



Sarah, 42, and Graham, 41, have been together for 22 years. They have four children and have homes in London and Yorkshire.

Sarah says...

We met when I was 19 and Graham was 18, and working as a labourer for my brother Diccon, who was a builder. Diccon had a contract painting banisters in a mansion block and phoned me up at work in a panic, saying, "I'm so late, I can't get this finished in time." I have to admit that although I wouldn't do this now – it was a long time ago! – I told work I had a tummy ache then I went to help my brother. Graham was there painting too. He had long hair and an earring, and was funny and very charming... but we hardly spoke.

I ended up giving him a lift home. As we pulled up at some lights, I said to him, "Just jump out and buy me some flowers, would you?" And without saying a word he got out and bought me some beautiful roses and gave them to me with a smile. I thought, "Ooh, that's quite impressive."

Diccon was going out with Graham's sister, so we all went to the pub a few nights later, and it escalated from there. It was quite full on, quite quickly. I was living in a flat at the time but didn't get on with my flatmates and about a week after I met Graham he said, "Why don't you just move in with me?" So I said, "Okay, I will then." And I moved out that night. At that point I wasn't thinking in terms of whether he was The One or not. But 23 years later, he still doesn't bore me in any way.

We are both quite impulsive and it's a dangerous combination; we make decisions really quickly. That is why we have four kids. And a dog that I didn't really want. And Rise Hall, a Grade II-listed stately home in Yorkshire, which we bought on a whim. But it makes for an exciting life. Graham keeps me on my toes – and I need to be kept on my toes. It would be awful married to a husband who just does what he's told, and who's really responsible.

My mission in life is to try and be more like him. I'd like to have his >>

“We row like cat and dog but we still make each other laugh”



INSIDE A MARRIAGE

TV presenter Sarah Beeny and her husband, artist Graham Swift, talk to Victoria Young about juggling family and business, and what makes their marriage work

clarity of thought and clarity of words. But very often, when I feel something, I won't say it. I'll say something else. There are so many layers to what I say – but Graham doesn't do layers. So I say "X" and he thinks I mean "X" but I don't – I mean "Y". Then I'm in a bad mood and I think, "Obviously I'm in a bad mood – you haven't done Y," and he doesn't even know I was talking about Y because I was talking about X. Poor man – he has to translate this irrational behaviour and is totally baffled half the time.

Graham's not a planner. At breakfast, sometimes I'll say, "What do you want for lunch?" and he'll say, "I'm stuffed!" He thinks, "But that's ages away, lunch." Left to his own devices, Graham probably wouldn't have a savings account and he can't understand why I'd need one. I want to have money

“After we were together for ten years, I told Graham he had to show some commitment”

squirreled away so when we decide to move into the motorhome, it's an active decision – not because we've been swept out by the bailiffs. But Graham thinks, "Let the bailiffs come!"

Graham and I aren't very good at doing the classic romantic thing.

He has bought me jewellery over the years, but we always laugh about the fact that, really, a new drill would be much more exciting than a diamond ring.

I did slightly go on about it before Graham asked me to marry him. We'd

lived together for ten years and he kept talking about this wife – he'd say, "My wife, when I'm 50," and I was thinking, "Is he planning on marrying someone else, and just passing the time with me?"

I said, "Let's have a baby or get married because I need some kind

of commitment." He chose the engagement, but I think that was just because he thought he didn't want to have children, to be honest.

Marriage didn't change our relationship, but having children did; it fundamentally united us. I look back on it as an incredibly romantic time. I saw Graham become a man when we had Billy – he really embraced the whole thing. Although he did say to me one day, "I don't think you've noticed but you've got a husband around as well as a baby." I just said, "Oh God!" because I had temporarily forgotten!

Working together was not a conscious decision. By nature, I'm self-employed because I'm not very good at being told what to do, and Graham is the same. We started with a property development company, then we launched mysinglefriend.com. I'd had lots of ideas for businesses before that but Graham always looked a bit withering about them. Then I woke him up at about four in the morning and said, "Let's start a website where you can check out each other's friends," and he

said, "That's actually a really good idea." That was ten years ago and it's going strong. Since then, we've started Tepilo, which is an online estate agency. And we've restored Rise Hall, and turned it into a wedding venue.

We've had loads of rocky moments – like financing problems. And we've had disasters, but they are mainly people related. Business problems do take their toll on the marriage but less so as we get older because you learn to deal with it and move on.

When it comes to rows we're both door slammers rather than sulkers. We have far too many arguments to sulk – we'd be there forever! Graham's most annoying habit is "assisting" my driving. He'll say, "You want to indicate now. Indicate! Indicate! And now turn..." It's like a driving lesson.

We normally argue about the same thing – Graham thinks I wantonly indulge the children too much and don't discipline them enough. We do have a terribly bad bed situation; there's bed-hopping all night and I think at times he'd prefer to be married to someone who'd say, "Seven o'clock. Bed. Now!" But bedtime is massively fluid because I'm a bit of a pushover and my boundaries aren't great.

I didn't have boundaries when I was younger, and I don't have them with my kids. My nine year old will actually say, "Mummy, we don't do what you say because you never see anything through. You just need to make a decision and stick to it." And I'm thinking, "You're nine; stop it!"

Graham is sometimes made to feel like Mr Sarah Beeny, which I think is awful, but he's got a sense of humour about it. He was recently sent a card actually addressed to Mr Graham Beeny – but he brought the invitation home and thought it was hilarious. I don't like it because I feel the balance



Sarah and Graham with youngest son Laurie, now four

is wrong: he's an artist and far more talented than I am, and he's the engine behind all of our businesses.

This sounds sexist but I think it's worse for a marriage when it's the woman in the public eye. I think in most marriages where that's the

case, they don't last that long. But we've managed to override that because he has the patience of a saint, and an inner security.

But if we'd met in our late thirties it's possible we wouldn't be together. He'd have married some beautiful model

somewhere and he wouldn't have even looked at me.

But I was clever and got in there early – you need to nab the good ones when they're young! Sarah Beeny's 101 DIY Jobs (*Quadrille*) is out now.

Graham says...

When we met I immediately noticed that Sarah was very nice looking but also naturally charming, and very interesting. I tried to play it cool but I think we both knew it was obvious that there was something there.

I waited for three days to ask her out for a drink, but then we practically moved in together, and pretty soon, we did everything together – which has its disadvantages.

We fight like cat and dog but we still make each other laugh. I suppose we're a little bit obsessed with each other. And if I'm troubled about something, I'll go to Sarah. She's always my first port of call.

I'm not romantic in an obvious way. I'm very bad at Valentine's Day. About three years ago I got all the presents that I meant to get for each anniversary – like paper and leather – and gave them to her as a whole

bundle. And I did buy Sarah a motorhome for our tenth anniversary. She was absolutely desperate for one since we went motorhoming for a month in Northern Europe when we had just two kids. It was a strangely awful holiday; it rained the whole time and both children were throwing up a lot, yet Sarah's been obsessed with having the thing ever since.

We had a babysitter booked for the night the other day and Sarah said, "We'll go away in the motorhome!" so I quickly booked us a hotel in London instead. We promised ourselves that we'd have just a couple of glasses of wine, then go to bed and just sleep – we haven't slept through the night for nine years. But we had four cocktails by the time we sat down to dinner, and then had a bottle of wine each and

went to bed really late. Twenty years on, we're still leading each other astray, and that has to be a good thing – if not necessarily for our health. Working together never really feels like work, and

“Twenty years on, we're still leading each other astray – that has to be a good thing!”

certainly when we were younger we did feel like we were playing very hard. We went and saw this crumbling old wreck called Rise Hall, for next to nothing, and we just looked at each other and went "Shall we?" It's been really rewarding although it's my main occupation, apart from painting.

We got engaged up on the roof terrace of Rise Hall. I'd been carrying the ring in my pocket for six months waiting for the right moment but every time I was going to ask her, we'd have a row. It took me that long to find the right moment and in the end I deliberately didn't talk to her all day because it would mean that there'd be a small chance I'd still be able to propose at the end of the day.

The best thing about being married is that we can take on the world together. Even if things are going badly, we'll help put things into perspective for each other. See graham-swift.com. w&h



Outside Rise Hall in Yorkshire, which the couple restored from a crumbling wreck

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