

CHAPTER ONE

Dating is Different at This Age

Wouldn't it be wonderful if those who bothered us when we were young and busy would come back when we are old and lonely?

Lois was frustrated about her recent blind date: "I met him at a local spot, we had a drink or two, and we danced for a while. He was quite pleasant and I haven't been out with a guy in so long, it was just nice being in his company. Because I had made brownies that afternoon and I thought he might like them, I invited him home to have coffee. I was so used to having people back to the house while I was married, that I didn't think twice about inviting Phil to do the same. However, as he was leaving to go home, Phil told me he had learned that when a woman invites a man in "for coffee," it means that she wants to go to bed with him. I wanted to kick him out the door.

Lois is not alone in her frustration. Dating has changed.

I'll never forget my first date when I decided to reenter the dating world. A friend called to ask if she could give my number to a fellow who had just divorced. He was "tall, handsome, very nice, and very successful."

How thoughtful of her, and why not?

David called me (his name is fictitious, as are all the names I use - in this case, to be more benevolent to the guilty than to protect the innocent) and he asked if I would like to drive to Provincetown, Massachusetts (two hours from my home) for a leisurely stroll and an early dinner. Foolishly, I agreed.

He came by at 1:00 in the afternoon. By 6:00, we were seated in a charming restaurant at a lovely table with candles and wine. We had spent a pleasant afternoon driving leisurely to Cape Cod and then walking around town talking.

After enjoying an appetizer and a few glasses of wine, he excused himself to go to the men's room. When he returned, he became angry at me (for what I believed to be no

reason), which was as surprising as it was totally unacceptable. I asked to be driven home immediately. For two painfully long hours, he kept up his barrage, including comments about women in general and his former wife in particular.

I rolled myself tightly in my comforter that night, with self-pity working overtime. A few days later, I learned that on the morning of our date, he had received word about a disturbing settlement on his second divorce. Hence, he was far from ready to socialize with this sensitive creature or, in fact, any other woman. I resolved not to date so far from home again, except with someone I knew very well.

I would guess most of us single GGs have a story or two to tell, and I'll bet the fellows have just as many. It goes with the territory. Nonetheless, where we shall focus now is on what the newly widowed or divorced Gorgeous Grandma might expect when she ventures forth to begin socializing with men again at this stage of life.

Has dating changed that much from what we remember years ago? When I asked that question to my then-single twenty-something son, he answered that it was still the same, but, on the other hand, it was a lot different. Wondering why we paid all that money for his college education, I moved on to explore the unknown for myself.

What did I discover? He was right (forgive me, dear). Dating is the same, but it is different - a lot different from what you and I experienced before we were married.

Dating years ago, I remember us meeting fellows at college mixers, at fraternity parties, at dances. I remember us being fixed up by friends, friends of friends, and by friends of our parents. We had some connection with the men we dated. Very rarely were we in the company of a total stranger. Of course, most of us lived at home during those years, aside from our years at college. We were, for the most part, in a protected, nurturing, and supportive environment.

But, were we not expected to come home with a loving husband by the time college graduation rolled around or shortly thereafter? If college was not an option, many future Gorgeous Grandmas were married by the time they were sixteen or seventeen. In any case, we knew that we did not

want to disappoint our parents by remaining single past the age of twenty-five. Establishing a family and bearing children was the expected future for the majority of us. Indeed, many of us submitted our total well-being into the hands of our husbands.

Our expectations now, regarding a man in our life? Quite a bit different than before, are they not? Our desire to seek and enter into a loving relationship grows out of fifty-plus years of experience at living. As mature, self-confident, wise, comfortable-in-our-own-skin women, we approach meeting and dating men with a different attitude. Indeed, our expectations and goals have changed.

The first consideration is whether a woman is *ready* to date again. When we were young and we broke up with a boyfriend, getting over that relationship, in most cases, lasted about as long as it took to find a new boyfriend. After many years of marriage, however, and after experiencing the painful loss of a loved one through death or divorce, it may take months and even years to recover. The healing process takes time. It is important to complete that process and feel good about oneself before beginning a new social life.

For the most part, the second time around, the focus of a relationship shifts away from child rearing to companionship, intimacy, sharing, and security. Now, most of us demonstrate an inclination to choose a companion, partner, or spouse on the basis of mutual interests plus the expected positives of good times, good laughs, love, and romance.

Another issue is that the thought of dating again can be scary and confusing. The possibility of being rejected makes it even worse. Let's face it: we have wrinkles; we have gained a little, if not a lot, of weight; we're too old to change, we think. We may be basically shy. Many widows say, "I took care of my sick husband for years before his death. I don't want to take care of another one." Too, it's not easy to anticipate a possible new relationship and perhaps another breakup. We question our ability to handle disappointment or rejection.

And then there's sex. For most of us, it's tough getting into bed with a stranger. Even if he was your former college sweetheart who has returned to you as a new beau or someone you've known for the last thirty years, he is still a

stranger to your body. But, we are thankful to the women's movement of the '60s for changing society's view of women, and we are now quite free to determine our own standards for respectable sexual behavior rather than our mothers'.

But our body parts aren't working quite the same way they were when we were younger. And the sex drive, for most of our crowd, does diminish with age. Now, to counteract that testosterone slump, Viagra plays a large part in renewed sexual activity for our crowd which, in turn, leads to increased promiscuity for folks over fifty. H.I.V. and venereal disease are now growing fastest among people among people sixty-five and older. But you are aware of these facts, I'm sure, and and you know to take precautions when necessary.

Sex is still good, though, regardless of age. In fact, we are probably much less inhibited than when we were younger, and we might even teach the fellas something new!

Also, in the our younger years, when we were dating men, there were not yet any children to influence our decisions one way or another. Today, there might very well be grown-up children in the picture who have some influence on us. Perhaps there is a child or a grandchild who lives with us. It's difficult to find time (and sometimes energy) to start a new life. Perhaps our children do not care for the man we are dating. There might be misunderstandings or jealousies. For example:

Betsy, a widow at fifty-five, had just begun to socialize when she met an interesting doctor at a singles event one night. She was delighted to accept his invitation for a drink the following week.

As Betsy was waiting for her date to arrive on the appointed evening, all was fine until her son, Eric, home on a college recess, reminded her that she had not finished his laundry. After Betsy left for the laundry room located down the hall, the doorman called and told Eric that Betsy's date had arrived and he was waiting in the lobby. When Betsy returned with Eric's laundry in hand, Eric said nothing. After Betsy had folded his clothes and placed them neatly back in his duffle, Eric informed his mother that the fellow was waiting.

By the time Betsy threw on her coat, grabbed her pocketbook, kissed Eric goodbye, walked down the hall to the elevator, waited for the elevator to arrive, and rode down to the lobby, her date had lost patience and left. Throwing dignity to the wind, Betsy ran and caught up with him a few blocks later. They did have that drink, but she never heard from him again.

Apparently, Betsy was ready to move on with her life but her son was not eager to let her. She did not allow this incident to deter her, however. Betsy was determined to enjoy dating and to continue taking risks. She also intended to have a long talk with her son about the changes in his life and hers, as well as about his new responsibilities.

How do we balance our childrens' wishes with our own needs and feelings? Children are very important to us, but our new life is very important, too. We must learn that children do adapt once we communicate openly with them and make our feelings known.

Too, children may have property concerns when a parent discusses remarrying. Oftentimes, children resent the new bride (or groom) and can start a great deal of trouble unless satisfactory financial arrangements are finalized to the benefit of the children. Even that arrangement can be troublesome if the parent dies. A friend of mine entered litigation with her significant other's children over the house he left her in his will after he passed away. The children fought her vigorously, even though the bequeath to her was their father's wish.

Many people who reenter the dating arena after years of married life have ghosts or hidden agendas. I like to think that most people are honest about themselves, but, let's face it, oftentimes they're not. The secrets about a potential partner that we eventually uncover may be ones we can't live with. It pays to be cautious before forming a lasting bond. It's wise to take a longer time to form that bond than it did in our younger days.

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When you do start dating again, consider these guidelines:

1. Try to make new friends. It is tremendously important to recognize that your former life is over. I am not suggesting that you forget your past and your friends. I am urging you to form new friendships that suit your current single lifestyle so that you will have a *better* social life. I did a great disservice to myself by clinging to old friendships, hoping that the stability and the security of old friends would shelter me from the work it takes to find new ones. I was wrong. It took me an unusually long time to accept and be comfortable with a new lifestyle. Please don't let it happen to you.

2. Ask for support. We are not islands unto ourselves. Do not hesitate to call family, friends, clergy, a former mentor, when you need support or encouragement. A small problem solved immediately is one less matter for you to deal with. Making decisions alone can be tough. It's okay to call your near-and-dears or a professional to help.

3. Take small steps. When you take small steps, you can avoid feeling fearful. Each morning, when awakening, think about new ways to move forward. Do something new every day. Buy new eyeglass frames. Start a journal. Just keep moving!

4. Recognize the areas of life over which you have control. When matters seem chaotic, take the time to think about the situation and seek an area you can control. You can't determine someone else's responses or reactions, but you can control your own. Find things you can make decisions about: whether or not to change your job or hair color, start a diet, take a trip. Starting small and getting control will enable you to gain confidence and reclaim power over other areas of your life.

Excerpted from *Find the Love of Your Life After Fifty!*
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Take the fun quiz below to discover your "Ageless Attitude"

- OR -

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~ QUIZ ~

DEVELOP AN “AGELESS” ATTITUDE

Because you are beginning a new and different social life, it might be fun to explore how you feel about aging. You may have not yet discovered that a truly positive attitude toward age can affect how well you feel and look, as well as how you come across to others.

From time to time, I am delighted by certain women whose attitude about age is so upbeat and infectious that they seem much younger than their years. Isn't it fun being around a person of any age, in fact, who has a great attitude?

There are many women who have a sadly negative attitude about age, even about aging well. Consequently, I thought it might be helpful to borrow a self-help questionnaire (adapted from *Longevity* magazine) to uncover and possibly improve your attitude about aging as you start out again in the single world.

How vital, energetic, enthusiastic, and sexy are you at this stage in your life? Do you feel wonderfully "ageless" or are you "old"? Begin by answering the following questions; then add up your score.

1. Do you think you look good?
Very much (2) Somewhat (1) Not at all (0)
2. Do you admire people your age (and older) and think of them as productive and attractive?
Very much (2) Somewhat (1) Not at all (0)
3. How much have you changed your hairstyle in the last five years to look better or younger?
Very much (2) Somewhat (1) Not at all (0)
4. Do your friends have positive attitudes toward aging?
Very much (2) Somewhat (1) Not at all (0)

5. Do you feel old?
Very much (0) Somewhat (1) Not at all (2)
6. How much have you updated your wardrobe in the last five years?
Very much (2) Somewhat (1) Not at all (0)
7. When you hit a major birthday (fifty-five, sixty, etc.), do you become depressed?
Very much (0) Somewhat (1) Not at all (2)
8. Do the signs of aging you see on your face appear to you as attractive badges of experience?
Very much (2) Somewhat (1) Not at all (0)
9. Do you think the physical signs of aging are bad?
Very much (0) Somewhat (1) Not at all (2)
10. Have you made much effort in recent years to live a healthier lifestyle by cutting down on high-fat food and getting more exercise?
Very much (2) Somewhat (1) Not at all (0)
11. Do you feel that looking older is a liability at work?
Very much (0) Somewhat (1) Not at all (2)
12. Do you feel that you are becoming less appealing sexually?
Very much (0) Somewhat (1) Not at all (2)
13. Do you feel satisfied with the life goals you've met so far?
Very much (2) Somewhat (1) Not at all (0)
14. Do you use cosmetics to look better?
Very much (2) Somewhat (1) Not at all (0)
15. Would you consider cosmetic surgery?
Very much (2) Somewhat (1) Not at all (0) (If you've already had it, give yourself 2 points.)
16. Have you changed your feelings about your appearance in the last ten years?
Very much (2) Somewhat (1) Not at all (0)

17. When you think of aging, do you think of an active sex life?

Very much (2) Somewhat (1) Not at all (0)

18. Does aging bring to mind maturity, valuable experience, wisdom, and the ability to contribute to society?

Very much (2) Somewhat (1) Not at all (0)

19. Do you continue to set new goals?

Very much (2) Somewhat (1) Not at all (0)

20. Do you feel hopeful, excited, or otherwise positive when you think ahead to the next ten years?

Very much (2) Somewhat (1) Not at all (0)

SCORING:

15-20: Congratulations! Your attitude is excellent. You will age gracefully and you will feel good and look good, no doubt, for many years to come.

8-14: Your aging attitude is about average. As with most people, you are bothered at times by wrinkles, gray hair, and your chronological age. Think about taking control over those areas of aging which are most troublesome to you. Perhaps a new hairstyle, fresh makeup, a new look would be more attractive for you. Improving your image can often divert attention (yours and others') away from chronological age and towards the ageless aspects of life: your intelligence, personality, talents, and friendship.

0-7: Oops, poor aging is obvious! It's time to shed that negativity about aging and take on a whole new attitude! Why not start by setting some goals for your relationships, appearance, and lifestyle. How about trying one new activity this week that will give you pleasure? And if your buddies tend to be "doom-and-gloom" types, seek out those who are more fun and upbeat.

Do remember that a truly positive attitude about aging will affect how well you feel, how good you look, and how charming you can be to the new men you will be bringing into your life.

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