

# Emotions

## *A love like ours*

Real love stories don't have endings. None of these couples will tell you they're fairytale perfect, but one thing's for sure, they are happy in love. So what really keeps them together when the going gets tough? Here, they let us in on their (not so sickening) secrets

BY LISA HARVEY

*"Communication is everything"*

XANDER AND CHRISTINE

Christine: "We learn from each other. At the beginning I wasn't a great communicator – if something was bothering me I'd keep it to myself – but Xander has helped me to talk about it all. He used to get easily annoyed about little things, but I was able to help him see that some things aren't worth taking seriously. I now get why communication is everything." →





TOGETHER  
19  
YEARS

*“We remember how we were when we first met”*

JARED AND ANISTATIA

**Jared:** “We never forget where our loyalties are. It’s not a 50/50 relationship because a long-lasting one shouldn’t follow mathematical logic – we try to give more than that. And we don’t have relationship discussions. We got those out of the way when we met. We keep promises, we’re generous with compliments and we’ve never let that initial politeness slip. I always remember how I behaved when we first met because that’s the person Anistatia fell in love with.”



TOGETHER  
25  
YEARS

*“Therapy taught us how to fight fair”*

STEPHANIE AND VINNY

**Stephanie:** “When we couldn’t agree on an issue to do with our in-laws, we wasted no time in seeking out a therapist after just 13 months of marriage. It’s the single most valuable decision we made. In therapy we learned how to speak so the other could listen, and listen so the other could speak. We also discovered that the one thing which has the most predictive value on whether a relationship will last is how couples resolve conflict. Learning what to do when we clashed during those early stages gave us solid foundations for the future.”

*“We learn from the low moments”*

STARLETT AND DAVID

**Starlett:** “Being married to a soldier means we have our fair share of challenges. David has been on four deployments since 2001, each lasting an average of 12 months. Some couples have it worse, so you won’t hear me complain too loudly. We try to focus on the positive things life brings us. And David has the right balance of being serious and funny. He’s taught me to not take things too seriously.

We know it requires effort – from raising our two children and navigating long-term separations, to planning the future and making peace with bad decisions in the past. Life is full of twists and turns, ups and downs, but we couldn’t appreciate the high moments if we didn’t respect and learn from the low ones.”



TOGETHER  
20  
YEARS



TOGETHER  
18  
YEARS

*“We accept the difference between men and women”*

RUTH AND RON

**Ruth:** “I have to constantly remind myself that men are so different to women, and that we shouldn’t expect to think the same. All men really want is a peaceful life, lots of praise for their hard work, having you on their side, and a yummy meal each night.”

**Ron:** “Spending quality time together has always strengthened our relationship. But we also allow time for self-interest. I agree that men and women are different – and *vive la différence!* I’ve stopped trying to understand the difference and just accepted it.” →

## *“We live in the now”*

ANNA AND DAVID

Anna: “Romance is important, but for a relationship to last you have to enjoy the mundane together too. And life, unfortunately, has many mundane moments. We appreciate being in the now and make the most of what we have, instead of wishing our relationship away for the sake of future excitements.”



## *“We give each other total freedom”*

CHRIS AND MONICA

Monica: “Chris gives me the freedom to do what I want. I don’t have to ‘clear’ anything with him and so never feel suffocated or restricted. I like my space and he feels the same. He spent most of last summer following his passion for motorbikes which meant he was away a lot. I didn’t have a problem with it because, in turn, I spent a month working on my novel at our seaside home – just me and the dog.”

Financially, we also have freedom. We have a joint bank account for the mortgage, bills, savings and other expenditures, but the rest of the money we earn is ours to spend as we wish – no questions asked. I’ve been in relationships which were controlling and unhealthy so I know what it’s like to be with someone who doesn’t know how to nurture or support a woman.” →



## *“We learnt to be happy with ourselves first”*

BRANDI AND BRANDON

Brandi: “You need to be happy with yourself first and foremost. Neither of us look at the world through rose-tinted glasses. It’s what makes us work – we know the reality of life, and we know who we are. Knowing what my own opinions are makes them easier to share. It’s like the opposite of Julia Roberts in *Runaway Bride* – I know how I like my eggs and I’m not going to pretend

to be any different for him (and vice versa).

I wasn’t looking for a relationship when I met Brandon. I think it happened because I wasn’t desperately searching for something that I thought I needed to fulfil me. I wish I’d known how happy a relationship could have been a decade ago, but I was obviously meant to learn some lessons along the way.”





TOGETHER  
9  
YEARS

## *“Being stupid together keeps us close”*

KAT AND GARETH

**Kat:** “Gareth and I said we loved each other after a week of being together and six years later we were married. We’ve been through some hard times, especially when I suffered from a serious eating disorder at university. I pushed Gareth away because I felt that him worrying about me, while we were so far apart, would only make it worse for the both of us. Lucky for me, he wouldn’t be pushed. Coming out stronger on the other side is what cements our relationship. That, and laughter; the ability to make each other laugh and be stupid together keeps us close.”

## *“We’ve kept our independence”*

TRAVIS AND MEGHAN

**Meghan:** “We value our own set of friendships and put time and effort into staying connected with those who matter to us. If I’m not available to attend something because of a work obligation, it doesn’t mean Travis has to stay home – he’ll go for the both of us. We keep each other in the loop with our respective Google calendars, but if I’m suddenly working late, or running errands on a week night, I know he’s not going to hassle me with dozens of calls asking when I’ll be back, or what’s for dinner. I give him the same courtesy. With us it’s ‘I’ll get home when I get home’.”



TOGETHER  
4  
YEARS

## *“We experience new things together”*

MARIANNA AND MATT

**Matt:** “As the old phrase goes, familiarity breeds contempt. And although contempt may be a bit strong, I do think it’s easy to get to a point where you don’t talk about the small things any more. Instead of switching on the TV as soon as we walk through the door, we chat about our day. You have to make that conscious decision to sit down as a couple because it’s all too easy to forget how the other one is really feeling when you’ve been together for so long.”

**Marianna:** “I’ve tried to learn from the mistakes my mother made. She treated her men like kings and did everything for them, whereas I don’t. Matt has to iron his own shirts, and make dinner if I am working late. I’ve always been adamant that our relationship needs balance. I can lean on Matt, just like he knows he can with me. But new experiences are the icing on the cake. I love exploring uncharted territory with him. When we do things away from the daily grind, it strengthens our bond.” ➔



TOGETHER  
5  
YEARS

TOGETHER  
**36**  
YEARS



*“We’ve lasted in spite of the fact we don’t have children”*

**MAGGIE AND ROGER**

**Maggie:** “Some people say we’ve lasted because we’ve never had children. But those people have no idea of the heartbreak and feelings of uselessness that being childless can bring. It has, at times, taken a great toll on our relationship but in some ways those times have made us stronger. And we’re lucky we have friends who have been generous enough to share their children with us – we owe them a debt that can never be repaid. Our marriage has lasted in spite of – and not because of – not having children.”

**Roger:** “We talk, but know when to keep quiet. We listen, but know when to use ‘selective hearing’. We advise, encourage and comfort each other through everything. I tell Maggie when her bum *does* look big in that dress – just like she says what a twit I look in my three-quarter-length trousers and cap. Of course we have our disagreements, but we never go to sleep on an argument. Well, usually we make up last thing at night only to start the same row again the next morning.”

*“We’ve stayed young at heart”*

**WINIFRED AND ALAN**

**Winifred:** “When we first discussed getting married Alan respected my decision to maintain my career as a nurse. His father had strong ideals about treating everyone equally and so brought him up to do the same. Whatever obstacles we faced, we knew we were on the same page. So many people give up on marriage too early, but it needs to be nurtured. You both need mutual respect and to really understand the promise of caring for each other. We would never dream of abandoning or letting one another down.”

**Alan:** “Having the perspective that life carries on, no matter what, has kept us together. If things were bad we coped because we knew we were facing it as husband and wife. We could count on each other’s support and make the best of what we had. Remembering you’re part of a team in a marriage is everything – especially when bringing up children. We’ve always stayed young at heart and have our children and grandchildren to thank for that. We love being in the company of younger generations.”



TOGETHER  
**60**  
YEARS

TOGETHER  
**26**  
YEARS



*“We’ve developed a strong friendship”*

**ALAN AND JULES**

**Jules:** “I try to remember what Alan does do, not what he doesn’t. When it feels like I’m forever having to nag him, I remember that he always says yes to any plans I make, or when he tells me off for not stacking the dishwasher properly, I tell myself that it’s great that he’s willing to do it so I don’t have to. When the lust subsides, you need to have developed a strong friendship to keep

you going. Alan has always said this would keep us together. I didn’t understand it at first because I had expectations of everlasting passion. But marriage isn’t a fairy tale, it’s hard work. You really need to like each other if you’re going to get through rocky patches. We still laugh, confide in one another and enjoy spending time together. That’s the real intimacy behind long-lasting love.” ■

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