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Jackie Tauber, 46, and her husband, Scott, 34, of Oceanside have been married for 12 years.



## Older women, younger men

LI COUPLES MAKING IT WORK

BY BETTINA MARKS  
Special to Newsday

**W**hen Peggy Wagner first met Kevin Dunn 10 years ago at the telecommunications company where they worked, she was 35 and a divorced mother with a young daughter, Jill, and he was 26 and single.

Dunn was "the Trifecta of fun," she says. "I wasn't serious at first, but when we began including Jill in our plans, I

knew it was for real."

Because she was in her mid-30s, they talked about the biological-clock issue early. Kevin had heard that she was older from mutual friends, but said the age difference was never an issue for him because they found common ground within their personalities and settled somewhere in-between.

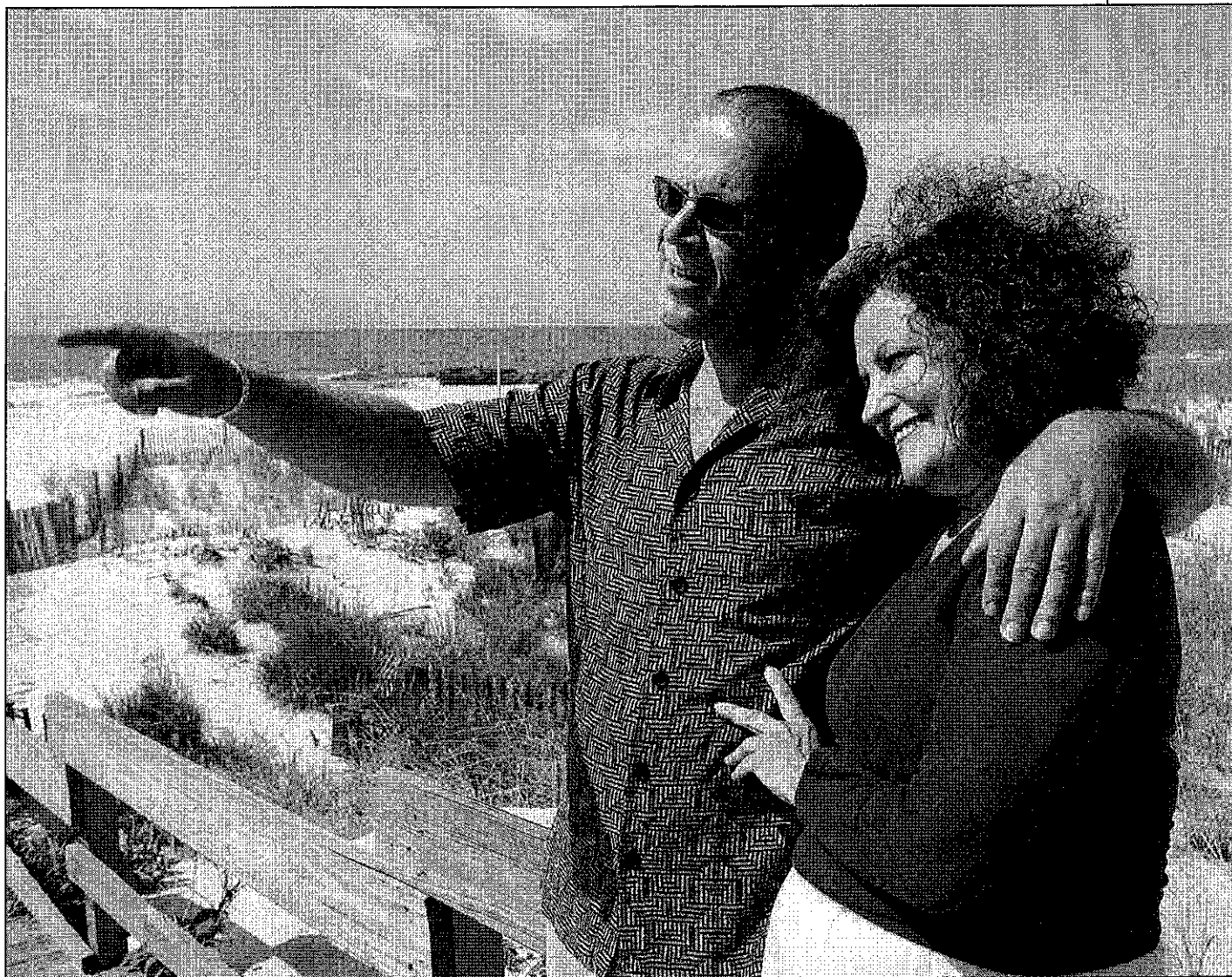
"She was very outgoing, friendly, aggressive and strong-willed," says Kevin. They married, live in Long Beach and have two sons together.

These days you don't have to be a rich socialite like Ivana Trump or a glamorous movie star like Demi Moore to have a younger man. And the younger man doesn't need to be as fearful of being ridiculed or questioned about his intentions toward the older woman he's attracted to, dating and even marrying.

The perceived stigma about younger men being with older women hasn't completely disappeared, some of those in such

See YOUNGER on B4

NEWSDAY PHOTO: KEN SPENCER



NEWSDAY PHOTO / JULIA GAINES

Joanne Nichols, 61, and Steve Smith, 48, stroll on the beach just steps from their Long Beach apartment; they've been together since 1985.

issues. "Women get the brunt of the stigma" that remains, says Janet Kahn-Scolaro, director at South Nassau Communities Mental Health Counseling Center in Baldwin. Among the prejudices, she said, is that some people think that the only reason that a younger man would be with an older woman is if she is wealthy, and it is sometimes perceived that they are gold-diggers or gigolos. "It is unfortunate that they don't see these women as worthy individuals or attractive for anything other than taking care of the man," says Kahn-Scolaro.

It is also thought sometimes that younger men are only looking for "easy sex," or at least a woman with more experience, adds Kahn-Scolaro. It is perceived that the man will leave the woman as they both age (something that men sometimes do even if they are with a woman their own age) or if he decides later that he wants his own children if a woman is past childbearing age. Some think that the younger man won't grow up, since

the woman will "enable him" by taking care of him.

Couples where the woman is considerably older can have issues, like any couple, though it's not always clear whether they are related to the age difference.

#### Afraid to be left

At Long Island Jewish Medical Center, Dr. Marie-Genieve Iselein, a geriatric clinical psychologist, recently evaluated her first patient for depression who fits this demographic — a 69-year-old woman with a 51-year-old boyfriend. She feared that he was going to leave after 18 years together. He was going through a midlife crisis and distancing himself from her. "She is a rare woman for her age," said Iselein. "She's very youthful and exuberant." This scenario could and does happen to couples regardless of an age difference when both are in midlife crises and one wants to leave.

Dr. Giselle Wolf-Klein, director of geriatric education at North Shore-Long

Island Jewish Health System and her colleague, Dr. Leah Kaufman, director of the Residency Program of Obstetrics and Gynecology at LIJ, have discovered that many of their patients are dating men as much as 20 years younger. Because of disparities in longevity and medical condition, healthy older women often have little choice in finding a partner among their contemporaries.

Dating expert and motivational speaker Lisa Altalida, who lives in the San Francisco area and has written several books on dating, says that older woman-younger man relationships, like those that cross cultural, socio-economic and racial lines, are becoming more mainstream. According to U.S. Census Bureau statistics, in 7 percent of all marriages in 2007, the wife was older by two to three years; in 3.4 percent, the wife was older by four to five years, in 2.6 percent, the wife was older by six to nine years and in 0.9 percent, the wife was older by 10-14 years. The 2007 figures

were somewhat higher than the census numbers for 1999. And there are even more older woman-younger man couples among those who live together without marriage, the Census Bureau said.

Those unmarried couples included an unusual one on Long Island. Thomas Aiello met Fanny Greenberg when she arrived at the assisted-living facility in Glen Cove where he lived. The ratio there of women to men was approximately 5 to 1. There were many "younger women," but Greenberg's unwavering energy and enthusiasm for life captivated Aiello. She was 103 and he was 85. They had a strong friendship, Aiello said in an interview before his death. "I'd give her a little kiss on the forehead," he said of the "wonderful woman," with whom he shared the last nine years of their lives until they both died earlier this year. She was 112. He was 94.

Thirteen years ago, when Hilory Boucher, now 62, passed Bernie Carlin of Northport, now 54, in a race and commented that she was beat-

ing him, she was a divorced mother of three dating a man 13 years younger. In the early stages of their courtship, Bernie admits that his father was concerned that he was serious about an older woman, until he met her.

Hilory was 48 and Bernie was 41 when they married in 1993. Hilory said she has met with some skepticism about their relationship from people who question their motives. She's found that, when they are part of a circle where there are friends in common, they are usually more accepted. "It's the new acquaintances that are curious," she says.

Altalida, the dating writer, has heard complaints from younger men that older women don't take them seriously and "toy" with them.

But for anyone endeavoring with apprehension into the older woman-younger man relationship, or for women not taking a man's advances seriously, Jackie Tauber, who is married to a man 12 years younger, offers her advice: "Go for it."

# She's older. So what?

Age difference raises few eyebrows nowadays, couples say



Fannie Greenberg gets a birthday kiss from her boyfriend Thomas Aiello at her 110th birthday party; when they both died earlier this year, she was 112 and he was a mere 94.

## YOUNGER from B1

relationships and experts say, but it has become greatly reduced. In general, they say, there is a greater acceptance of nontraditional families and a broader definition of what families can include. And as the couples get older, issues about age difference are further flattened.

During the past 10 to 15 years, there has been an increase in relationships and marriages in which women are older than men, experts said. It was and still is a nonissue if a woman is a year or two older. But even if there is a gap of seven years or more, complications seem to be receding.

There are some special subjects to be addressed in such relationships, such as the timing of trying to have children. But other concerns, such as finding similarities on cultural issues, don't seem to cause problems.

### Starting a trend?

In 1985, when Joanne Nichols, now 61, and Steven Smith, 48, of Long Beach met at the furniture showroom in Manhattan where they worked, it was not common for women to date younger men, and Joanne hadn't done so. They were both in the beginning stages of their respective divorces when they met, so navigating dating was a bit complicated.

Nichols didn't know anyone else in her situation and jokes about how she must have

started a trend. They say they were fortunate not to get much flak from family and friends about their nearly 13-year age difference, which is still today as unnoticeable to them as it was when they first met, when she was 37 and he was 25.

"She looks as beautiful to me as she did the day we met," says Smith, a salesman at a furniture manufacturer in Coram. "If anything, I think I've aged more," he says, talking about losing his hair.

When Scott Tauber, then 22, of Oceanside, saw Jackie, then 34, on the beach, he said he knew immediately that she was older. "That's what I liked," he said. He had dated older women, and he said it was better than dating younger women or those his own age.

"The older the woman, the more sure they are about what they want. There were no games," he said. An older woman wants to be in a sincere relationship with a future, Scott said, and he knew that he wanted to be a father, something they discussed early on. "Jackie not only truly loves to be a wife and a mother, but she also looks great on the beach!" Scott, now 34, and Jackie, 46, have been married for 12 years and have a son together, along with a son and daughter from her previous marriage.

Jackie said she always dated younger men after her first marriage: "It never seemed forbidden or unusual." She

knew right away that Scott was younger and was flattered and excited that he was interested. "At first it was fun, and then we became friends," she says. "Shortly after, we became intimate and then I knew he was real."

"An older woman and younger man is the perfect combination for a relationship," says Jackie, who always viewed her link with Scott as something that would last a lifetime.

She said, "The chemistry is better all around; we do everything together as a team and I never had any anxiety about being with him or about being older because I know he loves me." Jackie and Scott moved in together after a few months of dating and were married within the year.

According to AARP, 34 percent of all women older than 40 nationally who are dating are seeing younger men and are happy about it. Common cited reasons from experts and those in such relationships include that a younger man is appealing because he can be less controlling and set in his ways, is more fun and may have little or no "baggage." The chemistry is often seen as better and the balance of power more equally distributed. A woman who has a career may find a younger man more supportive and, if she works, she can retire and he'll still be young enough to work, assuring that their finances will be secure as they age.

Still, there can sometimes be

## Loving out of your age group

Here are some tips for navigating older woman-younger man relationships, from experts — and those who've been there themselves.

■ **Fertility:** Deal with the baby issue early on. If the woman is becoming less fertile and / or has her own kids and the younger man wants his own, he should be prepared and able to cope with these issues and to find alternatives, including adoption, in the event that they can't conceive.

■ **What kind of relationship:**

Assess what each of you is looking for, i.e. companionship, friendship, sexual intimacy, commitment, marriage, family.

■ **Viability:** Do take the younger man's overtures and interests seriously — dating him may be fun, but he may be serious. Forget about the stigma, your peers and societal pressures.

■ **The future:** Be here now. Enjoy the benefits and allay the fears and "what ifs" about the future that could be normal anxiety, as with any relationship.

■ **Finances:** If the younger man has less money in the beginning, he may have more later on.

■ **Critical comments:** Women with younger men have been derisively nicknamed "cougars," accused of being predatory. Terms like "robbing the cradle," once solely attributed to men who date much younger women, are now adhering to these women. Women should ignore the comments, smile coyly, laugh and enjoy their relationships.

— BETTINA MARKS