

Love ACTUALLY

WE LOOK AT THE UNCONVENTIONAL WAYS THESE COUPLES DEFINE THEIR LOVE.
BY ALIA SORAYA

LONG-DISTANCE LOVES//

FARRAH HANI IMRAN & ENDA KELLY

Having just gotten hitched after seven years of being together (three of which in a long-distance capacity and still ongoing), Farrah Hani and Enda are living a rather unusual marriage. She is currently completing her training in Plastics and Reconstructive Surgery in Kota Baru while Enda is finishing medical school in Dublin.

How are they making it work, you ask? "It helps to know that it's temporary and we'll be together soon enough," says Enda optimistically. Farrah chimes in by saying that they were friends first and then

together for a long time before the "long-distance" kicked in, so they've already had a solid foundation as a couple and know each other very well.

"We have high phone bills though! Skype is

a tad inconvenient, but we try to cut back where we can," Farrah explains. Enda makes sure that they speak at least once a day and that they're able to communicate clearly without having rows or bickering, even if it means that one of them has to stay up late to have a proper chat.

"All the little things matter... When I was really down the other day because of work stress, Enda made the effort to send me an SMS with the Malay words to the song *Kau Ilhamku* which is one of my favourite songs. And when we recently saw each other at Christmas, he greeted me at the airport with a Toffee Nut Latte, warm gloves and a scarf so I wouldn't get cold. If I'm really tired from work and I'm too sleepy to drive home, he keeps talking to me from when I leave the hospital until I'm safely home to make sure I stay awake," Farrah confides.

"It's just a matter of getting used to the distance, but of course it's difficult when you have a terrible day and just want to speak to someone," Enda admits, "but we know it's a means to an end. I don't even get suspicious when a stranger's male voice answers her phone and says, 'She's operating!'"

They both agree that the most important factors in keeping their marriage happy and their relationship honest is truthfulness, understanding and thinking as two rather than just one. And if that isn't love, then we don't know what is.



WORKING PARTNERS//

ZAHIR OMAR & NISHA KHRUDIN

all marriages have the same problems, younger guys are just more fun and malleable."

Zahir concurs, explaining that age isn't really an issue to them although he does appreciate the level of maturity that an older woman brings. "She balances me. I used to be quite wild, and she's become the ying to my yang." Now that they are expecting a baby, it seems Nisha will have to do some actual babysitting.

"In the beginning, all he wanted to do was party. So I let him go out, spend all his money until he was broke, and he eventually cut down on his own. But he does take care of me, he is considerate and he actually believes everything I say!" Nisha jokes. "I know it's a cliché, but while all men are irritating, at least Zahir makes me laugh."

"She brings out the best in me – I've learnt to be myself, and be honest and straightforward. I try to sit back and take it all in, because women communicate differently to men. I'm still horrible at it, but I don't rush into things anymore and we try not to argue rashly," Zahir adds further. "Love is about growing old together, and being able to embrace the person as who they are, no matter the changes." Hear, hear.

To the Malaysian independent film industry, Zahir and Nisha are familiar faces. He is a well-known commercial and independent film director who won the 2007 BMW Shorties, while she is a producer for Axis Films who produced that film and brought it to The Rotterdam International Film Festival 2008. They work together and they play together, having known each other for quite some time before tying the knot two years ago.

My first impression of him was, 'He is so annoying,'" Nisha laughs, explaining their age gap. She is 4 years older, but she says the difference in age affects them only superficially. "I've dated older men my whole life but I've come to the same conclusion – that all men are the same! And

SEPARATED SOULMATES//

CHARLOTTE TEUNISSEN & ERIC OH



It is heartbreaking, but it happens. You think you marry for a lifetime but you discover that it isn't always forever. Eric and Charlotte married in 2004. They have been separated and living in different countries for the past two years. However, they have remained friends and display an amazing level of maturity even while making plans for an impending divorce.

"The biggest challenge of being in this kind of unconventional relationship is staying together! When you're apart, it's difficult to work on your problems, as you begin to lead separate lives. But living apart while maintaining contact has helped us grow on many levels. It has helped us gain perspective of our relationship. We have both had the chance to detach and the emotional detachment has given us the opportunity to be more open and honest with each other," claims Charlotte.

Eric, who is 9 years older than Charlotte, understands divorce is not a 'bad' word. "The love we had for each other may have changed but it has not gone. We still have very high regard for each other and still care very much for each other."

"I still support her in her endeavours and she wholly supports me in mine," Eric shares. "It has been hard for the both of us. Believe me, it's not easy to let go of someone you have spent 10 years of your life together. But we are resolved that this is the best thing for us."

"Because we both care about the other, for our past two years of separation, we maintained contact over the phone, often speaking to each other every weekend, and we saw each other twice during that time," explains Charlotte. "But I've learnt that I need to start living my life the way I want to lead it, without always trying to make the other person happy."

MUSICAL HEARTS// JANE WONG & DENNIS LAU

He's the young violin prodigy taking Asia by storm and she's the experienced lady in charge of *New Icon* magazine. With his pop-star looks and fresh R&B sound, Dennis is highly in demand, but sorry to disappoint girls, he is very much unavailable. Calling his girlfriend Jane, the love of his life, he is not one to fret about the considerable 12-year age gap.

"It's a fact that we couldn't change, but love doesn't choose who you fall for. The most positive thing about this relationship is being challenged and stimulated mentally because my other half is much older and more experienced. To be able to share and exchange so many great ideas and experiences between one another is definitely priceless," Dennis reveals.

Commenting on the pros and cons of their relationship, Dennis states "there are many issues to compromise on but the most important is our commitment to solve things in a

mature manner."

Both Jane and Dennis believe that commitment, trust and "the ability to communicate" is vital and whatever the age gap, any shared experience allows them to relax, enjoy and open their eyes together to new things.

"Love is being with someone who can set you free, trust and believe," declares Jane.

Believing that nothing is impossible despite the age gap, they have learnt to practice patience and to compromise on certain issues and yet remain true to their own persons and characters.



PHOTOGRAPHY: MYTH STUDIO HAIR: CARMEN LIM/PICKABRUSH MAKEUP: MICHELLE YEOW/PICKABRUSH

CROSS-CULTURAL ROMANCE//



She's a Malay girl who's lived all her life abroad. He's a French man who came to seek adventure in Asia. Both strangers to a new world, they found a connection in each other, one that traversed geography, culture, and even height (he's 6' 3", and Remona is, errrr... petite!).

JACQUES & REMONA DUQUESNE

Having met over 5 years ago and being married for 18 months, both Remona and Jacques have found that love takes work but shouldn't be difficult. Jacques cites that differences in culture, religion and upbringing bring a lot to the mix, "We have so much more life experiences and opinions to share, and of course that necessitates difficult discussions regarding family planning, children's education, family responsibilities, cultural differences and differences in opinions and expectations. It's amazing what the other considers to be 'normal' [so] we've learnt to adapt."

Remona quips, "He can reach all the stuff I can't!" But on a more serious note, she's learnt that because they come from different worlds, they knew going into the relationship that they would have to compromise more than other couples, and to do so meant they'd have to make extra efforts to understand where the other was coming from. "If anything, it's made us more patient, open-minded and empathetic. Plus

I get to practice my French."

Both believe that communication is the cornerstone of any successful relationship, as well as trust and joint values. "By trusting each other and working together in a symbiosis we can achieve so much more than we would have on our own. I've mainly learned to trust myself and my emotions more – being more in touch with my feelings – and know that I will keep learning about Remona for many years to come" says Jacques. "And I've learnt that every stubborn man can be persuaded with the right argument!" Remona jokes, adding that laughter is also very important in their relationship.

So, really, the difference in culture or upbringing or background or ethnicity doesn't even come into play with these two, because they work at bridging the gaps. Half of it is work, and the other half is luck – as Jacques quotes Robert Mitchum, "Love is like luck, you have to go all the way to find it."