

First anniversary for Dorothy, 92, and 'toyboy' Ron, 88



JOY: Their wedding a year ago

EXCLUSIVE
By ANTONIA HOYLE

THEY'VE honeymooned in Cape Town and holidayed in Cornwall. They've bickered and bantered, kissed and canoodled.

It's been a year since they married, and Ron and Dorothy Rothery, Britain's oldest newlyweds, haven't wasted a second of it.

Ninety-two-year-old Dorothy and her 88-year-old "toyboy" are living proof that it's never too late to find love.

After losing their previous partners after more than six decades of marriage, both thought they would be single for the rest of their lives.

"I thought it was too late for me to find a partner - I was resigned to being alone," says Dorothy. "But now I feel content and complete."

Ron adds: "Dorothy's beautiful and puts a sparkle in my step. I can't imagine life without her. We're both incredibly pleased to have found each other."

The pair, from Bursledon, Hants, met nine years ago through Ron's first wife, Evelyn.

Dorothy explains: "Evelyn and I were friends, and Ron would come round to pick her up and amuse himself with a crossword while we gossiped. I found him friendly and charming, but he was married to my friend. And besides, I was married myself."

Sadly, however, Dorothy's 64-year marriage to husband Albert came to an end in 1999, when he lost his fight against cancer.

"I found it hard to accept that Albert was gone," says Dorothy, a former shop assistant. "As the months passed, family and friends suggested I found someone else, but I wouldn't hear of it. I didn't think anyone could ever replace him."

Ron's first wife Evelyn started suffering from strokes in spring 2003. Her health deteriorated and she died of a brain tumour that October. "I was devastated," says Ron. "We'd been married for 62 years and I felt lost without her."

BUT on her deathbed Evelyn insisted that he should carry on enjoying life - and he was determined to do just that.

"I met up with friends, including Dorothy," he says. "She was obviously upset about Evelyn's death too, and we supported each other."

In March 2004, when the couple joined a group outing to Bournemouth, Ron, a retired plumber, realised he carried a torch for Dorothy.

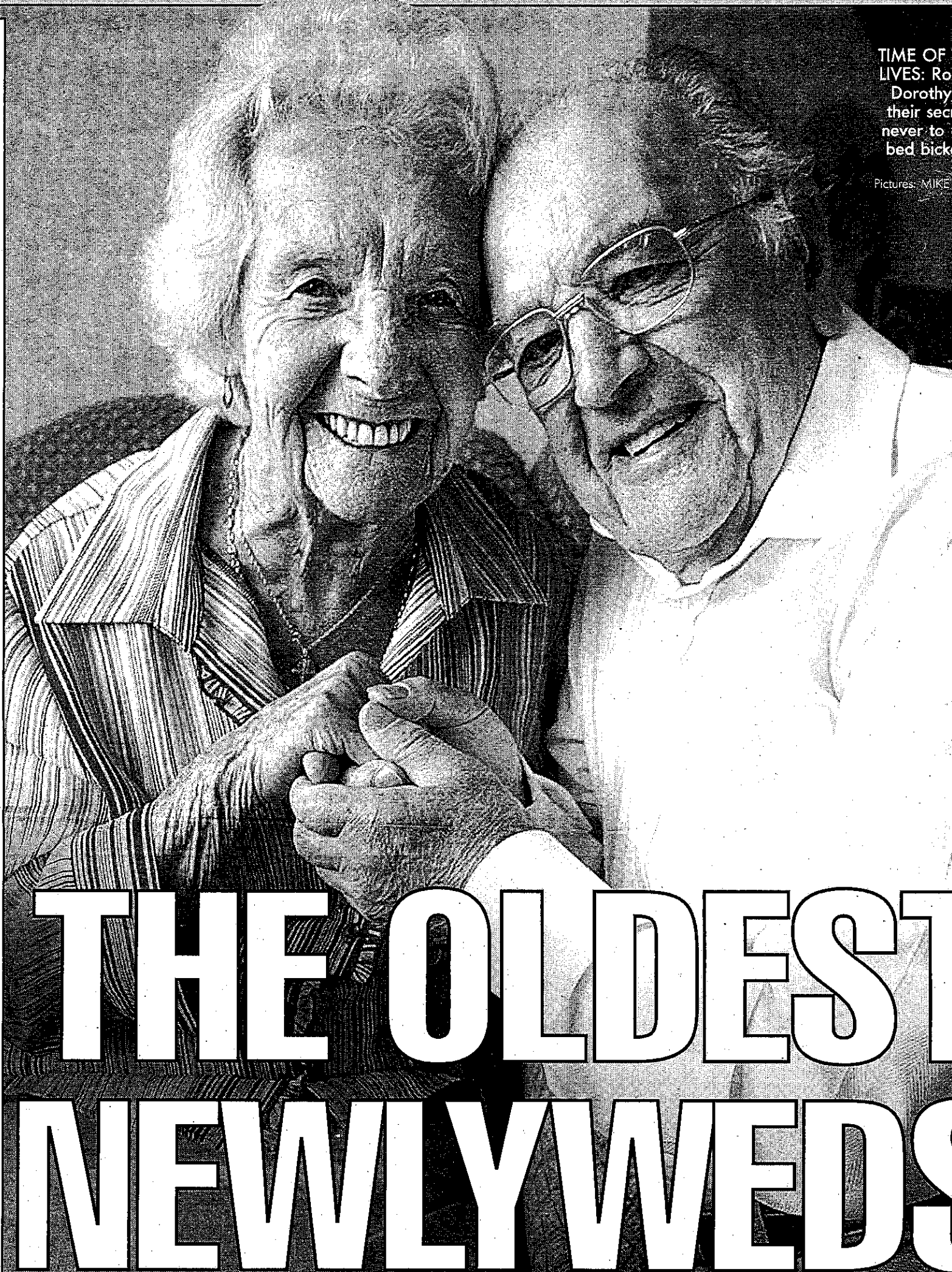
"I could talk to her about anything and everything," he says. "And I had a twinkle in my eye for her. Evelyn had given me her blessing to find someone new, so I didn't feel guilty."

As they prepared to go home, Ron took Dorothy's hand and gently kissed her on the lips.

"I nearly fell over in shock," she recalls. "But I was secretly pleased."

Ron drove her home - and bought her some red roses on the way.

"As he handed them to me I called him a silly fool," she smiles. "But we



THE OLDEST NEWLYWEDS



STROLL: Honeymooning in Africa

both knew it was the start of something special." From that moment they met at least once a week and spoke on the phone every day.

"We discussed family and friends," says Ron. "We've got 12 great-grandchildren between us, so there was plenty to talk about."

"We mentioned our previous marriages as well. We were determined not to make the fact we were widowed a taboo."

But Dorothy was hesitant. "I was so used to being on my own it felt strange having a man in my life," she says. So when Ron proposed she turned him down. "It felt

too soon," she says. But she regretted her reply, and when he asked her again, this time down on bended knee, she tearfully accepted.

"I realised it wasn't wrong to want someone else," she says. "Plus, my family and friends loved him - more than me, I think!"

THEY exchanged vows at Bursledon church on January 8 last year as a friend sang Michael Ball's *Love Changes Everything*.

"Dorothy looked beautiful. We were both overwhelmed with joy," says Ron. The big day was followed by a spectacular six-week honeymoon in Cape Town, South Africa, where Dorothy's daughter Janet, 65, lives.

Then it was time to settle into their new home together - and establish some rules.

"We agreed that I'd cook Ron's favourite fry-ups, as long as he washed up afterwards," says Dorothy.

"We've had the odd argument when he hasn't pulled his weight and has disappeared to the shed instead to do his wood-

work. And when he put a bell in the to ring for a cup of tea I was put out

Ron says: "I just leave her alone when mad. Arguments won't get us anywhere. We make sure we never go to bed bickering."

It's clear they're both besotted. "I love you every day, and make sure last thing at night and first thing morning," says Ron. "Obviously, sex important to us at it is to youngsters more about trust, honesty and friendship."

And humour. "We can't stop laughing together and I call Ron my toyboy Dorothy. "We love doing crosswords and the soaps together too. And Ron keeps romance by buying me flowers all the time."

They'll celebrate their first anniversary with a weekend at a hotel and a fancy dinner.

"We're so happy and hope to have many years left to enjoy each other," says Dorothy.

"Neither of us thought we'd ever find love after we were widowed. I hope our story will give others hope that it really is never too late to find love."

TIME OF LIVES: Ron and Dorothy Rothery, their secret newlyweds, never to go to bed bickering.

Pictures: MIKE HAYES