



flying Solo

*We all want the happily-ever-after fairytale but what happens when The One takes his time showing up? Do you settle for Mr (Almost) Right or march stoically into spinsterhood, asks author **Jacinta Tynan**. We meet four happy, successful and single fortysomething women who haven't given up on love.*



Only one thing is more disenfranchising than being single beyond 40 and that is being single beyond 40 and still holding out for true love. Everyone knows this is the age when you must hone your ideals, temper your dreams and disband the very concept of the perfect husband. This is the age when you must settle for less. It is a darn sight better than being alone, isn't it?

Let's not fool ourselves that we have matured in this era of seeming liberation. Life still echoes a Jane Austen novel where marrying remains a social imperative, preferably to someone in possession of a country estate, but if that's not happening, then just someone. Anyone.

And those Misses who buck the trend, like Miss Austen herself – who turned down a perfectly eligible suitor for the ridiculous reason that she didn't love him – are labelled their own worst enemy and consigned to a lonely fate of eternal spinsterhood

– for which they have only themselves to blame.

I was one such lass. I thought being single because I hadn't met a man with whom I would like to spend the rest of my life made sense, but it turns out it is not a good enough excuse. It certainly doesn't cut it with the Pity Police. "Don't worry, it will happen to you, too," they would chime when I'd turn up alone, and dispense all manner of unsolicited and futile advice along the lines of not to be so fussy. That is a privilege you lose somewhere between 25 (when you are advised to aim for the stars) and 35 (when it's take what you can get). Selectiveness will leave you destitute, the loved-up caution, changing their tune from urging the highest of standards to promoting tolerance and giving it a go. Compatibility is extraneous when your prospects are wearing thin. Being true to yourself is no longer an option.

So incensed was I with the stigma of being unwed past a suitable age, I wrote a book about →

Tanya Pluckrose is a 41-year-old manager in the travel industry. She has been single since she and her husband of six years separated in 2004. She would love to have a partner.

My life at 41 is very different to my life at age 35. I thought I would have the whole picket-fence thing – kids, husband – but sometimes life doesn't work out that way. I have accepted it, though, and am actually happy. I am financially secure, with a great career and the flexibility to travel at a moment's notice. Being single is liberating – I can wake up and do whatever I want – including flirting like crazy when I go out on dates. I have my own apartment, my own finances. I can buy the things I want. I have an active social life and travel the world. The grass is just as green on this side.

But there are downsides. Being single means you don't have anyone to cook dinner with each night, and it would also be nice to share those "golden moments" overseas. However, when you get older, your standards get higher and your priorities change. You do have your "non-negotiables": I wouldn't go out with a gambler or an alcoholic, for example, or someone who wanted an open relationship. On the other hand, I would have generosity of spirit for someone who had kids, no money or an old car.

Finding a partner in my 40s is more about finding a companion to share life with. That is the difference between being single in your 20s and being single in your 40s; it is less about money and more about a spiritual partnership of minds.

I have been actively looking for a partner for the past year. You do feel like the odd one out with friends, although they give you hope that love is out there. I even tried the internet but if you force it, it doesn't work. I know the right person will come along at the right time.

What I would really love now is a family man. Family men have been married, they are not scared of intimacy and are normally happy to settle down again. And they are usually less selfish because they have children. As a male friend said to me, "Children change you as a person." I am happy with my decision not to have children – my twin sister has done it for me – and I am probably too old now anyway, but I still love them. It would be nice to find a man who was happy for me to have a career and travel but who still supported and loved me. And I think it would keep my mum happy, too. She worries about me being single.

I do wonder what it would be like to be married again or at least be in a committed relationship. We might be successful, financially independent career women who don't need a ring on our finger to be happy but perhaps we do still want the picket fence. Or at least a lovely man behind it."

Janelle McCulloch

it. As I say in *Good Man Hunting*, “All of a sudden there is this ‘beggars can’t be choosers’ kind of indictment hanging over me, inferring I am not really in a position to knock anything back. But I don’t feel like a beggar; it’s everyone else who is desperate by proxy, not me.” I was only 34 at the time.

From a practical point of view, I get their point. Loiter eternally and you might miss out on motherhood and the chance of love. But a little faith, please. We know what we are doing.

We are dodging claims of “man droughts”, for starters – unhelpful and negative reinforcements that do not do anyone any good. I handed Bernard Salt’s *Man Drought* to a single friend in a bookshop recently. “Get that away from me!” she shrieked, visibly reeling. Man drought allegations have whipped a generation of women into a frenzy, all the while taking their focus off the legions of single men who are lamenting the lack of good women. Salt didn’t say there are no men; he just said there are less. There are also less jobs but we don’t ready for a lifetime of unemployment.

Settling will not get you anywhere, either, thanks all the same, Lori Gottlieb, who published an article in [US magazine] *The Atlantic*, urging single women to do just that. Nah ah! I have seen couples who have settled and it is not pretty. Sure, being single in your 30s is a different ball game to your 40s. In your 30s, mild panic may set in but there is still hope. By 40, women accept they are running out of options if they want to have children. It is impossible to even



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freeze your eggs past 40 at many fertility clinics.

But the strain of having to share a roof with a man you do not love for the *rest of your life* would surely kill you slowly, no matter how old you are.

“Making decisions based on fear is no way to find a life partner,” says a single friend. “I’ve got to have faith someone great is out there.” And if not, then what? There are decisions to be made: hard-core dating, freezing eggs or both? Donor sperm, adoption and single motherhood? Or waiting just a bit longer. There is no other decision like it, potentially spelling the end of one big dream. Time might be running out but by marrying the wrong person, you do not cheat time. You cheat yourself. Settling is unsettling for all concerned, including the children.

Life is not Noah’s Ark – an eternal pairing off, with the sad remainder left behind to drown. Life is not linear, either, where couples marry at 23 and stay together forever. Rather, our tendency to marry later and more often creates a whole raft of ever-evolving opportunities. “Second-round offers”, a friend calls it.

Being single is not some sorry in-between state involving the filling in of time until something better comes along. It takes courage to be on your own rather than rush a substandard pairing. Singles are well versed in the common justifications – being able to read until dawn, holidays on your terms, lid on the toothpaste. And still having it all in front of you: the chance to get it right while the loved-up have long ago sealed off their options. →



Angela Fonti, 43, a senior recruitment consultant with a Melbourne financial services company, has been divorced 10 years. Her last serious relationship was a year ago.

By 40 I expected to be happily married with a couple of kids. For my 40th, I decided to go to Bali with a girlfriend because I wasn't coping with the reality. But then I realised I wanted to celebrate my birthday with the people who were closest to me, so I came home. And they had a surprise party already organised for me.

There are plenty of men out there; it's just finding the right one. I go on internet dates; my girlfriends set me up. Occasionally I meet people when I am out, not at bars, but at the races, at the footy – I am a keen Richmond Tigers fan. One morning, earlier this year, I met someone when I was out for breakfast. It's more: who do you stick with?

If you are going to have a baby, I think it is important to be in a relationship – one that is solid – and I have never had that experience. What you want is two people working

together to raise a child. If I am realistic about it, I know it's probably not going to happen now. But I am experiencing children in other ways through the fantastic relationships I have with my nephew, my godchild and my friends' children. There is some regret but I am very lucky to have done well in my career.

I never thought I would be a career woman. When my relationships fell over, it made me focus on my career; while I was doing that I didn't have to worry about the emotional stuff. That is how I got to where I am now. There was always this thought that there would be a man to help me. But I have come to realise now that I can't rely on anyone but myself. It helps that I absolutely love what I do.

Not having children myself, the ideal person for me would be someone who did. I dearly want a family unit – his children, our dog, whatever. I wouldn't want someone who has always been single and has never experienced the ups and downs of relationships. I think that is what makes you who you are.

Bernadette Clohesy



Merran Wallis, 41, is a territory manager for Bayer Animal Health. Wallis spent seven years in the UK working with her first love – horses. She came back to Australia five years ago.

I imagined that when I came back to Australia, I would meet someone fairly quickly but that hasn't happened. I probably shouldn't have spent quite so long doing the horse thing; maybe a couple of years less. Being relaxed about the whole thing is the key – and not putting pressure on yourself that it has to happen.

It is harder being single in your 40s. In your 20s, you met someone and didn't put any pressure on that relationship. I work hard now at not putting pressure on someone too early. I have not gone past the three-month stage for a long time. I will not just sit in a relationship for a year or two, hoping it will progress to something. Now I would rather be single than be in a bad relationship or one that is going nowhere.

I have a horse and I do a lot of sport – ocean swimming in the summertime and in winter, I ski as much as possible. I usually do an overseas

trip once a year. I have a very wide circle of friends and a lot of them are single, so we go away for weekends quite a bit.

The last long-term boyfriend I had was about seven years ago in the UK. The horse scene is a bit of a limited market; most of the men in it are either married or gay. Being focused on a sport means your time is consumed by it. I did a lot of three-day equestrian events – dressage, cross-country and show jumping. I competed for Australia in international events and was long-listed for the Sydney Olympics but the horse injured itself at the wrong time.

Back then, if anyone had told me I would be single at this age with no kids, I would have said, "No way." I always wanted to have a family. I certainly hope it will still happen. I have lots of friends who are in their 40s who are either trying or having kids now. I have a strong family and if I did go down the path of having children on my own, it wouldn't be such an issue. I have researched it and I would definitely do that. When? It would have to be fairly soon. I'm not quite sure on that one.

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Just maybe Jennifer Aniston is happy. Hard to get your head around, I know. It's more convenient to perpetuate a great divide between marrieds and singles. The haves and the sad have-nots. Guess which is which.

Don't worry, single girls have plenty to do in the chasm that's not filled with another half and offspring. There is work to be done. On ourselves. You know, those courses, books and CDs in the car reminding us what fulfilled beings we really are, man or no man. Single women in their 30s and 40s are propping up an entire industry with their hopes that things might change, understanding you have to love yourself before there is any chance of being loved by another.

That is not to say it is easy – the angst, the chase, the agonising deconstruction of every date gone wrong, and the waking in the middle of the night with the shock realisation that it has come to this. A deep sadness haunted by regret for all the ones you let go just because they could not cook, hated their mothers or because you weren't completely smitten. Waiting for love is exhausting. One friend calls it her second job; she puts in equal hours.

But it is far preferable to selling yourself short. And just maybe, someone ideal will come along, making it worth the wait. That is what happened to me. ●
Jacinta Tynan is the author of *Good Man Hunting* (Random House Australia) and a presenter with Sky News.

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Jill Waddy, 45, is the director of Jill Waddy Media, in Sydney. The former model has never married but has no shortage of friends – 519 on Facebook at last count.

I have never had the urge to marry or have children. I have absolutely loved my life, whether I had boyfriends or was single. I just didn't have that urge to settle down. To be honest, I have never met someone I thought I could spend the rest of my life with.

Looking back, I am pretty happy with my choice. I'm sure that if I had married any of my past boyfriends, I would not be with them today. But I'm still good friends with all of them.

I bought a little cottage on the coast about five years ago. After I got back from the Kokoda Track [in Papua New Guinea, which she walked in May with five girlfriends], I bought a horse, so I go down there most weekends. I'm sure if I was married and had a family I wouldn't be able to do all that.

My life is full: I have a puppy, a new horse and an elderly mother who I look after, so I certainly wouldn't call myself

lonely. But there are times when you wish you could snuggle up and watch a movie in someone's arms.

I do not actively search for a man but I am sure it is going to happen one day. It's OK if he has children. I'm more likely to meet a grandfather these days [laughing]. The big thing for me is honesty. And he needs to be straight – you do meet a lot of gay people in my area – and not have too many demons. When you meet someone who is older and they are single, you have to have a little look at why. I'm sure they say the same things about women as well.

I used to be a party girl in my younger years. Most of my closest friends own public relations companies, so I was invited to a lot of functions. I have never thought "Oh my God, it's too late!" about marriage. I still don't. Because I have never been depressed or negative about it, it is not something that has been on my mind. You just go through life and whatever it throws at you, you take on board.

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