

# *Waiting until the time's right for marriage: First time brides in their 60s*

by Eve Menezes Cunningham

Not too long ago, many people got married straight after school. Now, those marrying for the first time in their mid-twenties are considered to be quite young. At the other end of the scale, some women leave marriage until they are truly ready.

These women got married not because it was expected of them (anyone pressuring them had probably long given up) but because they fell in love and the timing was finally right.

America's best-known feminist, Gloria Steinem, married for the first time at 66. Sadly, her husband, David Bale died of a brain tumour three years later. Gloria, now 71, talks about how privileged she was to have been with him at the end.

She admired the way "David tried to never pass a living thing in need. He also raised children on his own." The most famous of her stepchildren is actor, Christian Bale (Batman Begins, Little Women and American Psycho).

Although Gloria has inspired and guided countless young women and men, she says, "I don't know how I would have

survived if I'd had to give birth to someone else before I could give birth to myself."

Gloria Steinem is a founder of the internationally famous feminist magazine Ms. and the author of "Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions" and "Revolution from Within." She met David Bale, a South African anti-apartheid activist and entrepreneur, at a charity benefit in 1999.

After her wedding, she said, "Though I've worked for many years to make marriage more equal, I never expected to take advantage of it myself. I hope this proves what feminists have always said - that feminism is about the ability to choose what's right at each time of our lives."

During the ceremony, they substituted the word "partners" for "husband and wife" and she kept her name.

Speaking recently in New York, Gloria said, "Some of us are becoming the men we wanted to marry but not enough men are becoming the women they wanted to marry. Our classical role as women was one of dependence. Now, many of us have independence and the next step is interdependence. Interdependence is almost dangerous for women."

It's so easy to become empathy sick. To know what others are feeling better than we know what we are feeling."

"People constantly say to me, 'Isn't it wonderful that you finally found someone you wanted to marry?'" Gloria explained that it wasn't that the men she loved when she was younger were lacking in any way but that she was waiting for something in herself to be ready.

About her 70s, she says, "I am a slightly different person who builds on the past." Gloria has been redefining age for decades. On her 40th birthday, a well-meaning reporter said she looked young. Gloria's response became world-famous: "This is what 40 looks like - we've been lying for so long, who would know?"

A Kosovan woman in the audience said that when she arrived in the US 25 years ago, her mother was pressuring her to get married. She wanted to learn and develop and thrive as an individual first. Reading everything she could get her hands on, she kept telling her mother that Gloria Steinem wasn't married and she was fine.

When Gloria married, her mother said "Even that woman, your Gloria Steinem, got married." Amidst the laughter and applause, Gloria told her to tell her mother that she was 66 so she has plenty of time to catch up.

US author and Dreambuilders Community co-founder Barbara Winter\* found her Aunt Agnes to be a similar inspiration. The author of "Making a Living Without a Job: Winning Ways for Creating Work That You Love" says, "She was an adventurer. When I was growing up, I watched her

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**To thrive in your new marriage consider these issues in advance:**

**Family** - do you have a realistic idea of the commitment your partner's children / aging parents will need?

**Money** - are you planning to combine your resources or keep them separate?

**Living arrangements** - Gloria and David divided their time between her New York and his LA homes (until he became too ill). If you're both homeowners, will one of you sell your home or will you keep both?

**Flex your understanding and tolerance muscles** - just because you have done things the same way for a long time doesn't mean that you're right and your partner is wrong. Decide what you can live with, where you need to compromise and what things you can simply let go.

**Friends** - do you plan to keep your current friends and hobbies separate or will you meet the people who are important to your partner and introduce yours?

reinvent herself every few years."

Agnes' jobs included teaching, running a bookstore and becoming a writer. In her mid-50s she moved from the US to Nigeria and worked in a mission hospital for four years.

She returned to the US with a new skill - driving - and began taking road trips. Barbara says Agnes "got married for the first time at the age of 63. She threw herself into her new role as a wife, stepmother and grandmother with the same gusto we'd seen her display in all her projects.

"My Aunt Agnes also outlived her husband by many years. Her married name was Agnes Naatz. I'll never forget going to see her after her honeymoon and she just blushed and giggled like a teenager. I think her age - and her utter surprise that love found her so late in life - affected the relationship by making her more patient and tolerant. She wasn't annoyed by her husband's little quirks. She had always had a huge collection

of women friends and I think it was both a pleasure and a curiosity to spend time in conversation with a man."

Relate couples counsellor, Lesley Sharp\*\* advises that the main areas that need to be addressed by older brides and grooms are family and finances. Gloria and Agnes became stepmothers to grown children and, for some people, this can be quite a shock. If aging parents are involved, this can add even more to the list of things to be negotiated.

Lesley says, "People can be very rigid so what you see is what you get. My mum is 84 now and doesn't waste much time with tact. It's about understanding boundaries."



As Lesley says, "Those are the kinds of things that you have to deal with at any age."

\*Please visit [www.dreambuilderscommunity.com](http://www.dreambuilderscommunity.com)

\*\*Lesley is based in Essex. Please visit [www.lesleysharp.co.uk](http://www.lesleysharp.co.uk) for more information.