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# DATING & MARRYING ETHNIC MEN

Thirty Years of Love and Family in Canada...An Interracial Marriage Success

19 Feb 19 | Tacia Bryan | [0 Comments](#)

### Beyond Black and White Interview Spotlight: Jasmine and Lorne

This is an interview with Jasmine, who shares about her 30 year interracial marriage in Canada.. Fun fact: we're actually from the same town. I hope you enjoy the interview!

#### What are your names?

Our names are Jasmine and Lorne. We've been married for 30 years and we also have two children, Michael and Steven.



#### How did you meet?

We met on a blind date during my final year of university. My girlfriend was dating Lorne's roommate at the time. She thought that we were so similar and would be a perfect match. My girlfriend had asked me multiple times to go on a date with Lorne, but I was busy with my studies. I was not interested in going on a blind date with him, so I said, "No." Her boyfriend finally called me to beg me to come on a double

date. I had just submitted my last assignment for university after pulling all-nighters for two days. I was so much more relaxed and her boyfriend had taken the initiative to call me personally and we had never spoken or met prior. I was intrigued, and hungry, so I decided to join them. The free tickets to dinner definitely sweetened the deal.

We were supposed to meet up at their apartment, but when I arrived, Lorne wasn't there yet. My girlfriend and her boyfriend were starting to worry. They assured me that Lorne would arrive soon. While they were apologizing to me, Lorne rushed by. He was tall, slender, over six feet, with sandy brown hair, and sporting a leather jacket, black pants, cowboy boots, while he held his motorcycle helmet in his hand. On his way to his room, he popped his head into the living room to say hello and apologized for being late. His radio voice was so disarming. I was very impressed. Suddenly, I went from *I am just here for the free dinner* to being very interested in getting to know Lorne better. As they say, he had me at "Hello".

### **What are your cultural or ethnic backgrounds?**

I am a black woman. I was born in England and came to Canada when I was three. My mom is Jamaican and my dad is Anguillan. Lorne is white. He is Canadian – his mother is Scottish, and his father is Canadian.

### **When did you know it was going somewhere?**

Fairly early in the relationship, I started to feel like our relationship was getting pretty serious. We went on dates every day. Whenever he had a moment, he would pop by. I think he started to feel the same way about seven months later when he invited me to come home with for Christmas holidays to meet his parents. They lived in another city about five hours away.

### **What is your ideal date?**

We really enjoy travelling to Europe and the Caribbean. For example, we like going to UNESCO sites. My husband would download the audio (of the location) on his phone and it would be like we had a curator working beside us. That is a great treat. Lorne, my husband, is really interested in history and walking, so we plan our ideal dates around that. Also, occasionally we would go on short motorcycle sightseeing tours to little towns nearby.

### **What is the best thing that you like about each other?**

Frankness and honesty are really important. Also, we make allowances for educational experiences and being teachable. You don't know what you don't know, right? It's so important to listen to understand. We are together but we are our own person. I have maintained all my friends and relationships as has he. Our circle of friends has just expanded.

### **What is the best part about being together?**

Definitely companionship. We got married when we were young, so, we weren't just marrying each other – we were marrying each other's families. Both of our families were there for guidance. We can talk to each other's parents at any time, for advice or for company. We are both quiet and simple people. We could spend the whole weekend just sitting on the couch reading or watching TV.

### **What challenges have you faced?**

We did have some major issues throughout the years, but most of the issues were pretty minor. Our parents and older siblings were always around to intervene or to provide guidance. When we first got married, many years ago, the occupancy rate for rental units in Toronto was zero. We were young and married, just looking for a place to stay. We were living with my parents for a couple of months when Lorne's grandfather invited us to stay with him at his place in North York. He had a three bedroom apartment he had been sharing with his wife until she had been put in nursing home. He was all alone in the space. It was a huge apartment – 1000 plus square feet and we were on the top floor- the penthouse apartment.

The one thing I noticed was that there were no people of color in the building except for me. It was a "key" building. People were screened and had to pay the superintendent money to get into the building, which was primarily filled with white eastern European residents. We didn't have any problems until his grandfather became sick very soon after we moved in. After a very short stay in the hospital, he passed away. Our names were not on the lease for the apartment, but we decided to take over ownership of the unit.

We had been living there for several months when the superintendent made several visits to want to speak to my husband's grandfather who had died. That created a lot of problems for us. People constantly kept knocking on the door to ask us questions about the ownership of the unit, or about family members who were visiting us. We had a small baby at the time, so things were rather rough. The building owner was threatening lawsuits and implying that visiting family members were moving drugs in and out of our place, which was such a racial stereotype – and false, of course. I was livid and ready for a fight.



After the apartment corporation filed a claim against us, we counter-sued. As a settlement, we were offered another apartment in another building owned by the corporation. This new place was located in a high crime neighborhood 30 minutes away. We were given less than a week to move and had no choice but to go. The other apartment offered to us was filled new immigrants, black people and residents of lower social economic status. The building was quite run down and dirty. We were on the top floor again but this was no penthouse. After moving to this new place, we quickly realized that while it was more diverse, people were lovely and much friendlier, the environment was not what we wanted for our family. The notorious Scarborough rapist (in the 1990s), Paul Bernardo, picked up his first victim at the bus stop right outside our apartment. From there, we decided to move to the suburbs.

Another racially charged incident affected my husband at work. When my son was about five or six years old, we decided to throw him a party. My husband had recently accepted a job as manager of an arcade fun house/restaurant and was given the go-ahead and family discount for him to use the space for my sons' birthday party. His boss attended the event. He seemed really surprised that my husband was married to a black woman. There were obvious stares and whispering when my 19 black cousins, sibling and friends arrived to celebrate my son's birthday with him. I think we were probably the only black people in that town let alone in the arcade. Very soon thereafter, my husband was told he wasn't a good "fit" for the organization and lost his job. Thankfully, he was able to find another position somewhere else and get back on his feet.

Racism still exists in Canada to some extent. White flight from neighborhoods that have too many visible minorities is pretty standard. There are neighborhoods that are exclusively white. If you happen to be one of the few blacks leaving in that area be prepared to be questioned from people, "Are you lost?" For kids of different heritage, the color of your skin can determine how you experience of racism, how much and how often. My older son gets stopped and carded by the police so often that he sees it as normal (*note below*). On the other hand, my younger son who can pass as white doesn't have that experience. There are many areas in Toronto where black male profiling occurs.

#### **Do you find that your location helps your relationship to thrive?**

Oh definitely. My husband and I have a very good life here in Canada. We don't face many major issues. The most common reaction we will get is staring. One time, my husband, brother-in-law, sister-in-law and I were all walking down Yonge Street. There were stares, but I didn't even notice them. My sister-in-law was upset for me, but I've gotten so used to it by now. If I am with my younger son, who looks white, especially when he was a baby, people would always question me "Is that your baby?" It even happened at the hospital. However, I think the worst experience that we have had was in Halifax, Nova Scotia (*note below*). At a restaurant, the waitress didn't even acknowledge me or address me.

At a recent party we went to, in Mississauga, all of the children came from different walks of life, but they all looked alike. Mississauga is much more welcoming. Yes, we get the occasional stares, but I don't even notice the stares anymore. I just live in my own bubble.

These days, I live in a nice house in a neighborhood with a community board. People often refer to our neighborhood as a gated community because there is only one entrance in and out of the neighborhood. Recently, we went to a community event. The president of our neighborhood board greeted us warmly. He assumed that we were new to the neighborhood. He had been there 12 years, but we have lived there for 20 years. They have special block parties and movie nights in the park by the tennis courts. Life is great.

#### **How do you deal with difficult times?**



Issues involving race and racism are new for my husband, but we discuss it all the time. It's an opportunity to learn and grow. Comedy is a great way to move forward as well. Just laughing it off awkward situations and weird moments just brings us closer together. He is in a 30-year anti-racism course being married to me.

I have decided to take a more active role in shaping the world around me. I'm working on a PhD about racism and implicit bias. I am also facilitating workshops on race and racism. These sessions help to enlighten people about racism, anti-black racism and bias. I've also found writing to be really therapeutic. For instance, I've written about my experiences in Toronto. *(A link to that work is at the bottom of the article.)*

#### **How has your family reacted (to your relationship)?**

About five or six months in, I told my parents that he was the one. My mom was telling me not to say that so soon. I had kept myself really busy at that time, and it was a new relationship – a first time relationships for me, in fact. So, I could see why she was worried at first. Color was never an issue for them though. They loved him from the beginning. His family was the same. I talked to Lorne about how his parents would react when they met me. He said that it would be no problem, as we eat the same food and enjoy the same activities. I think that our shared Canadian experiences really helped to bring us together. His father was a professor of engineering and mother is a housewife. Back his Scotland, his mother had grown up with an African family who lived in the same building, so she was used to interacting with people from different backgrounds and did not have any negative thinking about blacks in general. She had been socialized to see blacks as equally competent as whites.

My relationship with his family is great, and he loves my family. My mother-in-law treats more like her own daughter. She has three boys so was so happy when I joined the family and showers me with gifts for my birthday and Christmas. My mom, my mother-in-law and I will spend time a weekend in Niagara Falls together. My mom adores my husband. Our family has a house n Anguilla, my brother and husband will be going down to check on the house. Ever since the recent hurricane, my father has not been back to do the necessary repairs, which thank goodness are minor. Lorne will also help my mother with house renovations and things. She need only call him. We have a really great family dynamic.

#### **How have your friends reacted (to your relationship)?**

Well, one of them did bring us together. No one was negative. For the most part, there was no big reaction. Things were just normal. My friends were just excited for me, and wanted to hear about how things were coming along.

#### **Is this a new dynamic for you?**

Yes, it was a new dynamic for me, I never dated before because I was too busy. If my friend hadn't set us up, I would probably be single today.

#### **What are some of the expectations you had before your relationship?**

I grew up in the High Park–Bloor West area in Toronto. (A neighborhood where today the average parent income is \$130,000.00.) It was a white neighborhood- ethnically diverse (Eastern European, Greek, British,) but a rather homogeneous. Many of my friends were either German, Greek, Polish or Ukrainian They would teach me phrases in their languages so that I could surprise their parents with little greetings when they brought me home with them. That was one thing I wanted: to be able to speak another language other English. I had always planned to marry someone who spoke something other than English. So much for that. My husband can ONLY speak English-. I also wasn't into clubbing, drinking or smoking-anything. I wanted someone who liked different things. I found that with my husband.

#### **Looking back on some of those expectations, how have they changed now?**

We were very practical with how we approached our relationship. I had a degree and my husband thought that we should focus on my career. He went to college for Food and Beverage Management and was in the restaurant business. He had lots of opportunities but he put them off until our children were in school full-time. He worked as bartender for years.

I secured a job as a Pharmaceutical rep for a Fortune 500 company. I made my way up the ladder to National Training Manager and then Regional Manager for Ontario and the Maritime provinces. I was travelling a lot and decided to take the family with me whenever it was possible. Sometimes I would bring my husband, or the kids, and sometimes both. I never had to worry because my siblings and parents would always step in to help with my children, often staying with the kids at our house in our absence.

### What are some of the things you do to keep your relationship growing?

Time is so important. We spend lots of time together. We'll bike together, go to the neighborhood pub and have wings, watch sporting events with friends, travel, go to the gym, and go to dinner a lot. It's so good to have very similar interests and activities. It brings us closer together. I can be more extroverted, while he is an introvert – it depends on the situation. Lorne doesn't see me as something exotic, just a typical Canadian. He really takes the time to learn more about my cultural background. We eat everything. He's been to Anguilla and Jamaica, and enjoys the food. His tolerance for spicy food has certainly increased over the years.

### How are the kids raised, considering they are biracial? How were their experiences growing up?

While my children are technically biracial, I don't like that term. My first son, Steven, is more racially ambiguous, and could pass for black, Indian or Middle Eastern, depending on whether he has a beard or not, short or long hair. He was actually in Turkey during the coup and flying back through England with his beard, he was pulled aside. On the other hand, my second son, Michael, could pass as white. His red hair and fair skin rarely make people aware of his black heritage. Due to US one drop rule, and how it affects our country, I decided to raise my children as black. I identify them that way. My husband is fine with that.

My sons have a really healthy understanding of who they are. Take Michael, for instance. Kids at school were so confused that this white-passing, red-haired child was describing himself as "black" and "Jamaican." I kept asking him everyday how his school day went and about his interactions with other children. I really wanted to see what kids would call him and how they identify him. After I asked him a few times, he finally turned with hands on his hip and with exasperation, he said "They call me Michael". After that I never asked him again. I decided to leave the racial discussions with the kids until they faced those issues.

### What advice would you give to others?

Race is a social construct, so it is not an issue for us. However, it is still something that affects our society. It's important to be open and talk things out. Conversations are really crucial.

Keep the family involved and talk to the parents, if you can. You can get a lot of help, wisdom and support from family members. There is so much love in our family. His mom is my mom and vice versa. When his mom or my mom comes to an Open House event at my school events, I introduce them both to my colleagues as "mom." I'm so thankful for the family I have.

### Notes

#### Note 1

"Carding" is the name of the practice of some police officers in Toronto to target black males, who may look suspicious, for questioning, even when no apparent crime has occurred in the area. It was an issue highlighted recently by the community and the Toronto chapter of the Black Lives Matter movement.

#### Note 2

Jasmine has written about her racial experiences in Canada inside of this anthology. Feel free to have a look [here](#) if you're interested.

#### Note 3

Nova Scotia, a Canadian province, has a very complicated racial history. Their dynamic is very similar to the United States.

#### Note 4

This article has been republished with some feedback from our interviewee. Thank you so much, Jasmine for your excellent contribution and interview.

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