

# older Women younger Men

by Christine Pilgrim



The 15-year age gap between Hollywood actress Demi Moore (49) and her dashing actor ex-husband Ashton Kutcher (33) is cited by friends and media as the main reason for their break-up.

Yet, here in the Okanagan, older women seem to do very well with younger spouses.

Take Candace and Todd: she's a 53-year-old grandmother and he

is younger than her son. 25-year-old Todd was best buddies with Candace's daughter in high school. He remembers Candace doling out cookies when he visited her house about ten years ago.

Neither dreamt then that they would meet again as adults. When they did, they both worked in a bath and shower manufacturing plant in Armstrong.

She laughs, "I don't know what he saw in me. My hair was scraped up in a bandanna and I wore a full face mask - with charcoal filters, like a gas mask; ear muffs; a baggy old T shirt; white painter pants; and steel toe boots."

But in Todd's opinion Candace could wear a sack and she'd still look good. He's right. And in Candace's words, he's "pretty hot" too.

One day Todd asked if she'd like to "hang out." She had no idea what he meant, so opted for taking her own car, telling herself that if "hanging out" meant "something weird" she could always drive herself home.

"Hanging out" was far from weird and the two began dating each weekend. But neither expected their "fling" to last ... until one day, when Todd walked into the manufacturing plant with a dozen roses in one hand and a gold bracelet in an elaborate box in the other. "I love you," he said.

"Right there, in the middle of my shift!" says Candace. "So from then on we were officially a couple."

A year later, they were married. Todd's mother, two years younger than Candace, was delighted. But Candace's son and two daughters, all in their 20s, took a while to see that Todd was genuine and had no intention of hurting their mother.

"They were being protective," acknowledges Candace.

The couple giggle as they remember the scandalized faces of some of the less liberal-minded when Todd showed his affection for Candace in public.

"He always has his arms around me when we're together ... and he constantly texts me love messages when we're apart," she says happily.

When asked about the pitfalls of marrying someone so much younger, she maintains that any arguments they might have are similar to those of other couples, whatever their age difference. She also says she's acquired patience over the years. And as far as interests, language and cultural perceptions are concerned, both say they learn from each other.

Candace works out regularly at the gym to keep her trim figure. "We both do," says Todd. And they make a pretty handsome couple, with him standing at almost 6ft. to her energy-

packed 5ft. 2ins.

When asked how they view their future, they say they stay focused on the present. And, after two years of marriage, their recipe seems to work.

Meanwhile, Joyce and her husband Chris are very much more low key. They were friends and co-workers for several years before they became romantically involved. A plaque on their office wall read, "Young love is a gift of the earth. Older love is a gift of heaven."

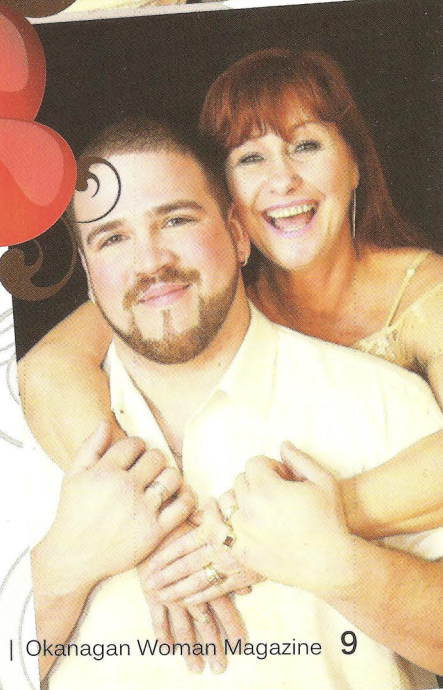
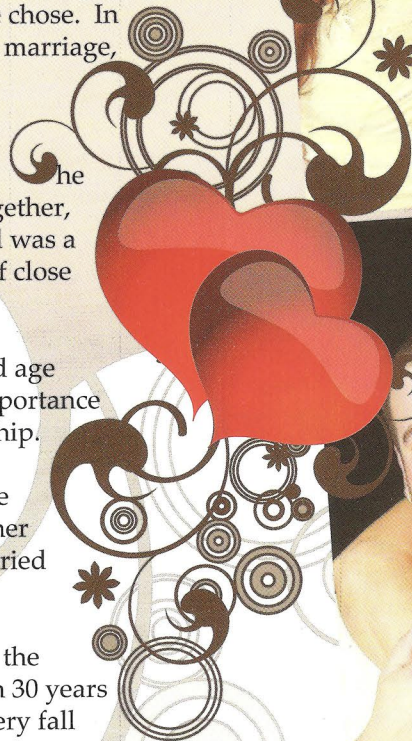
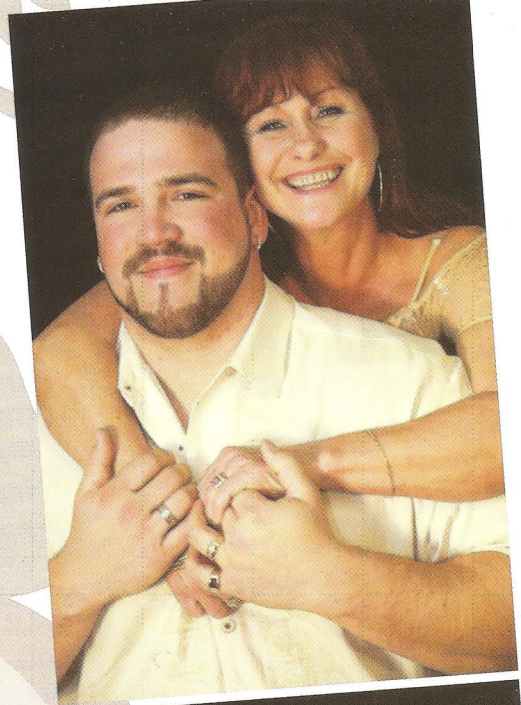
68-year-old Joyce, a former nurse who went into senior management caring for the elderly and who now runs One Joy Medi Spa from the couple's home in Enderby, looks lovingly at her 38-year-old husband who does the graphic design work at the spa. "I totally agree with that," she says.

Chris is a brain cancer survivor. The side effects of his two major brain surgeries and follow-up treatment mean that he might suffer from Alzheimer's or some similar brain deterioration; he might encounter mood swings; or die earlier than most. So he was reluctant to embark on any love match for fear of causing undue pain to the partner he chose. In fact, he had forsworn marriage, *carte blanche*.

As a consequence, when he and Joyce worked together, the bond they formed was a purely platonic one of close friendship.

Joyce has never found age difference to be of importance in a healthy relationship. She had shared a 31-year-long marriage with a man 11 years her junior before she married Chris.

She reminisces about the day she wed this man 30 years her junior, on a blustery fall afternoon six years ago.



"It was September 3rd," says Joyce.  
"My birthday."  
Chris smiles, "She was late."  
"I got lost," says Joyce.

When she finally arrived at Kananaskis Village viewpoint, situated between Banff and Calgary, retired Anglican Archdeacon David Ellis was waiting to perform the ceremony.

"So was I," chuckles Chris.

And Joyce recalls how she saw her handsome young groom run toward her, beaming from ear to ear. He still beams whenever he looks at her.

As they both have health issues, each cares for and supports the other. They exude harmony and mutual understanding.

So what is it that makes it almost taboo for an older woman to marry a younger man? I looked at my own relationship where there had been a significant age gap between my partner and myself. From inside, it felt no different from any other. Is it merely the perceptions of those outside, the judgements of those bound by convention and "rules of engagement" that make such relationships seem out of step with the rest?

A marriage and family therapist expressed concern about the often negative effects on children of older men and women who choose partners the same age as, or younger than those children. But both couples interviewed said that once their children realized the true worth of their marriages, they embraced their mothers' choices. In both cases, it was a son who had difficulty accepting, while their daughters had become even closer.

The notion of an older man marrying a much younger woman has, for some reason, been deemed less outrageous and, indeed, was the norm throughout Europe and North America in the 1800s. Famed Russian War and Peace author Leo Tolstoy was 34 when, in 1862, he married Sophia, then 18. And Rose, the 15-year-old daughter of our own Okanagan pioneer Catherine Schubert, was married to 50-year-old Tom Le Duc in 1877. Yet a woman much older than a man is still, for many, noteworthy at best and preposterous otherwise.

Perhaps, if life partnerships were to be viewed from a non-judgemental, non-prejudiced, open-minded point of view, every couple embarking on married life - in particular, in this "age" of women's liberation, those older women with younger male partners - would be congratulated and wished nothing but happiness, health, love and respect.

Footnote, solely for interest's sake: Several older women with younger male partners declined to be interviewed for this article.

COUPLE PHOTOS BY DEBBRA BUTLER  
[www.posesphotos.com](http://www.posesphotos.com)

