

Retirement Newsday > Lifestyle > Retirement

Print | A+ A-

0 Comment Email Like Tweet 5 +1 0 Submit

# Sex and love over 50 is a brave new world

Originally published: April 11, 2012 1:29 PM  
 Updated: April 14, 2012 9:39 AM  
 By JIM MERRITT, Special to Newsday



Photo credit: iStock | Many seniors are negotiating the brave new world of intimacy after divorce or the death of a spouse.

After her decades-long marriage ended in divorce two years ago, "L" started looking for a new man to share her life. For the first time in a long time, the 54-year-old Nassau resident decided to take a dip in the dating scene pool.

Initially, she was looking only for friendship and a little validation from the opposite sex that she was still desirable. "It made me feel good to feel attractive, flirting with guys, even though I wasn't ready for anything more serious," says L, who requested anonymity to shield her grown children from the private details of her life.

Eventually, she wanted something more, beyond friendship. Her transition was eased by joining a divorce support group at the Mid-Island Y Jewish Community Center in Plainview, where she made new friends who helped her understand the changes in the dating scene since her marriage. "That really gave me a lot of insight . . . and prepared me pretty much for what's out in the world nowadays," she says.

Registering with the online Jewish singles network, JDate, she began to meet men. "It was very scary," says L, who was born and raised as a Conservative Jew in South America and immigrated to this country in the early 1980s.

Her first 20 JDate "matches" were mostly with men she wasn't interested in. Others were "horror stories," like the man who showed up drunk at a restaurant and immediately began pawing and propositioning her.

She also was concerned about the ugly reality of sexually transmitted diseases (commonly referred to as STDs). When she was married, she says "AIDS and STDs were a far-off thing." But that sense of security evaporated when she learned that her husband had been unfaithful, leading her to be tested for HIV. Her results came back negative, but she started requiring the man she was having relations with to use condoms when they were intimate. She also did background checks on prospective mates, searching for information about them on the Internet.

For the past 11/2 years, she has been dating a man she met through JDate. They have a satisfying, intimate relationship, made more enjoyable by her new outlook on life as a woman in her 50s. "Sex is great," she says candidly, "but it's different because I'm not 20 anymore, I feel more confident in myself, and I'm more open with my sexuality."

## Dating is different now

For recently divorced or widowed baby boomers and even older adults who are suddenly single after a generation of married life, dating is a different animal from the one they knew years ago. The sexual revolution of the 1960s, the women's movement, medical advances with enhancement drugs such as Viagra, and an epidemic of STDs including HIV and AIDS that began in the 1980s, have all helped to create a challenging and sometimes intimidating era for older women and men who are suddenly single. However, with help from more experienced friends, and advice from experts, many start their dating lives over and find fulfillment with new partners.

There's an apparent appetite for the subject and a wide variety of offerings for different tastes -- from best-selling novels by E.L. James to discussions on Internet sites for the 50-and-older crowd, and events for those who want a road map to help navigate sexual relations and intimacy in their later years. For instance, L attended a recent lecture by an expert on 50-plus sex and intimacy at the Sid Jacobson Jewish Community Center in East Hills. About 50 women (men were welcome, but none attended) went to the event, sponsored by the Transition Network of Long Island, an organization for women who are 50 and older.

The speaker, Suzanne Braun Levine, is the author of "How We Love Now: Sex and the New Intimacy in Second Adulthood" (Viking). Levine offered a positive message to attendees about sexuality as they enter the "second adulthood," which she describes as ages 50 to 75. There are "a serious proportion of women our age who are having the best sex of their lives," she says. However, Levine acknowledges that some women 50 and older "can't find partners or suffer a physiological condition that makes sex unpleasant." Often, she says, the problem can be medically treated.

Sexuality, seniors and their search for love in the 21st century has become the subject of many blogs and websites. And while women seem more inclined to get together to talk about s-e-x, that doesn't mean guys don't have questions about the subject, too.

## A man's 'road map'

Harold Spielman, 84, of Sands Point, recently launched SuddenlySolo.org, a website described as "a lifestyle road map for the mature widowed or divorced man." Categories of information include "Sex & Relationships," "Solo Living" and "Personal Experiences."

Four years ago, Spielman's second wife died. When he was ready to begin dating again, he found support from a close friend and business associate. "She introduced me to the fact that there was a lot of activity going on out there." But even with a guide, he still finds some of the changes startling.

As a new single, Spielman says he began buying prophylactics for the first time since he was a young man. He was surprised to find what he wanted on display, readily accessible, instead of being discreetly stored behind a counter.

"When I was a teen," Spielman recalls, "you were embarrassed if there was a saleswoman behind the counter and you wouldn't buy them [condoms]. Now they're out there hanging in the open, by the vibrators."

Protection is important for sexually active older people who are not married or in a steady relationship, because of the prevalence of STDs, including HIV, Spielman says. HIV transmission is a problem among older people because many mature women don't insist on condom use because it's unlikely they'll get pregnant. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, on its website 1.usa.gov/cMxa6e, states that adults 50 and older accounted for 15 percent of new HIV/AIDS diagnoses in 2005. Many older people "do not use condoms and do not get tested for HIV," according to the CDC.

Despite the risks, some are finding joy in rediscovering sensuality with a more mature mindset. Bonnie Katz, who is in her 60s and lives in Bay Shore, recently reunited with an old flame. They were both students 45 years ago and planned to marry but ended up scrapping their wedding plans. "We both went our separate ways in the late 1960s," she says.

Now divorced, Katz found her former beau's email address online and they began corresponding. Katz, a retired Smithtown teacher, and the love of her younger life, a retired attorney, have reunited, but Katz says their relationship is different this time.

As college sweethearts in the late 1960s, Katz says, "you didn't talk about your feelings, everybody kept things in . . . so the first thing we said was that we were not going to do that anymore, that it was time to talk about feelings and be honest." Their second time around is sensual but more honest than it was years ago, she says.

"If you are open with each other, then your sensuality with each other and your feelings are more open," Katz says. "It becomes very loving and caring and . . . it's more about the whole relationship than just about the sex."

ASTRUMSOLAR™ Get a FREE instant quote  
 USE OUR SOLAR CALCULATOR ▶

Find us on Facebook  
 Be a fan Recent activity  
 Your friends  
 Newsday on Facebook Like  
 27,560 people like Newsday.

Facebook  
 Newsday on Facebook Like  
 27,560 people like Newsday.  
 Paul Pete Arlene Kevin Johnny  
 Joey Kim David Raquel Beverly  
 Jacqueline Laura Christine ScubaSteve Diana  
 Facebook social plugin

Most popular lifestyle  
 Stories Photos  
 Making eggplant Parmigiana  
 How to organize your garage  
 Breakfast recipes for dinner  
 Garden Detective: Butterfly bush, aphids, spider mites  
 Too much sleep may increase risk of stroke

ASTRUMSOLAR™ Get a FREE instant quote  
 USE OUR SOLAR CALCULATOR ▶

careerbuilder top jobs search jobs  
 View all top jobs Post your resume