

# [***Opinion: 'The Golden Bachelor' divorce did us a favor***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BWD-CXK1-JBSS-S04D-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; Now that we know the fairy tale didn't happen, what can we learn from "The [*Golden Bachelor*](https://abc.com/shows/the-golden-bachelor)" divorce?

The show inspired viewers young and old to believe that everlasting love is possible, even in later life, More than 5 million people tuned in to watch the televised [*January 4, 2024 wedding*](https://people.com/golden-bachelor-wedding-photos-of-gerry-turner-and-theresa-nist-8422623) of 72-year-old widower and retired restaurateur Gerry Turner and his love, 70-year-old widow and financial services professional Theresa Nist. The ceremony featured heartfelt toasts from the bride and groom's grown daughters from their prior marriages, teen grandchildren as junior bridesmaids and groomsmen and a six-year-old grandson ambling down the aisle as an adorable ringbearer.

Imagine the shock and sadness of [*"Bachelor Nation*](https://bachelornation.com/)" - just [*three months later*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/16/entertainment/theresa-nist-gerry-turner-divorce/index.html) - when the couple called it quits. In an April 12 appearance on [*Good Morning America*](https://www.goodmorningamerica.com/culture/story/golden-bachelor-couple-gerry-turner-theresa-nist-announce-109148023), the newlyweds announced that they were divorcing. As Gerry explained to viewers, "Theresa and I have ... come to the conclusion mutually that it's probably time for us to - dissolve our marriage. We just feel like it's best for the happiness of each of us to, to live apart."

While romantics and Bachelor devotees were crestfallen by the quick collapse of the marriage, Today Show personality [*Al Roker had a simpler, if unkind, assessment*](https://nypost.com/2024/04/12/entertainment/al-roker-mocks-golden-bachelor-gerry-turners-divorce-old-people-can-be-just-as-stupid/): "It just goes to show that old people can be just as stupid" - presumably as younger people - when it comes to love and marriage.

I watched "The Golden Bachelor" series religiously, my interest piqued by my professional background as a [*researcher of older adults' romantic relationships*](https://sites.bu.edu/deborahcarr/). But I'm also a sucker for a happy ending - especially for two seemingly kind and thoughtful people who found new love years after the devastating deaths of their former spouses. My gut reaction to the golden divorce wasn't surprise or snark or sadness. Rather, my first thought was "I told you so ...."

In an essay I wrote last year about "The Golden Bachelor," I cautioned that Gerry's final rose ceremony [*"[didn't] require a Neil Lane engagement ring."*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/09/28/opinions/golden-bachelor-gerry-turner-diversity-carr) And I stand by that assessment. Marriage didn't have to be the end-all and be-all for Gerry and Theresa. Rather, there are many ways to enjoy love, companionship and intimacy without legally marrying - especially the second time around.

Here are three lessons we can all learn from the "golden" divorce.

For older couples, marriage may not be the best course

More and more older adults today are eschewing marriage and cohabitation for "[*living apart together (LAT)"*](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/16/well/family/older-singles-living-apart-LAT.html) - which essentially means "going steady," with each keeping their own separate home. Some older adults want love, intimacy, support and companionship from a committed romantic partner, but they want to keep their home and remain in their own community where they have friends, family and routines. LAT arrangements also help older adults simplify finances and inheritance for their children, maintain their independence, keep their routines and schedules and avoid the strain of [*round-the-clock spousal caregiving.*](https://academic.oup.com/psychsocgerontology/article/66B/3/341/719265?searchresult=1)

Gerry and Theresa mentioned these very concerns when explaining why they called it quits. Gerry was retired and living in his [*dream lake house in Indiana*](https://www.housebeautiful.com/lifestyle/entertainment/a44961679/golden-bachelor-gerry-turner-home-indiana/), while Theresa was still working as a [*financial services professional*](https://www.northjersey.com/story/entertainment/2023/11/30/theresa-nist-gerry-turner-final-rose-the-golden-bachelor/71762335007/) in New Jersey. They had talked about buying a home together in South Carolina, but those plans never became a reality.

As Theresa explained, "we just looked at homes after home, but we never got to the point where we made that decision." Like many other older adults, Gerry and Theresa were happy in their separate lives, and the prospect of togetherness didn't strike them as an improvement. Would a long-distance dating or LAT relationship have been a better choice? I think so, but the truth is, we'll never know.

Late-life marriage is about more than love: It's the merging of two multi-generational families

The public spin that Gerry and Theresa put on their divorce announcement was that they were splitting, in part, for the sake of their families. As Gerry shared on Good Morning America, "The thing that strikes me the most in our conversations ... [is] how dedicated both of us are to our families ... We just feel like it's best for the happiness of each of us to, to live apart."

Whether it's spin or the truth, [*the merging of two families*](https://extension.usu.edu/relationships/faq/adjusting-to-challendges-of-later-life-stepfamilies) is a challenge facing nearly all older adults as they form new romantic relationships. Older couples often need to [*make complex decisions as an extended family,*](https://abc.com/shows/the-golden-bachelor/video/most-recent/vdka34364669) about mundane matters like where to host family holidays or a grandchild's birthday party as well as more serious issues, like caregiving responsibilities, nursing home moves, inheritance, end-of-life medical decisions and more. These challenges often are easier when parents, children and grandchildren [*live in proximity*](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S027795362100959X?via%3Dihub) to each otherand are all on the same page about major life decisions.

At any age, romantic partners need to respect and support each other's personal goals and priorities

Some of the most talked about moments of "The Golden Bachelor" were the [*minor spats*](https://screenrant.com/the-golden-bachleor-teresa-kathy-feuding-drama/) between women in the house, and the spirited [*pickleball matches*](https://www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/tv/2023/10/19/the-golden-bachelor-episode-4-pickleball-contest/71210359007/). But for me, another scene stood out.

Very late in the season, on their "Fantasy Suite" final date, Gerry asked Theresa for the first time about her work life. Theresa lit up, and spoke proudly about her transition from a wife and mother to a highly successful stock trader. She explained that once her children got older, she developed a passion for the stock market and read every book she could find on stocks and the markets. In her late 40s, Theresa got an entry-level position and then ascended the ranks at a financial services firm - where she continues to work today.

According to some media reports, Theresa's commitment to her career was the death knell for the marriage. Her desire to keep working was at odds with Gerry's retirement plan[*. "I still work, so that's the hurdle,"*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWCr91mBGb0) Theresa shared on a podcast. Gerry, however, told listeners, "I've been retired for a long time. I wanted fun [and] adventure ... So that is the crux of it."

Regardless of the specifics of this case, couples need more than just one another to be happy. If a partner cannot support and cheer on one another's passions (even if they don't share those passions themselves), the relationship may sputter and die. While shared interests - whether for board games, gardening, Broadway musicals or ***politics***, also are a key to a happy relationship, [*it's respect for differences*](https://legacyproject.human.cornell.edu/2013/02/04/one-thing-to-look-for-in-a-mate-advice-from-long-married-elders/) that can sustain a couple in the longer haul.

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