

# Happy

## EVER AFTER - in separate homes



Relationship coach Francine Kaye, 48, has a committed and monogamous 13-year relationship with Gary, 53, whom she adores. Yet she doesn't want to live with him. Here she tells Tamsin Kelly why they believe **THE BEST WAY TO STAY TOGETHER IS TO LIVE APART**

"Gary had gone to so much trouble - he had put on romantic music, lit candles and prepared a delicious dinner of antipasti followed by rack of lamb. But this wasn't a seduction scene in the early weeks of our relationship. This blissful evening took place last week, and the two of us have been together for 13 years.

Whenever Gary and I are together it feels like a proper date, but on the occasions I want time to myself, I can go to bed alone, in my own home, in comfy pyjamas with a good book, without worrying about hurting Gary's feelings.

The secret to this perfect situation? We made a conscious decision not to move in together. This means we spend quality time as a couple - walks on Hampstead Heath, meals out and relaxing holidays - but crucially we both have our own space.

If I'm feeling tired or want to concentrate on work, the solitude of my own home is lovely. But if I have a problem, Gary will listen. I've had three breast cancer scares in recent years and Gary has been my rock.

Our time together varies - some days

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we speak on the phone three or four times, others not at all. Sometimes we see each other every day, at other times a whole week will pass without us meeting.

I firmly believe I have the best of both worlds. I have a loving and committed relationship with Gary, but I also have my independence. And I think our experience shows you can consciously design the relationship you both want.

When I first met Gary, I was just beginning to enjoy my independence again. I was newly divorced after 15 years of marriage, with two small children aged just five and eight. I knew I wanted to share my life with someone again, but not my

home. My home is my sanctuary and I was relishing doing things my way. Having to divide money and possessions during my divorce had been awkward and painful, so I was reluctant to become financially entwined again. Most importantly, my children, Carly, now 21, and Alex, 18, needed stability and my total attention.

Gary felt the same way. It was just nine months since his divorce and he was still emotionally fragile. Although he felt ready to start a relationship, he definitely didn't want to live with someone, let alone remarry. He wanted to give his children, Joseph, now 24, and Amy, 21, their own time with him, without having to share their father with another family.

I have no doubt that if we had moved in together, the strain of raising our children would have split us up.

### Designing our relationship

So we designed our own perfect 'living-apart-together' relationship. I live in my three-bedroom house in north London, and Gary lives in his flat in Hertfordshire



- a ten-minute drive away. But Gary is not emotionally detached from my children. They adore him and call him their 'other dad'. When we do get together for Christmas and birthdays, the atmosphere is relaxed and easy because we've never forced our children together. In my birthday card this year, Gary's daughter Amy wrote: 'Thank you for making my dad so happy.' It felt like a real accolade.

But just because we don't live together, doesn't mean I don't expect total sexual commitment from Gary. He's a kitchen designer and spends most of his time in women's houses, and I often spend nights away on seminars, but we trust each other.

Despite this, Gary has never stayed the night at my house. My children are still living at home and he doesn't feel comfortable sleeping over. So I always stay at his, which adds an extra edge of excitement for me. I always dress carefully in sexy underwear because these nights are special. I'm positive that not having sex available all the time is the reason we've retained our sexual chemistry.

When Gary comes to collect me for a date, I still have that 'Cinderella going to the ball' feeling. He never sees me clearing the kitchen or rushing for the shower, so we've kept the romance in our relationship and not fallen into domestic drudgery.

I always make an effort to look my best when I'm with him. Even if he only pops in for a cup of tea, I'll still check my hair and put on some lipstick.

When we go on holiday, we slot together very easily. And when we hug each other goodbye after two weeks of being together constantly, it is sad. There is always a feeling of emptiness as I turn the key in my front door, but it goes within a week.

As our time together is precious, there might be a tendency to brush problems under the carpet, so we have to make an effort to really communicate. If I'm honest, I sometimes miss the 'How was your day?' chat we'd have if we lived together. But living apart means we also have time and space to reflect on our conversations.

And as I don't have to look after Gary in the same way I would if we were married, doing his laundry or cooking and cleaning, I can concentrate on him as a person.

Of course, running two separate households instead of pooling our money makes no financial sense, and it has been a strain. But you can't put a price on the quality of parenting we've been able to give separately - all our children are now secure, happy, young adults - or on a stable relationship that continues to meet both our needs."

*Francine Kaye is founder and director of [thedivorcedoctor.co.uk](http://thedivorcedoctor.co.uk).*