

#### PARTNERS FOR LIFE

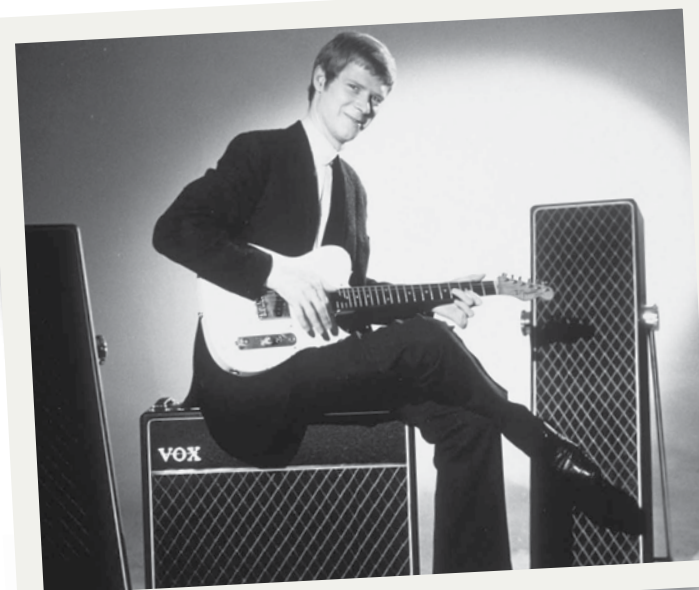
"To be worthy of someone's love, you have to be brave enough and clear-eyed enough to be honest with yourself and your partner,"

Elton wrote on Instagram in 2017.

## TRUE ROMANCE

# ELTON IN LOVE

After years of bad relationships, the singer finally found his own Captain Fantastic when he was 46. BY ANNE MARIE O'CONNOR



**ELTON JOHN'S ROAD TO LOVE WAS LONGER AND** more twisted than most other people's. Of course, that's not surprising considering his debilitating lack of self-esteem, multiple addictions and confusion about his sexual identity. "At school, I used to have crushes on people [but I didn't] really have any sex at all, male or female, until about 23," he said in *Elton: The Biography*. "Sex was completely frightening."

#### First Love

Reg (he hadn't yet changed his name to Elton) met Linda Ann Woodrow at a gig in Sheffield after he saved her from the hands of an abusive boyfriend. They quickly got engaged and moved in together, even though Reg, then 21, knew he wasn't in love with her. As the wedding date got closer, Reg grew more desperate and unhappy, but was afraid to break it off and hurt her. He even made a half-hearted attempt at suicide, putting a pillow in the oven and turning the gas on low, but leaving all the windows open. When Bernie Taupin, who was living with the couple, found him, he couldn't stop laughing.

Just a couple of weeks before the wedding, he was out drinking—heavily—with Bluesology bandmate Long John Baldry, who himself was gay and had guessed that Reg was as well. He was adamant that Elton break the engagement. "If you marry this woman, you'll destroy two lives, yours and hers," he said. That night, Reg finally got up the nerve to tell Woodrow the wedding was off; the very next day, his stepdad, Fred Farebrother, came and moved Reg (with Taupin in tow) back to his parents' house in the suburbs.

#### A Late Bloomer

"I didn't accept the fact that I was gay and didn't come out of my shell until I was about 24," Elton said in



**LEFT** Elton's bandmate and friend Long John Baldry urged him to break off his engagement to Linda Woodrow. **ABOVE** Woodrow, Elton's first fiancée, would love to reconnect with the star, whom she has not seen in 50 years.

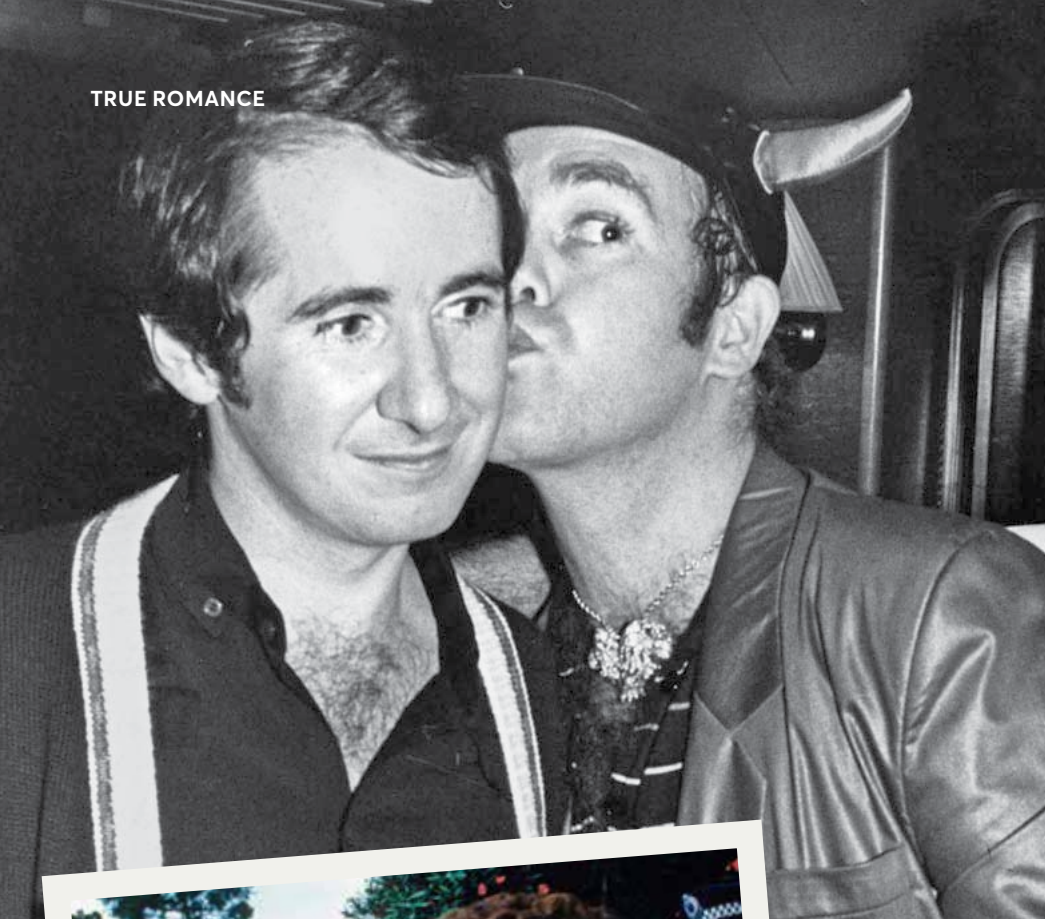
*Elton: The Biography*. His first boyfriend was John Reid, with whom he had become romantically involved during his first U.S. tour; Reid also ended up becoming Elton's manager, and back in London after the tour, the pair moved in together.

Everyone in their circle was aware of the true nature of their relationship. "He was exactly what Elton wanted and Elton was exactly what John needed," recalled Bluesology bandmate Mick Inkpen. "John was absolutely dedicated. He knew Elton was star material and he knew exactly how to develop him."

Elton didn't keep it a secret from his parents, either. "I got really lucky. My family and friends were a textbook example for families and friends of people coming out," he told *Out*. Reid and Elton were together for five years, and Reid continued as his manager until 1998, when Elton accused him of embezzlement (but lost the case in court).

Despite how open Elton and Reid were about their relationship, the public still thought Elton was straight, until an infamous 1976 *Rolling Stone* interview in





TOP Elton's first boyfriend was his then-manager, John Reid. ABOVE Despite knowing he was gay, Elton married Renate Blauel, a 28-year-old German-born sound engineer, in 1984.

younger and didn't have their own money or careers. "They didn't have jobs. They were reliant on me," he added. He'd shower them with gifts—exotic cars, expensive trips, Cartier watches. Since they would often accompany him on tour, "In six months they were bored and hated my guts because I'd taken their lives and self-worth away [even though] I hadn't intended to."

#### An Unexpected Twist

Even though rumors were swirling in the early 1980s that he was gay, Elton married a woman, Renate Blauel, in 1984. In many ways, she was an ideal mate: According to *Biography*, she was also obsessed with music—he had met her while she was working as a sound technician on his album *Too Low for Zero*. Almost everyone who knew her agrees she was a lovely self-effacing person who genuinely loved Elton and wasn't in the relationship for money or fame. The one problem, of course, was that she was a woman. In fact, in *Elton: The Biography*, the singer calls her "one of the best people I ever met in my life. I don't have one negative thing to say about her."

Elton proposed to her during the Australian leg of his 1984 tour, and they were married three days later, on Valentine's Day. Elton's friends and family were shocked, having long ago concluded that Elton was gay. Taupin thought Elton had tied the knot because he wanted to start a family.

Elton's buddy Rod Stewart best summed up the rest of his friends' reactions with a typically catty comment: "You may still be standing, but we're all on the f--ing floor," *The Australian* reported.

Not surprisingly, the marriage didn't last; after a long separation, the two divorced in 1988. In 2017, Elton took to Instagram to apologize to Blauel: "Many years ago, I chose Australia for my wedding to a wonderful woman for whom I have so much love and admiration. I wanted more than anything to be a good husband, but I denied who I really was, which caused my wife sadness, and caused me huge guilt and regret." Blauel, meanwhile, has never said a negative word about Elton.

which he admitted he was bisexual. Shortly thereafter, his record sales began to drop; whether it was due to this confession is up for debate.

Around this same time, Elton's cocaine and alcohol abuse began spiraling out of control—as did his promiscuity. "Drugs, sex and doomed relationships were my form of destruction," he's quoted as saying in *Elton: The Biography*. But the relationships were lopsided, he later explained in *Parade*. His lovers were usually



#### SHARED INTERESTS

In addition to the Elton John AIDS Foundation, Elton and Furnish support many other causes. Here they are at The Rainforest Foundation Benefit Concert at Carnegie Hall in New York in 2000.

★  
"I was attracted to David immediately.... I knew he was the one because he is not afraid of me."

ELTON JOHN



MCPE 036082

CERTIFIED EXTRACT OF AN ENTRY OF CIVIL PARTNERSHIP  
Pursuant to the Civil Partnership Act 2004

**CIVIL PARTNERSHIP**

Civil partnership registered in the Registration Authority of *Windsor and Maidenhead* Entry No. 408/000002

1. Date and place of civil partnership registration	Twenty - first December 2005 The Guildhall High Street, Windsor	
2. Names and surnames	Sir Elton Hercules JOHN	David James FURNISH
3. Date of birth	23 <sup>rd</sup> March 1947	19 <sup>th</sup> October 1952
4. Sex	Male	Male
5. Condition	Previous Marriage Dissolved	Single
6. Occupation	Musician	Film Maker
7. Father's name, surname and occupation	Frederic FARNBOTHAM Stagefather Interior Decorator (retired)	Jack Edward FURNISH Director (retired)
8. Mother's name, surname and occupation	Sheila Ellen FARNBOTHAM Civil servant (retired)	Gladys Emily FURNISH Homemaker (retired)
9. Civil partner's signature	Elton J John	David J Furnish
10. Name and surname of witnesses	Sheila Ellen FARNBOTHAM Gladys Emily FURNISH	
11. Civil partnership register's signature	Clair J Williams	

I certify that the above particulars have been compiled from an entry in the Civil Partnership Register.

on behalf of *Rebecca Burgess of Windsor and Maidenhead* Registration Authority

Date: *23<sup>rd</sup> December 2005*

CAUTION: THERE ARE OFFENCES RELATING TO FALSIFYING OR ALTERING A CERTIFICATE AND USING OR POSSESSING A FALSE CERTIFICATE. (CRIMINAL COPYRIGHT)

WARNING: A CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY



LEFT Elton and Furnish's certificate of civil partnership. ABOVE Onlookers cheer on Elton and Furnish as they emerge from their civil partnership ceremony in Windsor in 2005. BELOW LEFT With their sons, Zachary and Elijah.

### Getting Clean and Finding True Love

But it wasn't until Elton got sober in 1990 that he was ready to welcome true love into his life. And in 1993, he met the man who would be by his side for the next 29 years. "I wanted to meet new people, so I rang up a friend in London and said, 'Could you please rattle some new people together for dinner here Saturday?'" he recalled in *Parade*. One of the people who attended the dinner at Elton's Windsor home was then-30-year-old David Furnish, a successful advertising executive at Ogilvy & Mather. "I was attracted to David immediately," Elton said.

For his part, Furnish had limited expectations of the evening, he later recalled in *The Guardian*. In fact, instead of taking Elton up on his offer of a chauffeured car, he drove himself so he could leave early if the evening was a bust. But they hit it off—so well, that they met up again the next night for Chinese takeout. (Of course, Elton being Elton, the "Chinese takeout" was a four-star feast from the famed Mr. Chow's restaurant.)

Though Elton was quickly smitten, Furnish had his reservations. "Our lifestyles weren't compatible at all," he told *The Guardian*. "The balance of power was different to the way it is now...everything was so new to me. When you're in a relationship with a very famous person, you have to make compromises. I can't say to Elton, 'Hey, let's walk around the corner and have a coffee.' Someone as well-known as that can't go anywhere in the world without being recognized. Now I have a much better understanding of what he can and can't do."

### Making It Work

By 1997, the couple had found balance in their relationship, so much so that Elton allowed Furnish to show him, the good *and* the bad, in the documentary *Tantrums and Tiaras*. On Dec. 21, 2005, they were united in a civil union—one of the first couples in the U.K. to do so. They got married in 2014, when gay marriage was legalized in the country.

### Old School Romance

One secret to the longevity of their love? Sending each other an old-fashioned love letter once a week. "Every Saturday, without fail, in the last 25 years, we've sent each other a card or a fax," Elton revealed in R&B artist 6LACK's video series about love. "We sort through [our difficulties] by communication, and one way of communicating is writing down on a piece of paper or card how you're feeling."

Since they first met, "Our love has grown stronger and stronger," Elton told *People* magazine. "And you have to work at it when you're married."

In a 2017 Instagram post, he wrote about his journey to find a meaningful, fulfilling relationship: "Almost 24 years ago, I met the person with whom I could be fully myself. When we married in 2014, it felt like that fact was accepted by the world. For David and I, being able to openly love and commit to one

another, and for that to be recognized and celebrated, is what makes life truly worth living."

### The Next Step

The love in Elton and Furnish's lives increased exponentially when they welcomed children. Zachary Jackson Levon was born on Christmas Day 2010; a little over two years later, Elijah Joseph Daniel arrived on Jan. 11, 2013, both via surrogate. "Our boys came into our life at a late time," Elton told *Good Morning America*. "If you'd had said to me 10 years ago I'd be sitting on your show married to the man I love and have two beautiful children I would have said, 'You put acid in my drink,'"

Elton told Ellen DeGeneres. "But life throws you challenges and life throws you curveballs—great curveballs. These two children have come along at a time I never thought I'd have children. They are the greatest thing in our lives."

Speaking to *Entertainment Weekly*, he said, "Everything I thought might be annoying about children turned out to be not annoying at all. I just love every second of it. It's helped make me a nicer person and it's helped settle me down.

It's helped me musically, too, because I'm so happy in my own skin." In fact, they were the main reason he decided to retire from touring. (His ongoing Farewell Yellow Brick Road tour began in September 2018.) "There's no contest. I'd rather be with my children than playing shows," he said.

★  
"I've never experienced anything like it, being a father and being a parent."

ELTON JOHN

## LAVISH HOMES

An estate that's within a stone's throw of Windsor Castle is only one of the singer's luxury properties.

"I have too many homes, probably, but I love them," Elton confessed on the Irish TV network RTÉ. Woodside, his estate in Old Windsor, a suburb of London, is his family's main residence. (Elton calls it "the hub.") He and David Furnish also have homes in Nice, France; Beverly Hills, California; Atlanta; London and Venice, Italy. "I'm addicted to buying

a piece of property, doing it up, then buying another piece of property," he confessed in *Elton: The Biography*. "My mum always wanted me to put my money in bricks and mortar instead of up my nose." Woodside was originally built in the 1500s for King Henry VIII's doctor. Elton bought the classic English country house

in 1974 for £400,000 (around \$1 million), and has remodeled and expanded it numerous times. In addition to enough bedrooms for a house full of guests, there's a gilded salon, a library, a recording studio, a gym, a room covered in shells, numerous outbuildings, a pool and a classical Italian garden filled with sculpture.

