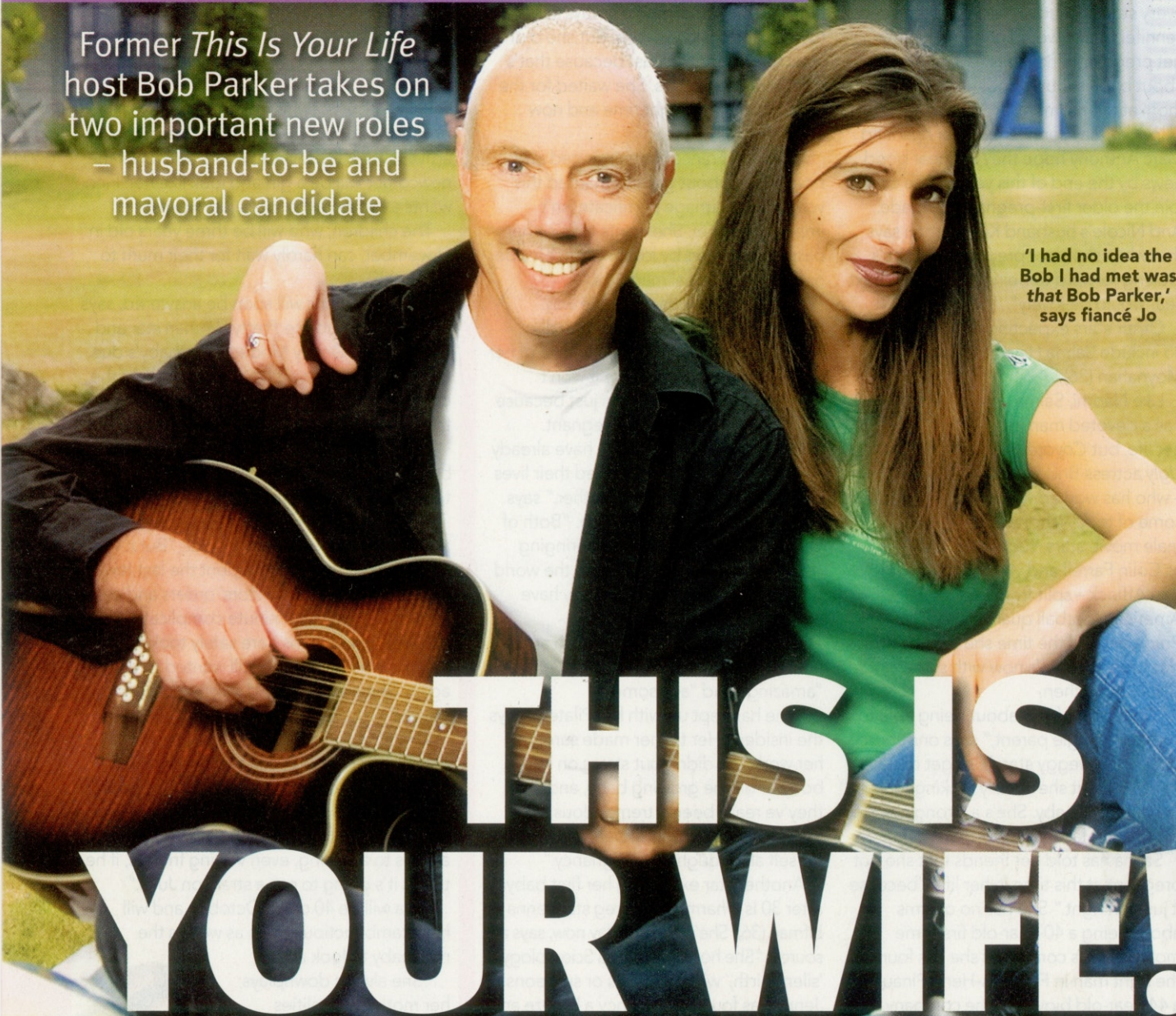


Former *This Is Your Life* host Bob Parker takes on two important new roles – husband-to-be and mayoral candidate

'I had no idea the Bob I had met was that Bob Parker,' says fiancé Jo



THIS IS YOUR WIFE!

When Johanna Nicholls first visited Bob Parker at his central Christchurch office, she spied a framed photo of a young man in large glasses on his wall. "Oh!" she exclaimed, "You know that guy from *This Is Your Life*!"

Such is the transformation – from the dark-haired TV host to South Island local body politician – that artist Jo had not made the connection that the man she was dating and is now engaged to was also a beloved Kiwi TV personality.

"I don't know what normally happens to people when they meet someone with a profile like Bob's, but whatever that is, I didn't experience it because I had no idea the Bob I had met was *that* Bob Parker," she laughs.

A theatre enthusiast, Bob met Jo while performing a role in a repertory production of a Noel Coward play in 1999.

"I had finished with TV – or, at least, TV had finished with me – when the play's director rang me and asked me to take this part," Bob (56) recalls. "She told me, 'You'll be playing opposite this really gorgeous woman,' which of course was a very nice incentive!"

Father-of-three Bob says meeting Jo (36) for the first time was a memorable moment. "I liked her instantly," he says. "I thought she was beautiful and that she possessed a lot of special qualities."

Jo smiles. "One thing led to another – much to our director's chagrin. She thought that we weren't being at all professional! We broke the rules a bit."

The smitten couple began dating, dividing their time between Bob's historic Akaroa home and Jo's city dwelling until "at some stage we just sort of merged," says Bob. "We became inseparable."

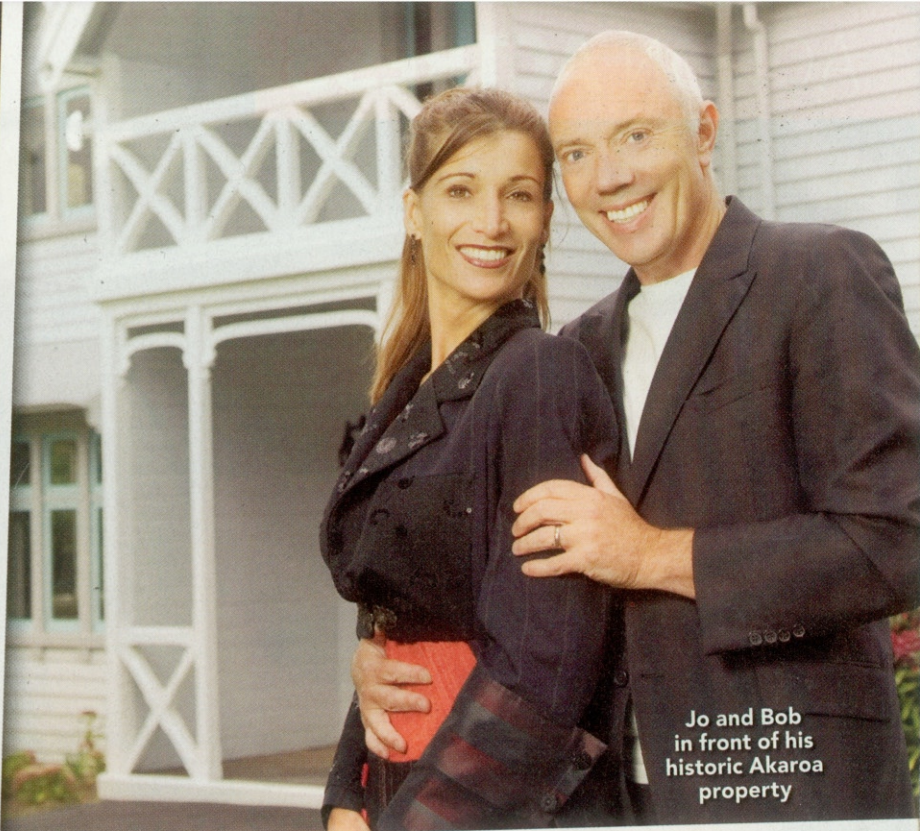
The 18-year difference in their ages and their different backgrounds only enhanced their blossoming relationship. Bob had previously been married to Anne, with whom he has adult sons Nicholas, Anson and Daniel. With a young family at home, he had never had the opportunity to travel extensively, while self-confessed free spirit Jo enjoyed her life as an art auctioneer, spending several months of each year overseas. Both say they have learned a lot from each other.

"For me," says Jo, "it was the first time that I had handed my life over to someone

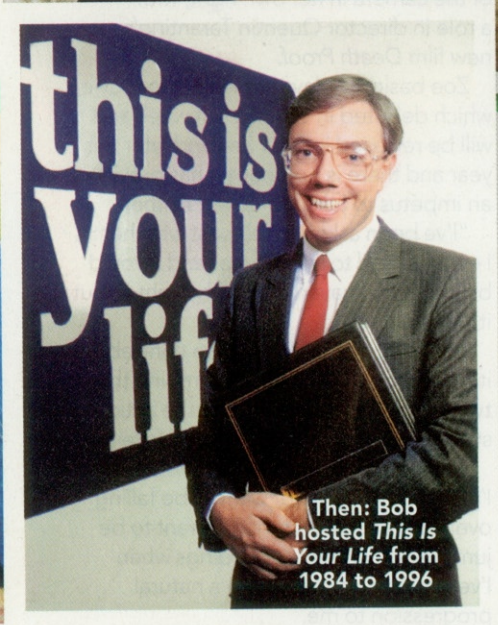


Now: Bob is a local body politician in the South Island

PHOTOS: SIMON BAKER



Jo and Bob in front of his historic Akaroa property



Then: Bob hosted *This Is Your Life* from 1984 to 1996

“We’ve tested our commitment... and it’s solid. Our relationship will stand the test of time”

I would be working for things I believed in. I simply love local government. It’s an area in which I’ve found that many of the skills I’ve learned in the past – organisational and communication skills, for instance – come to the fore.”

Then came Bob’s decision, when the Banks Peninsula and Christchurch City Councils merged last year, to run for the Christchurch mayoralty.

Elections take place in October – but before then, there’s a merger of a different sort to plan.

“Johanna proposed to me on a beach in Queensland last year and I said yes,” Bob reveals, grinning from ear to ear.

Indeed, Jo admits that she took matters into her own hands when, after one particularly gruelling six-month stint overseas away from her man, she decided she wanted Bob to become her husband.

“To formalise our relationship had never been a major consideration before – I’d never felt any need to ‘claim’ Bob in any greater capacity than that which we have,” admits Jo.

“But I’d experienced such a great journey with Bob and after that trip, I realised I had reached a place where I knew I wanted to marry him. We were in Surfer’s Paradise and we were talking loosely about marriage so I simply said,

‘Bob, I think we should get married. I want us to make this commitment to each other.’ And he agreed.”

“How could I refuse?” Bob laughs. “It was a lovely spontaneous moment. I was lying on a beautiful beach, alongside a beautiful woman with whom I was – and am – completely in love.”

Bob and Jo each wear an engagement ring, and Bob jokes that his wife-to-be has started leaving diamond brochures around the house in the hope that one will grace her wedding band. The couple will marry in September.

“In spring,” explains Bob, “because it marks the beginning of something new, and that appeals to me.”

Far from being nervous about his upcoming nuptials, Bob says he can’t wait to make Jo his wife. “She’s always supported me in whatever challenges I have taken on in my life,” he says. “She’s my best friend.”

“This marriage is, in some ways, really only a small step because we’ve been in a ‘married’ sort of relationship for a number of years now.

“I’m not leaping into an abyss – we’ve tested our commitment to each other, and it’s solid. Our relationship will stand the test of time.”

Fiona Fraser

else and trusted that person to take care of it. I don’t think I would necessarily have done that with someone my own age.”

Bob’s youngest son Dan, who lived with the couple while studying to become a journalist, became “a brother” to Jo, who says it was a huge learning experience welcoming him into her life.

“At times he’s been a rival; at times a friend,” she says frankly. “But, of course, we are all adults and have always been mature with each other.”

During their early years together, Bob moved away from life as a performer, and stood for Mayor of Banks Peninsula. He says Jo supported him 100% as he campaigned for, and won, the position. “We both knew that if I won it would be a massive commitment, but also that