides caring for the family's own menagerie, Dr. Wechsler's mother, a veterinarian, was known to care for an injured flying squirrel in the bathtub or give dialysis to a dog in the kitchen.

E-MAIL PRINT REPRINTS SAVE SHARE Young @ Heart

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Stew Milne for The New York Times The couple with their mothers.

So when John Pierre Simpson, the founder of MacImage of Maine, a software firm, asked Dr. Wechsler, then a Harvard radiology instructor, to meet him at the Make Way for Ducklings sculpture in Boston Public Garden for their first date, it seemed a good sign.

Mr. Simpson, 46, and Dr. Wechsler, 38, found each other online, but only after some coaching from Rachel Greenwald, author of "Find a Husband After 35: Using What I Learned at Harvard Business School."

Three years ago a review of that book spurred Dr. Wechsler's parents, now of Little Compton, R.I., to consult with Ms. Greenwald, who charges \$2,000 to \$5,000 a day, depending on what is needed.

The author recalled being told by David Wechsler that his daughter "had done everything right professionally, but he was worried that she wasn't making dating a

priority.”

“This was marriage 911,” Ms. Greenwald said. Soon, Dr. Wechsler and her mother, Louise, flew to Denver to see the author. Ms. Greenwald was struck by Dr. Wechsler’s personal warmth but learned that in her dating life part of her personality was often hidden behind the professional demeanor she projected. The author suggested that she not approach dating as if it were a job interview, and guided her in preparing an online dating profile and on makeup, jewelry, clothes and accessories. “She needed a coat that made a statement, a coat that said, ‘I’ve got pizzazz,’ ” Ms. Greenwald said.

It took Dr. Wechsler a year to get started, but when she did, she began going on two to three dates a day. Then she found Mr. Simpson’s online profile, which read, Your birthday and Valentine’s Day are likely to be my favorite holidays. “I loved this,” Dr. Wechsler said, “because Valentine’s Day *is* my birthday.”

After having seen his social life dwindle to six or seven dates over a couple of years, Mr. Simpson also sought to improve his odds by consulting “Double Your Dating” by David DeAngelo and other advice books. “At my age, and living in Maine, my options were getting limited,” Mr. Simpson said. Because going online allows for getting past “the awkward stuff” early, “when you finally do get together, it becomes obvious within a few seconds if you want the date to end quickly.” he said. “I didn’t want my date with Elena to end.”

Like Dr. Wechsler, he was looking for somebody educated and outdoorsy. On that first date last June, they boarded a Boston Duck, an amphibious tour vehicle, and things started to click. But it was later, as they watched the sunset, when Mr. Simpson won her heart. “He told me a story about when he was canoeing and accidentally disrupted a mother duck and her babies,” she said. “One of the ducklings got separated, and John took it home with him. That night, the duckling cried so much that John took it into bed with him and kept it on his chest all night.”

“Successful women are looking for someone to take care of them, too,” she continued. “I thought if he loved that duckling that much, he could love me too.” That night Dr. Wechsler said to herself, “I’m done.”

Friends took notice of this fast-developing relationship. “I have seen Elena through a lot of boyfriends,” said Laura Benoit, a friend. “But I have never seen her float on a cloud like this.”

It did not take long for Mr. Simpson to decide on her, either. “Elena has a certain warmth and a sharp mind that I found very appealing,” he said. “That’s why, by the third date, I knew I didn’t want to lose her.”

In October, barely half a year after they met, he took Dr. Wechsler on a car ride up Mount Washington in New Hampshire. Mr. Simpson imagined the view would make for a perfect proposal. But then he began noticing the gas gauge sinking, a freezing wind picking up, and signs announcing that the mountain was closing for the season that very day. “Elena thinks of me as very calm, so when she took my hand and it was sweaty, she started to worry,” he said.

Moments after the proposal an image of the engagement ring on Dr. Wechsler’s finger was on its way to her mother’s cellphone. “Knights in shining armor appear differently in 2008,” the bride’s mother said at the wedding, “often through Dells and Macs.”

On the evening of May 10 the bride appeared in her mother’s 42-year-old wedding dress and walked down a rose-petal-strewn aisle behind her parents’ home in Little Compton, just as her mother had always dreamed. Mr. Simpson’s father, the Rev. Earle B. Simpson Jr. of Sumner, Me., a retired Lutheran minister, officiated, with Rabbi Howard A. Berman participating.

“John’s books all told him that women fall for confident men,” the bride said. “But Rachel told me to always look for a guy with a dorky walk. They make good husbands.”

And when she saw the man she would marry walking toward her for the first time, she recalled thinking: “This guy walks like a duck.” Which to Dr. Wechsler is a very good thing.