

1D.

Snapshots of commitment

Getting married young can work, even if Canadians increasingly prefer to wait
Guaranteed ups and downs simply come with the territory. *by Nelia Raposo*

Michelle Albert decided early not to let fear get in the way. The 25-year-old Mississauga resident married a guy she's known since kindergarten.

While people are increasingly waiting until their late 20s and early 30s to even consider marriage, a few brave souls like Albert and her husband Bryan dive right in. For Valentine's Day, here's some snapshots of some of the tips, tricks, perks and perils of marrying young.

SOMETIMES IT JUST SEEMS MEANT TO BE

Some get hitched to the only one they'll ever love. In her circle of friends, few are married, never mind still dating their first serious partner. But after a lifetime of friendship, seven years of dating and one year of marriage, Michelle doesn't doubt the choice she's made.

"If I go one day without talking to him I go insane," she says about her childhood sweetheart Bryan, also 25. "It's really weird. I wonder what I would do if I ever had to live without him."

"I can't even think about being with anybody else. I don't have this kind of connection with anybody else. I can tell him anything," she says. "Each day I have more respect for him."

Bryan, who moved away from their hometown of Corunna, Ont., to be with Michelle during her studies at Guelph University, says she's "always been the one I've always had feelings for."

Michelle and Bryan Albert have known each other since they were 5. Their dog Cola clearly approves of their marriage.



Michelle and Bryan Albert have known each other since they were 5. Their dog Cola clearly approves of their marriage.

ally connecting with one another emotionally, Dorfman says. "The challenges when you are young are great because people are busy working on themselves," says Dorfman. "People in their 20s are really pushing themselves, trying to advance careers."

"Then you've got two people going to work long hours, stressed out, so they can live a certain way, then they come home and each of them wants to unload on the other the pressures of the day."

Here's a quick that suggests getting married early could make more of a difference than you might think. If you've had many relationships, you're more likely to move on and see what else is out there, Rubinstein says.

But couples who have only dated each other tend to be more loyal — if there's a problem they tend to stick it out longer.

GOING THE DISTANCE
Lynn Philip and Marlene Hodgson are examples of a successful marriage. The Scugog couple recently celebrated their 41st wedding anniversary. But getting to this point wasn't always easy.

Fresh out of high school, Marlene and Lynn were on their own by the time they were 18 respectively. Even in 1964, some considered them too young for such a commitment.

Out of the people that did the same thing we did, 90 per cent are not together anymore. It was very difficult. If you survive, you can discuss what sex has been like over the years so they can

renew their love," Dorfman says. "Renewing and re-energizing a relationship is very important. Things can get dull if you let it. What happens to people who have been together for a long time is that they are expecting the other guy to do it."

Dorfman encourages her clients to defy stereotypes to suit the marriage. "One partner may feel: Now that I'm married I can go out with my friends to the bar any more. This may make that person feel isolated and resentful, then you get people who close off emotionally... It doesn't have to be this way," she says.

This isn't as likely to happen to couples who marry when they are older, as the people involved have learned what independence feels like and aren't willing to give it up for someone else, she says.

WHEN IT DOESN'T LAST
Most of Jack's time with her future husband was spent at her family's restaurant. Jack isn't her real name — she asked that not be used.

Being from a close-knit Roman-Catholic Italian family, abstinence before marriage was important to her parents, who never left them alone.

At 23, getting married seemed like a good way to escape. "I was young and naive. He was my first love. You jump into it. You don't see the way they would if you were older."

"Don't get me wrong. There are a lot of couples who marry young and have kids and years later are still happy to be together. But I think I did it for the wrong reasons," the 34-year-old says. "We just didn't get along. He was too attached to his mother. There were a lot of other issues too."

Those issues included emotional and physical abuse, and an addiction to prescription drugs. "I started taking him. Finally I realized, I don't need this garbage. I packed in the morning so everybody could see that I left him. He didn't leave me."

"I understand that in the Catholic religion it's a sin to get divorced. But if staying in that relationship is making you sick, what's the point? A lot of people out there are just living unhappy lives because they are stuck in a rut and scared to leave," she says.

"This has been a big experience that's made me really grow up. I've learned not to put up with anybody's garbage. Don't let somebody tell you what you can and cannot do. That's my biggest lesson."

Four years later she's happily remarried. Experience has taught her this: you have to make sure you're compatible, have similar interests, discuss issues openly, compromise and give each other space.

BEING FRIENDS ISN'T ALWAYS ENOUGH
Thirty-something and dating again, Maggie (not her real name) tried to make things work with her first serious boyfriend, the father of her young

son, until their 11th wedding anniversary. When it came, she felt there was nothing to celebrate. She had been feeling "empty, like something was missing" for a long time. Her husband, the same man who had proposed to her at a restaurant with a serenading violinist, a dozen roses and a diamond brought out on a dessert tray, barely paid any attention to her. He was too busy concentrating on his career.

"I felt like he'd gotten married just to check it off his list," Maggie says, who worked in retail for years. "I kept telling him I feel like we're holding each other back."

"We went straight to full-time jobs after high school. I didn't go to university or college and that will be a regret I'll always have," she says. "You get married in such a rush that you don't take the time to figure out who you are and what you really want."

Looking back she jokes that she said yes to the wedding proposal because the waiter at the restaurant were waiting for an answer. "It was like a movie, you just go with the moment," she says. Afterwards, during their two-year engagement she often worried.

The trouble came when she wanted to confront the conflict. He was more comfortable avoiding it. "I kept trying to change him. He's a wonderful person but you just can't change someone," she says.

After months of trying to get him to join her at counselling they finally agreed it was time to call it quits.

© thestar.ca

Life online

Ellie Linwood Barclay
Hear podcasts of their columns at thestar.com/podcasts

Because I Said So
Family Issues Reporter Andrea Gordon's new blog is at thestar.com/blogs

The Constant Shopper
Monday to Friday online and Saturdays in the Shopping section thestar.com/constantshopper

Under one roof
All of the inside and outside stories from our various homes sections are now together online for easy access in one place. Read thestar.com/athome

Ellie
Q I'm in my senior year of college and since freshman year you have been best friends with one guy. Last year, I studied abroad and he met a girl. I do understand that he has to be with her, but it's taking a toll on our friendship. We're only doing things whenever she's unavailable, he spends every part of the week with her. I'm feeling as though I'm a third wheel. I need to talk to him, but how should I approach it, and not come off too strongly?
Left Out
A Being best friends includes being really happy for the other guy when he gets a great mark, lands a terrific job, falls in love. It also means being able to talk to your buddy in an open, non-judgmental way. You miss him, and would like to get together more. Say so. And come up with a suggestion that's workable — for example, a

Buddy should agree to 'guy's night'

Ellie

Q Things were great with the guy I've been dating for four months, then he started giving me mixed messages. He's said he's not dating anyone else, but implied it wouldn't be okay if I did. We also decided I'd go on the pill instead of condoms, but recently he's been dropping hints about other women being interested in him. Finally, he said he doesn't care a lot for me but that he's not ready to commit to being my boyfriend as we're only just getting to know each other, and he doesn't want to get hurt. I'm fine with taking time before things get more serious, but he's had problems before with commitment. I don't want to close off the chance of it developing into a relationship, but at the same time I want to protect myself from being hurt. Scared
A Protect yourself in every way, and that means giving

"boy's night" once a week, and also to get together with the couple every two weeks, say for a movie. If you welcome this girl into your friendship, he won't feel he's "choosing" between you for time. Act like an upbeat, friendly companion, and you won't be a third wheel.

Q I've been dating for four months, then he started giving me mixed messages. He's said he's not dating anyone else, but implied it wouldn't be okay if I did. We also decided I'd go on the pill instead of condoms, but recently he's been dropping hints about other women being interested in him. Finally, he said he doesn't care a lot for me but that he's not ready to commit to being my boyfriend as we're only just getting to know each other, and he doesn't want to get hurt. I'm fine with taking time before things get more serious, but he's had problems before with commitment. I don't want to close off the chance of it developing into a relationship, but at the same time I want to protect myself from being hurt. Scared
A Protect yourself in every way, and that means giving

back to condoms since he's likely to be having sex with other women. This guy likes to have things his way — he controls your availability and his pleasure, as well as his options. Pull back, go slow, and date others if the opportunity arises. He's far less likely to take this further if he has you waiting on the shelf while he shops around. I'm not so convinced that he has "problems" with commitment... rather I think he just isn't ready for it, and maybe not with you. You need to protect your emotions too, by not building your expectations too high.

Q I've been with my husband for three years, married one I work full time and when I come home I'm tired. He gets mad that I don't want to have sex with him. He's not working now. The stress of carrying a house by myself gets to me. I haven't been wanting to have sex lately and he throws a temper tantrum. He doesn't clean the house so it's left up to me, plus most of the cooking. He won't help. Then I caught him masturbating and I'm hurt by it. Very Tired
A Take a rest from the battle. You're in a power struggle:

He by refusing to help out; you by withholding sex. Decide what this marriage is about — are you a team, or just two combatants living under the same roof. If a team, then his unemployment and the household responsibilities are an issue you need to address together. What's he doing about looking for a job, and how can he use his free time to be helpful to your life together? If he's depressed, then he needs to see a doctor. You need to show you're on his side, not the enemy. Meanwhile, after a hard day's work, treat yourself to some relaxation, such as a warm bubble bath and some intimate time with the man you chose to marry. He'd be more inclined to pitch in and later share a pizza if he got less cleaning and cooking and more understanding and closeness.

DENTURES
\$249.00 each
416-588-9966
Valid until March 31, 2006

SANDYLION
Happy Easter!
Hop on down to our store for some unbelievable savings!
Great for Party Favors, Last Days and much, much more!
We offer and present our products as mentioned and advertised only!
See your local retailer for Sandylion's latest and greatest designs as well as our fabulous licensed character products!
400 Colborne Ave., Burlington, Ont. L7R 4K6
Sales Hours: Mon. - Fri. 9 a.m. - 5 p.m., Sat. 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.