

How to Keep Your Love Alive

by [Ellie Kahn](#)

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I'm smiling a lot these days because I've recently fallen in love. Starting over at 56 years young, it's unlikely that I'll experience a golden anniversary, but I'd really, truly like to enjoy and adore one special person for the rest of my hopefully long, healthy life.

With the divorce rate in this country still shockingly high, I wonder how it's possible to stay in love for many, many years. But then there are the examples of:

Joan and Harry Gould, married 51 years;

Ruth and Herb Forer, married 55 years;

Janet and Jake Farber, also married 55 years;

Millie and Mike Hersch, married for 58 years;

and Marjorie and Rabbi Jacob Pressman, married for 63 years.

There is much that we "young" folks can learn from these devoted partners who have succeeded at keeping love alive, year after year after year.

Couples who have created a partnership and life together consistently talk of the effort involved.

Yes, some relationships seem easier than others, but all say it takes time, energy and a true willingness to face whatever comes along on their journey together.

"It's a lot of give and take, just like in business," Jake Farber said. "If you don't have that, you won't have a lasting marriage."

"I think you have to be patient and flexible," Janet Farber said. "Compromise is so important. One time you give in a little bit, and the next time the other person gives in. Everyone has times where someone in the family is having problems, or there are emotional difficulties, but you try to communicate and get through the hard times."

Rabbi Jacob Pressman has counseled many couples over the years, some of whom, he said, have "stayed together miraculously. I notice that as the years go by and they stick it out, the differences begin to melt away and they begin to be more like each other and grow closer. And they have a mature love. They've gotten over some of the pettiness of some of the differences in life. Now their lives are more the same and the controversies are minimized."

This shared commitment to face challenges and keep communicating through difficult times seems to be such a critical aspect of keeping love alive. In his book "Becoming Partners" psychotherapist Carl Rogers writes about threads of permanence and enrichment in relationships. One element he explores is dedication -- not to a marriage contract, but to a continuing process that the partnership goes through. "The commitment is individual, but the constant, difficult, risky work is of necessity work that is done together," he writes.

The Forers, both 75, met when they were 16, and got married when they were 20 years old. The constant work that Rogers writes about is familiar to Herb Forer.

"There's no perfect person," he said. "We all come into our relationships with our own warts and shortcomings and our own strengths. On any given day in a marriage, anybody could say, 'What do I need this for?' But then you realize the things that bother you are silly. You have so much more in common and so much fun together, and those difficult days pass."

And the Forers know about difficult days. Their relationship was severely tested when they lost their first child at 10 months old. Herb and Ruth were both 25 at the time, but the tragic loss led to a conscious decision about how they would live as a couple.

"We vowed that we'd work together to fulfill the type of life we wanted -- to not blame each other, not find fault, or let unimportant things upset us," Herb Forer said. "We agreed to discuss things openly and communicate. And we decided to focus on the real priorities in our life and our common goals, rather than using the strains in life to separate us."

Along with common interests and commitments, couples who create a successful life together seem to really support each other's individuality and growth. Rogers writes, "When each partner is making progress toward becoming increasingly his or her own self, the partnership becomes more enriching."

Joan and Harry Gould, who are both psychologists, agree. "Keeping yourself vital and interested in the world is the primary thing," said Harry Gould, who is 81. "You can't just look to the other person to keep you inspired. If both people are thinking about their own lives and development, it enhances the relationship."

Joan Gould appreciates the fact that both her husband and their relationship are constantly changing. "I discover new things about Harry that I never knew before. It would be boring otherwise. He is a different person at 80 than he was at 40 or 50. He's changing and I'm changing. Consequently the relationship changes and grows," she said.

Rabbi Pressman sees his marriage to Marjorie as a constant source of stimulation and fun.

"We've always entertained each other," he said. "We're both rather clever and bright, and we admire that in each other, so there's a freshness about our lives almost all the time. We laugh together at the same things. And we surprise each other so there's ever a new personality and yet the same personality. We didn't have any mid-life crisis; we're still juveniles."

"When my husband retired and it was the first time he could take a weekend off, I'd arrange a weekend away," Marjorie Pressman said. "Sometimes I'd surprise him. I'd just tell him what to pack and we'd go down the coast and stay at a hotel and just have a good time together. We've been really blessed. I don't think either of us expected to live this long but here we are. He just turned 86.... I'm a little younger."

Looking back with amazement at the many years they've shared seems a common theme for these couples.

"Being married this long came as a surprise to me," Millie Hersch said. "When we were first married, I worried about what I'd talk to him about and figured it wouldn't last very long. But the years have just gone by."

When a love lasts for many, many years and people grow old together, there seems to be a shift in what is most important within that partnership.

"It's a lot better for us in retirement, when there are minimal pressures on us, and we just face life together as a team," Herb Forer said. "We don't take ourselves seriously. We take what we do seriously, but not ourselves. We listen to each other and try to anticipate each other's needs and try to make each other as comfortable as we can and do for each other. We're just having fun."

But having a relationship that lasts many years can also mean facing difficult challenges, and making adjustments with age.

"The aging is a whole new time of life," Harry Gould said. "We haven't been each others' physical and psychological and mental helpers before. There's a sense of becoming a parent to each other at times. That's new. Some people get frightened of the changes they go through as

they age, and it might cause them to pull away and withdraw in their marriage. But it's so important to talk about your feelings. Talk about how this new time of life is for you. Talk, talk, talk. Share yourself."

Besides the challenges of aging together along a shared path, these couples have all discovered new ways of loving.

"The senior caring about each other is different than courtship and honeymoon. We take care of each other at this point, not out of duty, but out of a profound love," Rabbi Pressman said.

I'm inspired and moved by these stories of heartfelt, lifelong devotion. Whether you are renewing an existing relationship or starting a new journey in love as I am, these couples can give us hope that someday we, too, will look back in celebration over many years of keeping a precious love alive.

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