

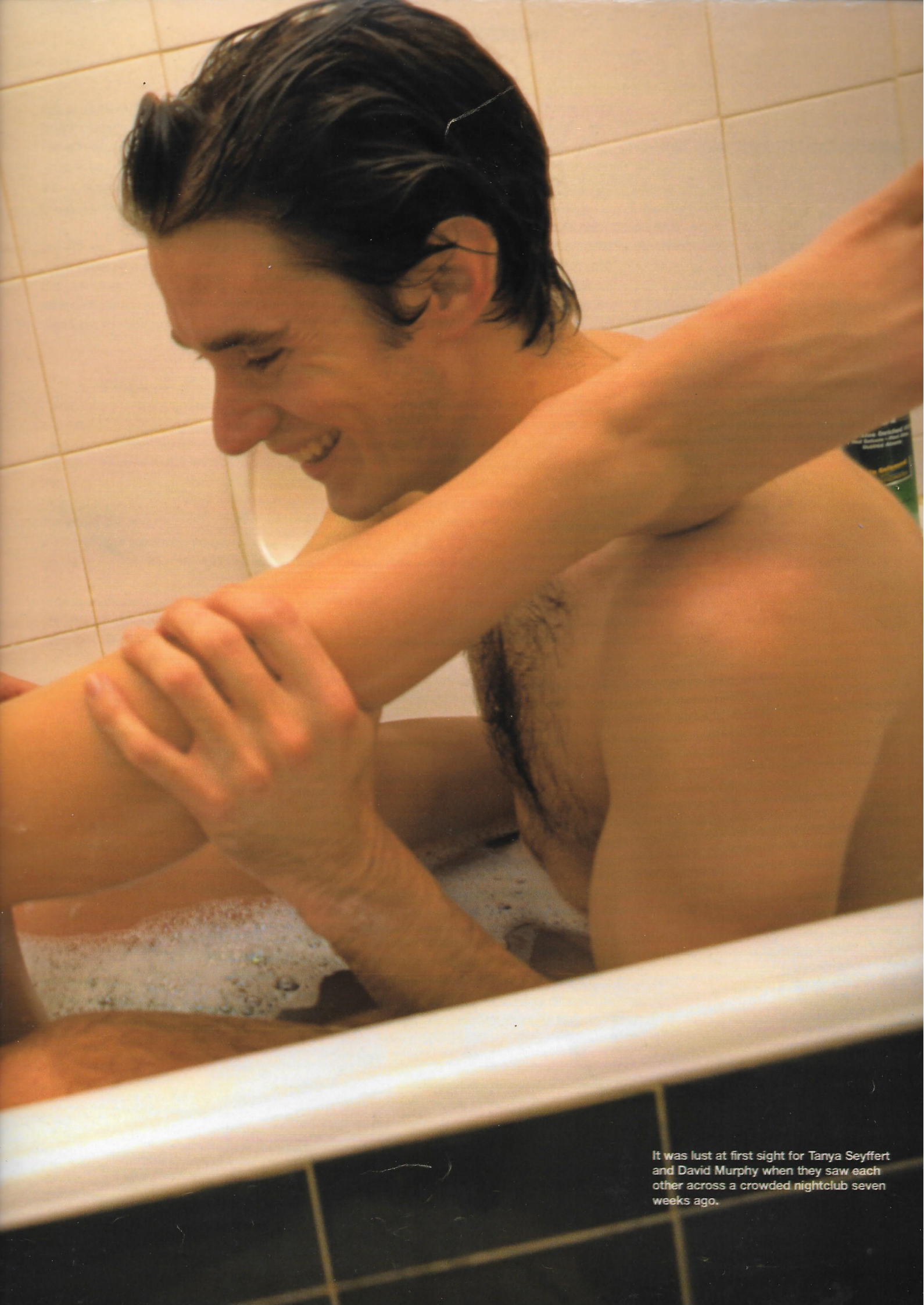
relationships

seven up

From the headiness of seven weeks to the solidity of seven decades, Jo Lennox snaps four relationships at different stages.

Photography: Nick Aldridge.





It was lust at first sight for Tanya Seyffert and David Murphy when they saw each other across a crowded nightclub seven weeks ago.

7 weeks

Tanya Seyffert, 23, sales executive

It was instant magic when, for the first time, our eyes locked across a crowded nightclub. I was out with my ex-boyfriend when I saw David looking at me. We stared at each other for some time, then he pointed to a room at the back of the club and I met him there. We didn't say anything at first — he just grabbed me and kissed me abruptly. I kept saying, 'This is radical, this is radical' — I'd never before experienced such immediate physical attraction with anyone.

"We exchanged names and phone numbers and he called two days later to make a date for drinks. We immediately hit it off and scheduled a more formal dinner date, as he was about to leave the country for a month. David got the flat numbers confused and ended up knocking on my neighbours' door, so we never went out. I thought I'd been stood up and was devastated, but he phoned the next day and we cleared up the misunderstanding. While he was abroad, he phoned almost every night. When I saw him again, the magic was stronger than ever.

"We had sex for the first time the day David got back. Waiting was worth it — the sex exceeded all my expectations and fantasies. We see each other almost every day, but we don't have plans

to move in together yet — that would just complicate matters at this stage. I've discovered that he's a bit messy and doesn't know how to clean up after himself; he doesn't replace the toothpaste cap either, but I can learn to live with that!

"I enjoy the pace of our relationship — nothing about it feels wrong. I enjoy his company and we have loads of fun. We haven't discussed a long-term commitment yet — we just take it for granted that we'll be faithful to each other. I haven't met his family as they live in Zimbabwe, but hopefully he'll meet mine soon. He's the man I want to marry, and if he's reluctant to ask, I'll just have to wait for the next leap year and ask him myself!"

David Murphy, 21, law student

"I was attracted to Tanya from the moment I saw her and I wasn't going to let an ex-boyfriend stand in my way. The attraction was definitely physical at first — the chemistry between us was incredibly strong. I knew taking her out was the next step.

"When we met, I lied about my age. I told her I was 23; she only discovered my true age about three weeks ago when I let it slip. Luckily it didn't bother her in the least.

"I missed her when I went away, but it gave us time to get to know each other over the phone, and our strong physical attraction couldn't get in the way of our 'talking time'.

"Tanya and I are very comfortable together; things happen naturally between us. She's a

dynamic person and her determination to get what she wants is part of what attracted me to her in the first place. I'm happy to say we haven't had a fight yet. You can't deny our sexual compatibility, but there's more to it than that — we sometimes just stare at each other without saying a word, but we're saying everything.

"I suppose I'm ready to commit. I've met her brother and will meet the rest of the family soon. I'm flattered that she wants to marry me, but I must admit that I don't give things like this much thought — I'd rather face each day as it comes."

7 months

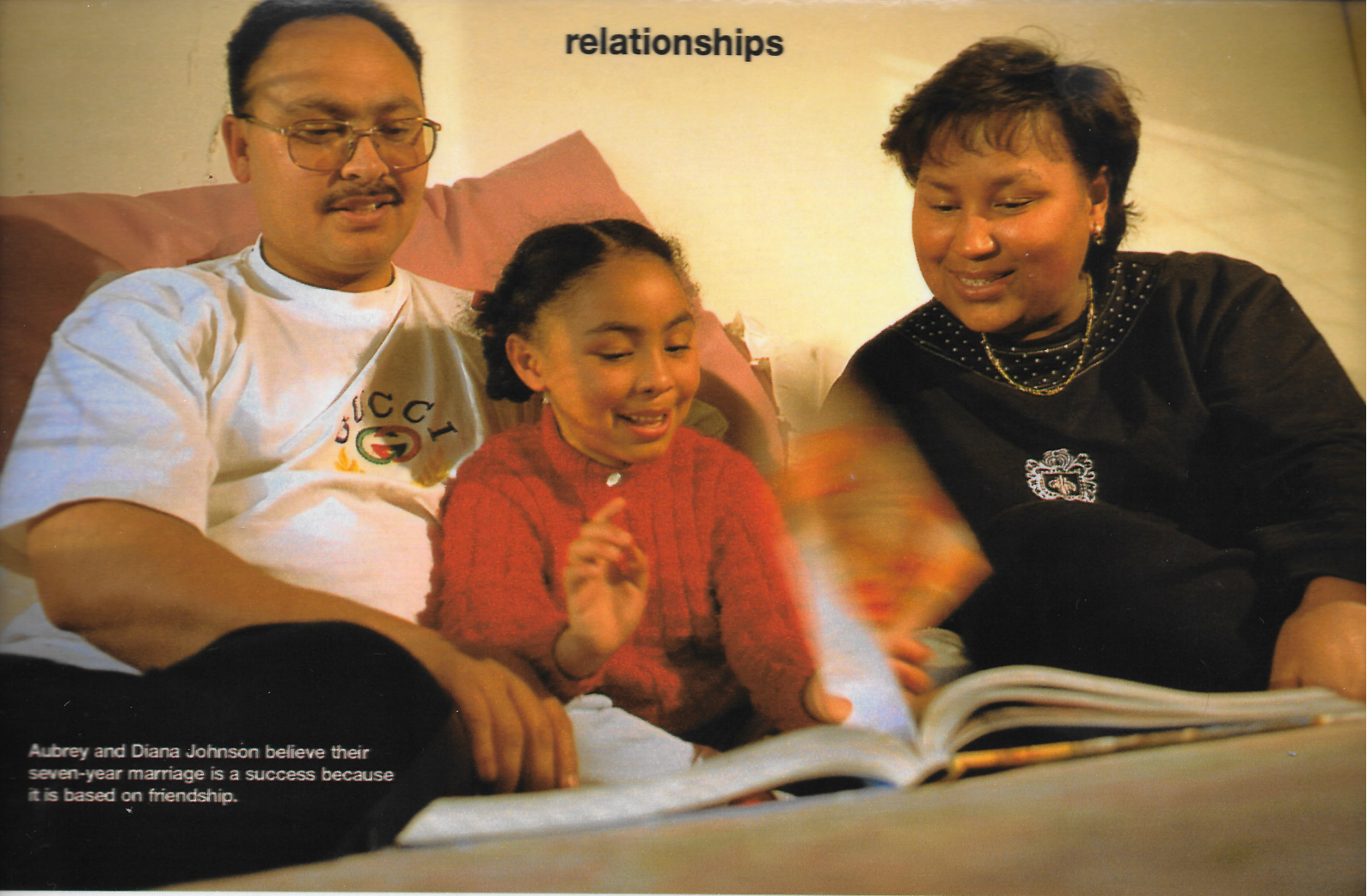
Samantha Bartlett, 26, deputy radio news editor

Friends introduced Martin and me in a members-only pub. He has a thing for redheads and that was what attracted him to me, while his tall, confident appearance made him stand out from the crowd for me. We went out a few times. Although we both knew something was bound to happen, we didn't kiss for the first few months, but our intense goodbye hugs spelled great things ahead. When we finally did kiss, the floodgates opened. We didn't waste any more time waiting to rip each other's clothes off.

"Three and a half months down the line, Martin's male panic button hit, and he abruptly broke up



Her red hair did it for him, while Samantha Bartlett was attracted to Martin Farrell's maturity. Seven months down, the relationship keeps getting stronger.



Aubrey and Diana Johnson believe their seven-year marriage is a success because it is based on friendship.

with me over the phone. But I got my revenge when he phoned three days later and confessed to being miserable without me.

"It's been hard work keeping the relationship in good shape. I've lived alone and earned a living from a young age, and through my work as a radio journalist, I've seen many disturbing things which have forced me to grow up quickly. He's 12 years older than me and I like his maturity.

"We haven't officially moved in together, but we're house hunting for a place together. It's a big step, because there are so many things to consider — I've never lived with anyone, and Martin's divorced with two kids. We're both career-driven as well, so marriage would be a very big step for us. But we're comfortable together and have mutual respect. For now, we enjoy growing together and learning from each other."

Martin Farrell, 38, businessman

"Sam was wearing a skimpy white number when we met, so I was pleasantly surprised to discover that she wasn't a dizzy redhead. We were immediately comfortable together and I'm glad we got to know each other as friends before things became more serious. We're on the same wave-length and I'm glad she forgave me for breaking up a too-good-to-be-true relationship. I enjoy the spontaneity between us. We do fight a lot, but this allows us to find out more about each other. Sam now knows that, although we share a

bed, my kitchen is sacred ground.

"The sex has been great from day one and I believe that the fireworks will continue as we grow closer. We're committed to each other, but there's still a lot to think about before I'll consider marriage again. Sam and my ex-wife get on very well and we do have the support of our families, but for now we'll take it one step at a time."

7 years

Aubrey Johnson, 35, retail manager

"diana and I met several years after I first spoke to her on the phone. Her friend worked at a blood bank, and when I went in to donate blood, she made a special note of my number because she thought I was cute. She later phoned me and gave me Diana's number, thinking we'd be a good match. But when I phoned Diana she put the phone down on me.

"Five years later, I found her number again. I took the chance and called — and she finally agreed to meet me. We became friends and this eventually developed into a relationship. We got engaged after nine months, and were married soon afterwards. The first two years were difficult because Diana was studying and we both worked long hours. Her parents also found it hard to let go, and interfered in our relationship, which

put a lot of strain on our marriage. I decided to put my foot down and told them to either take their daughter back or to trust me with her.

"Our little girl, Kaylan, was born a year after we were married and we started to settle down as a family. Diana and I both still work long hours so we don't get to be together as often as we would like. Now six-years-old, Kaylan stays with her grandparents three days a week, so when we do see her, we spoil her as much as possible.

"Because of our lifestyle, Diana and I need to be extremely considerate of each other. I think that's why our marriage is a success. Our relationship is based on complete trust. Diana and I have stayed together because we got married for the right reasons. We also have an understanding that, if one of us should decide that things aren't working out, we'll simply split up. Marriage is a partnership, and friendship is the most important ingredient."

Diana Johnson, 31, nurse

"Aubrey and I got on well from the moment we met, and became good friends. Our marriage is a success because it is still based on friendship.

"Marriage was a major adjustment for both of us and we lost many friends because our priorities became more family-orientated.

"Of course we have our ups and downs, but we're determined to resolve our differences because our priority is to create a loving home for our daughter. She doesn't have the luxury of a



Mary and Connie Joerdens have been together for seven decades and still feel as young and in love as they did when they met.

mother staying home to look after her and has made many sacrifices for our careers, so we try to consider her in every way. Aubrey and I have discussed having another baby and a playmate for Kaylan, but it has to be when we can devote more energy and time to our family.

"My husband and I are both ambitious, but we try to support one another. I work long hours and I study, but he never complains when he's presented with a sandwich for dinner. He's also proved himself as a great cook and I sometimes get spoilt with breakfast in bed.

"We have a lot of respect for each other and, although our circumstances aren't perfect, we have more than many other couples have."

7 decades

Connie Joerdens, 88, retired clothing wholesaler

"I was a toddler when I met two-year-old Mary — her family came to visit her uncle who was our neighbour. It's hard to believe that we've been a couple for 70 years, but we were destined to be together because, when my family moved to another town a few years later, we discovered that her family lived only a few blocks away.

"We were both teenagers when I decided not

to waste any more time and to invite her out. After that, I often took her to the bioscope and to visit friends, but our relationship wasn't always smooth sailing — it was on and off.

"We started discussing marriage, but I was determined that my wife shouldn't have to work and I needed to save some money. However, Mary ran out of patience and both our families pressed for marriage, so we got engaged when I was 24 and she was 21 — that was late in life in those days. We had a big wedding and I still remember how proud I felt to have my beautiful bride beside me.

"Like all married couples, we've had good and bad times together, but you just have to get through the hard times and stick with the promise you made at the altar. Today, people get divorced when things start going wrong. I still believe that the husband should earn the bread and butter, so that his wife can stay home and look after their children. When they're both away from home for most of the day, the children can get out of hand, and that can cause great conflict in the marriage.

"Mary and I recently celebrated our 60th wedding anniversary and I can honestly say that I've never regretted choosing her as my life partner. God intended us to be together and I can look back with the knowledge that I would do it all over again with Mary."

Mary Joerdens, 85, retired sales assistant

"I've known Connie for as long as I can remember. He was always the most attractive guy in town, so we started dating as teenagers. We enjoyed each other's company enormously, so committing to each other was clearly the next step. We were engaged for five years, but I became impatient because I couldn't go out on my own. After setting a date, Connie wanted to postpone; that's when I set an ultimatum — now or never.

"We had a lovely wedding — my stepmother made my dress and we were both relaxed and happy. We went through some hard times in the early years of marriage. During the war, Connie had to manage the company he worked for on his own and he went away for long periods of time. It was hard to look after things at home and raise three small children on my own. I missed him terribly. But we also had many lovely times together and now, in our old age, we enjoy being together more than ever.

"We've grown to know and love each other completely and we both still feel young. After all these years, I've never regretted choosing Connie as the man to share my life with. We are blessed with three children, eight grandchildren and five great grandkids. I thank God for keeping us together for such a long time."