

# 'We've put in the work': Lorna Jane and husband Bill Clarkson on secret to 35-year love story

Fashion queen Lorna Jane has been happily married for 35 years to the man she built her clothing empire with. How they juggle work and home life successfully revealed.



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6 min read

February 13, 2025 - 5:00AM

QWeekend



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Bill and Lorna Jane Clarkson share the secrets to their success in love and business. Picture: Jamie Green and stylist, Kimberly Gardner

Together, Lorna Jane and Bill Clarkson have created one of Australia's most successful businesses but they say their biggest achievement is their love story.

The pair open up on their 35-year relationship, how they've thrived living and working together and the secret to their success in love and business.



Bill and Lorna Jane Clarkson share the secrets to their success in love and business.  
Picture: Jamie Green and stylist, Kimberly Gardner

# Lorna Jane, 60, founder and director of Lorna Jane

## How did you meet?

We met in Cairns at a mutual friend's birthday party. There was an instant attraction, but it took years for us to finally start dating. We became friends but we were just both too busy to think about dating. I was a dental therapist during the day and teaching fitness at night and he was running his own business during the day and playing in a band at night. It was only when I told him I was moving back to Brisbane (from Cairns) that Bill finally plucked up the courage to ask me on a date and the rest is history.

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## What was the first thing you noticed about him?

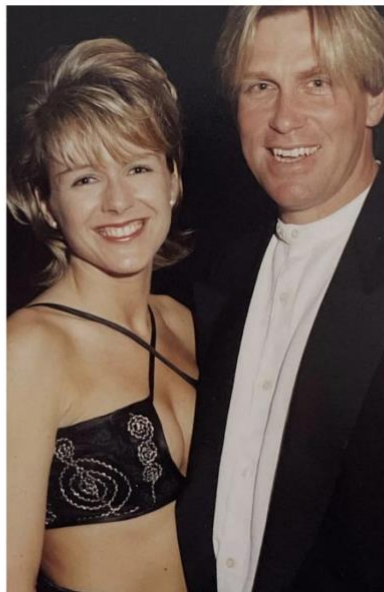
His smile – it just made me instantly want to get to know him. And then when I got to know him, I loved how he made me feel, he makes you feel like he'll always be there for you no matter what.

## When did you first know it was love?

I knew there was something special about him from day one and once we started spending time together it wasn't long before we fell in love. The problem was that I was already moving to Brisbane, so Bill decided to pack up his life and come too.

## What was your standout date?

Our unofficial first date was a 5km run which was indicative of the fitness fanatic I was at the time. I loved that we talked so much during the run we ended up running an extra 3km. For our "official" first date we went to dinner and he asked me to choose the restaurant – which, of course, was super healthy and vegetarian. I found out later that he was a hardcore meat-eater and because he didn't complain, it just made me like him even more.



Lorna Jane and Bill Clarkson in 1996.

**What is the most romantic thing he has done?** There have been so many over the years and they're never typical – he once ran through an airport calling my name because he was running late and had promised he'd be there to say goodbye. When I first moved to Brisbane, I had a very unreliable VW Beetle car that was always breaking down. I couldn't afford to replace it, so Bill surprised me one day with a new car. He just turned up at work with it and handed me the keys.

**Who puts the bins out?** Bill.

**What is toughest thing you've had to overcome together in your relationship?**

Losing our dog Roger after 13 years.

**What is the secret to a happy relationship?** Respect, communication and a sense of humour.

**What is the thing you argue the most about?** Work! But they're not really arguments, they're more like "passionate" debates and our secret is that we never let it get personal. We stick to the subject at hand and keep it professional. One of the most common questions we're asked as a couple is what it's like to work together and it's often assumed it would be challenging and it can be at times, but we love it. We have built an incredible business together and one that has allowed us to live a wonderful life. We get to share absolutely everything together and I have no doubt that this has had a huge influence on our relationship going from strength to strength over the years.



Lorna Jane and Bill Clarkson on their wedding day.

**What do you find the most annoying about each other?** Every day is a fashion moment for me which doesn't annoy Bill. But he's happy to wear shorts and thongs everywhere which DOES annoy me.

**Who does the most cooking?** It's pretty even. But one of the things I love about Bill is that it doesn't matter whether I make dinner, or he does, he always wants to clean up (it's his thing and I'm not about to complain about it!) We prefer to eat at home and Bill makes the best spaghetti bolognese I've ever tasted, and my specialty would have to be salads and smoothies. And desserts, my watermelon cake is the bomb.

**What is the trait you like most about him?**

He brings out the best in me.

## Bill, 63, director of Lorna Jane

**How did you meet?** It was a friend's birthday party. I had noticed her at a club the night before, so I asked a mutual friend to introduce us. We chatted for a little while but then she left with her friends. Cairns is a small place, so we kept bumping into each other but it took me a while to find the courage to ask her out.

**When did you first know it was love?** I knew it from the first time I met her, I even told a friend of mine that I was going to marry her one day. I can't explain it, but I just knew.

**What was your standout date?** In the early days we used to run together which I'm not sure qualifies as a date, but it was a great way to get to know each other because we would talk non-stop for the entire 5 or 6km. Our official first date was a farewell dinner because her job was taking her back to Brisbane and then I flew to Brisbane (from Cairns) for our second date which was her 25th birthday party. I arrived a little late and walked into a room full of her family and closest friends which was pretty intimidating but it showed me first-hand how important family was to her and I loved that.



Bill and Lorna Jane Clarkson on how they have thrived in their 35 year relationship.  
Picture: Jamie Green and stylist, Kimberly Gardner

**What is the most romantic thing she has done?** Agreed to marry me. I proposed to her on Hayman Island, organising a candlelit dinner on the beach. I think she knew it was coming because it isn't often that I plan something like that. In true Lorna style she didn't say yes straight away, joking that it wasn't a real proposal unless I got down on one knee. But as soon as my knee hit the ground, she said yes ... and the rest is history.

**What is the secret to a happy relationship?** I think the secret is that there is no secret! Successful, happy relationships take work and from the very beginning we've put in the work and been clear about what we both want in life and that we're on this journey together. Lorna and I have built an incredible life together while facing the many challenges of building a global business at the same time! While it's not for everyone, it works for us because we thrive on being together and building things together. We genuinely like each other's company and like to do everything together.

**Who puts the bins out?** Me.

**What is the thing you argue most about?** Honestly, we don't really argue about much. But, if I have to pick something it's that she thinks I work too hard on the farm when I should be relaxing and enjoying it and I want to teach her how to use the ride on-mower so she can do it with me!

**What do you find the most annoying about each other?** I love to watch rugby league and Lorna can't think of anything worse.



Lorna Jane and Bill Clarkson. Supplied.

**Who does the most cooking?** We share it.

**What is the trait you like most about her?**

Her passion. If she's going to do something she gives it 100 per cent every time.

**When were you the most vulnerable in your relationship?** Packing up my life in Cairns to be with Lorna in Brisbane when we had only just started dating should have been a vulnerable moment for me, but it just felt like it was meant to be. Even in the early days of our relationship I just knew that it was going to work. We have been committed to making it work from the very beginning. It hasn't always been easy, there have been challenges and sadness and hard decisions, but we have faced them all together and come out the other side stronger and, dare I say it, even more committed and in love.