

What Happens When a Divorced, Independent Woman Looks for a New Love

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How do you find someone to love later in life, when you don't have the advantage of the youthful encounters available in high school and college, where hundreds of possible partners parade past each day on the way to math or English class? When your life may encompass many decades, births and deaths, marriages and divorces, great joys and also deep heartaches?

There's online dating, wading through photos and profiles, looking for someone with whom there might be a spark. Then, if things look promising, taking a chance and meeting for coffee. This can lead to a few dates — and also a lot of dead-ends and disappointments. But let's say you find someone.

In younger love, you would worry about introducing him or her to your parents, as well as meeting his or hers. That's four people. But in this "later love" scenario, there may not only still be parents involved, but also kids and even grandkids. Will they be accepted? Will you be accepted? The permutations of the situation have just quadrupled, like a complicated math problem.



Courtesy Covington-Carter

Landon Carter and Diane Covington-Carter hang out in 2021, near their home in Golden Bay, New Zealand.

Taking a leap and finding joy on the other side

I had married young, at 19 — too young to know who I was or what I wanted out of life. At 30, I knew I had to face up to my unhappy marriage and make a change. I signed up for a personal growth course, which challenged me to go beyond my fears — jumping off a mountain on a zip line, rappelling down a steep cliff and other terrifying tests. I thought it would help me get over my fear of heights.

I did not get over that fear, but I did learn that once I faced the terror of jumping off that mountain via that zip line, that joy and exhilaration waited on the other side. That I could be afraid and still go ahead into unexplored territory. That I could take a leap, both in real life and figuratively, and I could uncover new and deeper aspects of myself and my abilities.

Within months, I separated from my husband and, with my two young daughters, began to carve out a life on my own and discover my own values and identity. For the next 30 years, I cherished my independence and relished my journey of learning and growth. I dated many interesting men, but always guarded my freedom, keeping a safe buffer around me.

Turning 60, I felt a shift. Could it be time to allow a real love partner into my life at last? I felt mature and strong enough to open up to that vulnerability, so I started my new quest, like many others have, on the internet.

After a few false starts, one of my coffee dates led to a real invitation — a New Year's Eve gala. I'd spent recent New Year's Eves babysitting granddaughters, so I felt ready to celebrate. My date was handsome and charming, and we had fun. But after a few more

dates, I noticed that we were on different paths, so we parted as friends.

In the short time we were dating, however, my granddaughters had seen him a few times. One day, my 6-year-old granddaughter took me aside and asked, “Are you going to marry him?” I reassured her that no, I was not going to marry him. But it did remind me that I wasn’t alone on this journey.



Courtesy Covington-Carter

Diane Covington-Carter and Landon Carter enjoy a sunset.

A deeper approach

After that relationship and a few others from the internet dating scene fizzled out, I decided it was time to take a different, deeper approach.

I wrote in my journal about what I believed in, whom I was looking for and what I had to offer. I wanted someone who shared my values and had made an effort to let go of baggage from the past. Someone who could appreciate the wisdom gained from experience and see the beauty that shines from within. A partner on this journey called life — who was also looking for a long-term and committed relationship.

I kept working to improve my own past, making efforts to heal relationships that needed healing. I practiced loving everywhere I could — with family, friends, even strangers. I asked myself, after one divorce, and then after all those years as a happy and independent single woman, whether I could reclaim the innocence and trust needed to fall in love again. And did I still believe in love? And if there could be someone out there who could be a true partner for me?

The answer, again, was yes. I knew I had to keep a positive outlook and watch my thinking. And that was no small feat. I'd listen to women complain that there were “no good partners out there.” And I'd say to myself, *Nope, not believing that. I just need one.*

I set out to prepare myself for his arrival, even though there was no one on the horizon. I bought new clothes, including pretty, lacy unmentionables, and got a new hairstyle. I cleaned the house, cleared clutter and made space in my closet. After all, if I really believed he was coming, he'd have to have somewhere to hang his clothes.

A memory resurfaces

In looking forward, I also looked back. One morning as I journaled, the words I wrote reminded me of the man I had met 30 years before, the one who had led the personal growth seminar I'd taken — the one where I'd jumped off that mountain. He'd told us to “use everything you've got to make a difference in life.” And I had remembered his words throughout the years. I had admired how he had committed his life to contributing to others, and I'd never forgotten that he had challenged us to do the same. I'd become a life coach and counselor because of his influence, a career I had found fulfilling for many years before I became a writer.

I'd also never forgotten how handsome and dynamic he was. *Where is he now*, I wondered? A quick internet search showed that he lived in New Zealand. I found his website and wrote him an email. He had trained thousands of people in that course and wouldn't remember me, but I wanted to thank him for the difference he had made in my life all those years ago. Within days, I received a friendly email back, acknowledging my thanks. He'd written a book, and I ordered it.

Months later, I wrote to him to discuss his book, thinking we'd be emailing back and forth across the planet, if he responded at all. But he was in the States and near where I lived, and he offered to get together to chat about his book. From our emails and a few phone

conversations, I could feel a rapport and an ease. I kept telling myself: *You're just getting together to talk about his book. Don't get ahead of yourself.* But I also knew that he was the kind of partner I had been looking for, and that if he was unattached, I was interested.

When we met, he was still handsome and dynamic, though mellowed by life. When I learned he was not in a relationship, I was smitten. He had one free weekend before his flight back to New Zealand — and in a bold move, I asked him to come back and spend it with me. I had a sense that I had a small window before he left, and that if I didn't jump, we could lose our chance. In later love, you can't afford to miss chances.

Real sparks and real challenges

There *had* been some real sparks between us, and he came back for the weekend. We slept out under the stars on my deck, shared intimate moments by the fire, even skinny dipped in the river near my home. It was idyllic.

When he left, I didn't know if we had a future. But I was determined that if I had anything to say about it, we did. Through emails and phone calls, we shared more about our lives, and our rapport deepened. But he was also honest about some of his reservations. He, too, was looking for a committed relationship. But he pictured being with a younger woman, one who was blonder and skinnier. I was six years younger than him, but he was going for more.

Though it took all my accumulated courage and strength, I listened and worked to not take it too personally, focusing on the good feelings flowing back and forth across the planet. We navigated through that and arranged for him to come back and visit again, this time for two weeks. This shocked some friends and family. "You barely know him, and he's coming for two weeks?" Yep. I could feel that what we shared was real, and I'd learned through experience just how rare "real" was.

Three weeks after his long visit, I was on a plane to New Zealand. We spent 19 powerful days, alternately enjoying each other and going through the layers of his doubts and resistance. Because of my previous experience with him, I didn't give up. But at one point, I did stand up to him: "You are 66 years old. Are you going to go to your grave with your fantasies and your 'pictures,' or are you going to get real? I am real, and I am here. Where is this fantasy woman? And would she stand up to you when you are being a jerk, like you are right now?"

He listened to me. It was the truth. I knew that what we shared was so much more powerful than his fantasies. He began to let go of his resistance.

After seven months of our long-distance relationship between New Zealand and California, he moved in with me. He hung his clothes in the closet, right in the space I'd set aside for him. I welcomed him into my life, as did my daughters and grandchildren. He fit. When we

married two years later, in an outdoor wedding on a bright June day, surrounded by our grown children, grandchildren and friends, he told our guests that I didn't give up on him. I had been his angel.

A second chance for love

We just celebrated our 10th anniversary, and we're more in love now than we were then. We're sharing the fun and adventures of travel, staying healthy and spending quiet evenings by the fire. We relish how our grandchildren love each other as "cousins" and cherish our special, now larger, family gatherings.

When we married, we didn't have our whole lives ahead of us. But we had the maturity to recognize the gift of finding someone to share life with. We both had developed skills in resolving the difficulties that can come up in relationships, and we can work differences out quickly. We never take for granted the richness of our love and the preciousness of each day together. We celebrate and are grateful for our second chance for love.

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