

FROM LISDOONVARNA

WITH *love*

*Inspired by Ireland
to help others find love*

When South African widow Marleze Nolan made the 13,000km trip to Lisdoonvarna last year, she was like thousands of others looking for love at the village's annual matchmaking festival. What she didn't expect was that the trip to the west of Ireland would be the start of a life changing journey. Now the 47-year-old is organising her own matchmaking festival in Johannesburg in March and is also planning to relocate to Ireland within the next year.

"I heard about the Lisdoonvarna matchmaking festival from an Irish couple who stayed at my guesthouse in South Africa last year. They told me about the non-stop music and dancing sessions and the famous matchmaker Willie Daly and I was immediately hooked," she says.

"I have always felt a strong connection with Ireland, especially as my maiden name, Nolan, is Irish. I have visited the country twice in the past couple of years and it really felt like home.

"In South Africa, it is difficult to meet people, we don't have gatherings or dances for the over-40s, these are mainly for young people. So to hear about a mass singles event for all age groups was very exciting."

After looking online and finding more about the event, Marleze booked her ticket and arrived in Lisdoonvarna along with her adult son for the first weekend of the festival.

"I didn't really know what to expect, but when I arrived the village was buzzing. Country music star Mike Denver was headlining and there were thousands of people, young and old, all mixing together having the most wonderful time. I spent



"In South Africa, it is difficult to meet people"



all night jiving with different partners. It was honestly one of the best nights of my life."

Marleze stayed in the area for the next month and enjoyed many days and nights in Lisdoonvarna. But it was only after her son left that she began her search for love in earnest. Her first port of call was matchmaker Willie Daly, whom she had previously contacted in South Africa.

"I met Willie at his farm just outside Lisdoonvarna and he immediately made me feel at ease. He has this amazing ability to give you hope, hope that there is someone special out there.

"He did 'match' me with a few men but unfortunately there was no spark. However, I didn't mind too much as I'd met a few guys myself at the festival and have a feeling that it won't be long before I find love," she added.

Marleze's husband was murdered following a robbery in Johannesburg in 2003. His body wasn't recovered for 11 days. This

By Julie Carr