

# Inside the Dating Scene for Single Seniors

It's never too late to find the man or woman of your dreams.

It started with a hello and a smile. It ended with a wedding that included guests from two continents.

That's the story of Bruce and Bernadetta Bateman, who found love at the Lakewood Village retirement community in Melbourne, Florida, and got married at ages 76 and 73, respectively. Their story is only one example of how older Americans are pursuing romance and finding the perfect partner, regardless of their age.



According to AARP, 45 percent of Americans older than age 65 are divorced, separated or widowed. Meanwhile, a 2013 Pew Research Center study found that 6 percent of Americans between ages 55 and 64 had used an online dating website or app. That may not sound like much until you consider that only 10 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds reported using those sites.

However, as the Bateman story demonstrates, older Americans don't necessarily have to resort to high-tech means to find their next soul mate.

## Finding Love Next Door

Bruce didn't have to go far to find his wife. While gardening one day, Bernadetta walked by and said hello. Bruce recalls being instantly smitten – although his future wife insists she had no intentions other than showing neighborly friendliness.

It wasn't until Bernadetta lost a beloved pet and received a condolence note from Bruce that she began to feel otherwise.

Spending the holidays together led to a January proposal and a March 2012 wedding attended by family and friends from as far away as Bernadetta's native Netherlands. When asked whether they were concerned about moving too fast, Bruce is quick to point out their previous marriages and life experiences meant they knew they were a match.

"With all that background and experience, we knew what we needed," he says. "We absolutely knew it was the right thing to do."

## Where to Meet People After Age 50

Not everyone will find their future spouse living a few houses down the street. But fear not. Relationship experts say older Americans have several options when it comes to meeting new people.

“Instead of focusing on where can I meet guys or where can I meet girls, think about where can I meet friends,” says Christina Pesoli, a family law attorney in Austin, Texas and author of “Break Free from the Divortex.” She says those settings, from book clubs to church groups, can be great places to meet potential dates with similar interests.

Pepper Schwartz, a love and relationship expert for AARP, says travel and hobby groups and community classes are also places where older Americans can mingle. She adds that online dating shouldn’t be overlooked either.

“I’m a big fan of online dating because it has so many people to offer to you,” Schwartz says.

Some dating sites, such as those run by AARP and OurTime, cater specifically to singles older than age 50. However, big sites like eHarmony and Match have plenty of older users as well. Schwartz notes older Americans may find that boutique sites that cater to specific religious groups or personal interests may provide the best matches.

Seniors shouldn’t limit themselves to only dating people of the same age, Pesoli says. It’s an issue she sees with women in particular; they tend to date people they *think* they should date rather than whom they *want* to date. “You get to have your own rules and preferences,” Pesoli says.

## Common Mistakes on the Senior Dating Scene

“You’d be surprised how much people talk about health on a first date,” says Schwartz, adding that dropping a “data dump on hello” is a major senior dating mistake. “I’ve heard older daters make it sound like a job interview or a health check.”

From rattling off physical ailments to discussing former relationships, seniors may be prone to oversharing on a first date. Others may have been out of the dating scene for so long that they’ve developed off-putting habits. Seniors may have to relearn how to interact on dates, says Schwartz, who finds it touching to see many adult children step up to coach their parents through the process.

For those who don’t have that sort of support, the key to a successful first date may lie in remembering to steer the conversation away from events of long ago. “When you’re going out on your first date, make it about your future and not your past,” Pesoli suggests.

Dating too quickly after a divorce can be another mistake, and one that could cause friction within families. “It makes adult children crazy when mom or dad rush into a new relationship,” says Bob Boyd, a partner with the Atlanta law firm Boyd Collar Nolen & Tuggle, and past president of the Georgia Chapter of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers.

Taking it slowly can help ease concerns from adult children who may be worried about their parent's emotional and financial stability. To that second point, Boyd says seniors have to think carefully about money matters if they are considering a second marriage, particularly after a divorce that may have already divided retirement assets and income.

"You cannot be afraid to have the hard discussion about having a prenuptial agreement," he says. For those who aren't sure whether it's worth it to date again, Bruce Bateman encourages his peers to at least give it a try. "Don't be stuffy and stay at home. Take a few chances," he says. "Love is wonderful the second time around."

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