

When to get HITCHED

Are you wondering if it's a good idea to get married in your 20s, 30s, 40s or even later? Or have you ruled out the possibility altogether? Marriage is a contentious topic, now more than ever, so we invited our readers to join the conversation. Here, three women share their perspectives.

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Yoko Bewick

I'm glad I raised my children when I was young, energetic and free-spirited enough to see the world and its magic through the eyes of a child. It allowed me to stop and appreciate my time with my children and to learn, together with them, about life's beauty. There was a time when I thought that perhaps my younger years would've been better spent learning about myself before teaching my children to hold their individuality dear. I now know that would've also come at a cost. I can't help but wonder whether I'd have the energy or the patience to raise children in my 40s. There certainly are sound arguments on both sides of the coin.

My divorce resulted from marrying too young and not knowing what I did and didn't want from a partner. I hadn't yet learned about my needs and wants from a relationship, and my marriage bore the brunt. I'm now in a healthy relationship where I'm clear about my needs and wants and can retain my independence – something I fought fiercely to achieve. Would I remarry? The chances are slim. Why? Well, I see no need.

For me, marriage is not unlike entering into any other legal contract. As I'm not religious and don't observe any cultural practices, I don't have a sense of obligation. I could talk for days about the pros and cons of marriage (from *my* perspective).

Today, I have the most beautiful family that brings tremendous joy and love to my world. This includes my partner, who's dried tears, wiped noses, played driver, and onboarded the role of

caretaker and role model to our children. I'd say I'm lucky, but I've learned through hindsight this is a result of my being able to stand my ground, retain my independence, and choose my partners wisely. The best part is that I'm still young enough to chase a dream, change career, travel and enjoy what life still has to offer. The biggest advantage is that I can forge this new path having the wisdom I've gained through my experience. This is one of the most prominent pros supporting the argument for having children while you're young.

To anyone reading this: if you're conflicted about whether or not to marry or have children, my humble advice would be not to do it. Conflition arises from doubt, and if there's doubt, then I think you should explore the source and reason for those feelings. These are life-altering decisions, and if you have the luxury of time to mull over your choice, use it wisely. ♦♦

"I'm glad I raised my children when I was young and free-spirited enough to see the world through the eyes of a child"

I'm what some people might consider a happy, middle-aged woman. Reaching this juncture has, however, been quite a journey. I got married at 18 and had three children by 23 – which makes me sound like I was alive in the 1800s! Like many teens, I believed I knew all there was to know and was mature enough to venture into adulthood with my head held high. Fast forward 18 years, add a healthy dose of maturity and a sprinkling of wisdom, and you'll find I'm now a 42-year-old divorcee who's lived with her partner for 11 years. Would I change that? Not at all.

I'm a 34-year-old mother to four beautiful children, Owami (14), Oluhle (nine), Onora (two) and Onesu (a four-month-old baby). I married the father of my second-born child when I was 25. It was all roses and sunshine until a few days before he had to pay lobola. I thought there'd be no wedding, or he'd ghost me. He paid lobola when we weren't on good terms. I'm not sure how this'll sound, but Iknewwe'dgetdivorcedevenbeforewesaidIdo. Still, we got married and behaved as if our relationship was healthy. But you can only pretend for so long.

I was suffering financially, but I couldn't share anything I was going through with his family because they never liked me due to my tribe – I'm Zulu, and he's a Mosotho man. They'd often try to sabotage our marriage. He'd pretend not to like what his family was doing, all the while having an affair with a woman his family knew about behind my back.

We started sleeping in different rooms. Sometimes, he wouldn't come home at all. One day, he returned to fetch his belongings and said he was moving out. I was at peace with his decision until he saw how comfortable I'd become with our kids and began sending me threatening messages. At night I'd hear gunshots outside my home, and when I looked out of my window would see the same car

driving away. He'd send people to jump over our fence to scare my kids and me.

While a man was trying to open my window, I remember praying with my kids, trying to stay calm and unshaken. When the noise stopped, I steeled myself to go outside to see who was trying to break in (I know, that was stupid of me). Luckily, the guy ran away.

One Saturday morning, I returned home to find the kitchen door broken and left open. Shocked, I entered the house to see what had happened. Nothing had been taken. I was scared, wondering who'd been there and what they wanted. Deep down, I knew my ex-husband was responsible.

I told myself I wouldn't leave until [my ex-husband] served me with our divorce papers. I heard stories he was now with [the woman with whom he'd been having an affair] and was planning on marrying her. Once he knew I wasn't planning on moving out, he served me the papers, which I was only too happy to sign. Months later, I experienced the trauma of everything I'd been through and cried about all the bad things that had happened to me. Still, I appreciated coming out of my marriage alive. I moved back home with my family for support.

Two years later, I met a Zulu man, and I thought, this is a blessing because now I've got a loving man who respects me and my kids. At first, I was afraid of loving him because I thought our relationship was too good to be true. Then, I received a call from a woman questioning me about *her* man. I thought, what the heck have I gotten myself into? I swiftly ended our relationship to protect myself because I was two months pregnant and tired of fighting. But over the next three months, he sent me money to buy things to satisfy my pregnancy cravings and accompanied me to the doctors. I decided to give him a chance because I'd never felt so loved yet lied to, but on one condition: he'd have to prove his love and faithfulness and stop lying to me.

I must say, *indoda* (a true gentleman) is a Zulu man. He's taken care of me since I allowed him back into my life, and he was supportive when I gave birth via c-section. I must commend him for being the best partner I've ever had. He expressed his intention to pay lobola, and I asked him not to just yet, pleading with him to bare with me because I want to do things differently this time. We've been blessed with another bundle of joy, and we're looking forward to the future.

“I'm not sure how this'll sound, but knew we'd get divorced even before we said I do”

Thulile Gambushe



Ruth Katz

“Listen closely to what your close friends and family have to say about your intended spouse”

I was 22 when I married my first husband, and I wish I'd waited, getting to know him better first. One lesson I learned from the experience is not to marry someone to escape a situation – in my case, I never got on well with my mom. And not to marry someone before you've had an extensive courtship (at least two to three years). [My first partner] and I got engaged in February and married in April of the same year. What affirmed my decision to get married again? I met my second husband at the inauguration of a support group – we'd actually met eleven years beforehand. After the meeting, we kept on bumping into each other in the most unexpected places. Then, we started dating. I'd

recommend getting married when you're older. I was 40 when I remarried, and my husband-to-be was 43. We'd both travelled extensively and had considerable life experience. By the time I was 40, I'd completed a four-year honours degree in social work at Wits University and a research Master's degree at the University of Johannesburg. Working in the child protection field as a related foster care social worker for almost a decade, I had to remove children and babies who were being physically abused by their biological parents. The various hospitals around Joburg knew the social workers from my employer, the Johannesburg Child Welfare Society, and when we arrived carrying a child with non-accidental injuries would allow us to go to the front of the queue in casualty.

I took a break from social work from 1987 to 1988 to work as what the company called a Personnel Supervisor (an employment assistance role). My position entailed screening applicants for software positions using a personality test called the Thomas System. My husband-to-be had worked as an all-rounder at a small hotel in Southern France before embarking on a tour around Europe, including Scandinavia, where he has relatives on his late father's side. He also worked in London driving forklift trucks at an American army base and in Spain selling oranges and newspapers. Everything fell into place. My family, friends and daughter from my first marriage (then aged 14) all expressed their approval of our marriage. My first cousin (who was more like an older sister) said my husband-to-be was *very* good to me. My advice to women who may be conflicted? Listen closely to what your close friends and family have to say about your intended spouse because they may see negative character traits in him you've missed. I agree with the old saying, love is blind, which I interpret as when you're in love, you're blind to [your partner's] faults. **©**

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