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Fairytale romance

Age no barrier to love

IT WAS a romance born in cyberspace heaven and none was more surprised than its two protagonists – a young Sydney business analyst and a Gordonvale grandmother.

Avid followers of American science fiction writer Spider Robinson – and the imaginary Callahan's Saloon in which most of his stories are told – Vickie and Rob Farquhar met through an online forum dedicated to the author and his characters.

But their own tale of love, shared with *Cairns Sun* in the lead-up to Valentine's Day, is as intriguing as any they have read.

Rob was 23 and living in Sydney when he was invited to join the forum by its predominantly American followers. Vickie was 58 and the only other Australian "Callahanian" in the forum.

"I was what we called the message board tender – you look after the people who post (messages)," Vickie says. "I got talking to Rob ... and used to give him advice on his girlfriends."

When she posted photos of a Callahan's reunion she had attended in America, Rob decided they should hold a "mini reunion" in Australia and flew north to meet her.

"And things, as they say, started happening," says Rob, now 31.

"It was a friendly get-together,

● **ROZ PULLEY**

but that was the first time I took notice, if you know what I mean," he says.

One person who didn't pick up on his intent was Vickie.

"I didn't realise at the time he was attracted and I don't think I was really aware," says the gregarious 66-year-old mother of five and grandmother of 10.

When Rob asked if he could fly up for another visit a month later, she still didn't realise.

"I said: 'No problems, of course you can' and he said 'Vickie you still don't know, do you?' and stupid me says 'don't know what?' Then he said 'Vickie...' and I thought 'oh, yeah, all right'."

Within months, Vickie had accepted an invitation to move to Sydney with a boyfriend who was 35 years her junior and younger than all five of her children.

"I'm one of these people, I feel 27," Vickie says.

"I could never see what all the song and dance is with age. It's never mattered to me and if people have a problem with it, it's their problem – not ours, because we don't have one. He got the best end of the deal. He really did," says the no-nonsense former station cook, cabinetmaker and clerical worker.

There was a mixed reception to the idea.

"My boss said: 'Go for it, girl,'" recalls Vickie.

However, Rob's parents did not approve of their only child's new partner. "Dad said on a couple of occasions 'look Rob, she's going to die before you'. I said if someone had told you that your wife was going to die before you, would you not have married her," Rob says in reference to his own mother's premature death four years ago.

"If there is any lesson in how unpredictable life can be, it was when mum suddenly died. Everyone's time on this earth is limited, so we enjoy what we've got. I know the odds aren't good. Then again, for all we know, something could happen to me on the roads tomorrow," Rob says.

"Dad's still not accepted it, but he's come to realise there's bigger all he can do about it."

When Rob and Vickie married in Sydney in 2004, it was without any of his family present.

"We didn't want anyone to be with us that wasn't happy," Vickie says. "We had the best wedding – we got married in our front room with my eldest daughter, her partner and their daughter, together with a couple of close friends and a celebrant, and then tootled off down the road to a pizza café and met all our friends. It was great."

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HAPPY COUPLE: Vickie and Rob Farquhar relax in their Gordonvale home.

Picture: ROMY SIEGMANN

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