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# STYLE



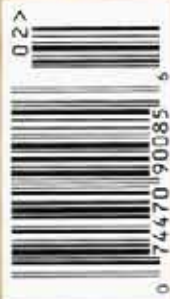
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# From Tragedy, A Silver Lining

Though not the wedding she envisioned, the author's nuptials could not have been more meaningful.

BY JUDITH COOKIS RUBENS

I always assumed planning my wedding would be a romantic journey. I envisioned my fiancé and I holding hands in Crate & Barrel, selecting items for our dream home. I saw us taste-testing buttercream cakes. I pictured us sorting through brochures for a sun-drenched beach honeymoon. I originally thought our biggest dilemma would be “band or DJ?”

In reality, there were more than a few snags along the way. Our rehearsal dinner restaurant shut its doors without warning, just weeks before the big dinner. Bridesmaid dresses didn't fit properly. Invitation maps were printed incorrectly.

I took it all in stride — until Tuesday morning, Sept. 11, 2001.

It was 9 a.m. when my mother and I sat down to breakfast in our suburban Chicago home before heading to pick up my gown for my Sept. 15th wedding. We flipped on the TV and saw smoke billowing out of the World Trade Center.

I sat transfixed, unable to turn away from the news coverage as the tragedy unfolded. Sometime later, we finally wandered over to the bridal shop in a daze. We hovered around a small TV with the salespeople, watching in disbelief as the towers crumbled. Within minutes, the whole world changed.

York City and Washington, D.C., were safe, I started to process the enormity of what had happened — the first attack on U.S. soil in my lifetime.

I also felt horribly guilty because my

Suddenly, my planning over the last year seemed so trivial. All I wanted was for my relatives to travel safely and be together. Having lost my father to cancer just the year before, I grieved for every-

one who lost a loved one in the attacks. Hearing tale after tale of husbands or wives scanning hospitals for “missing” spouses, I found myself concerned with only one thing: marrying my fiancé — with or without a fancy celebration.

In the end, our wedding went on as planned four days later. It was beautiful, romantic and absolutely perfect — yet it was nothing I had envisioned the week before. A handful of relatives and friends were notably absent, but many others hopped in cars and drove cross-country to be with us. Toasts, dances and seating arrangements were quickly rearranged. Even our wedding album will forever remind us of

that time — we stopped for pictures in a park draped with huge American flags.

Ironically, countless guests told us that our wedding was one of the most memorable they had attended. It gave them an outlet to laugh, celebrate and dance — something they hadn't done much of in

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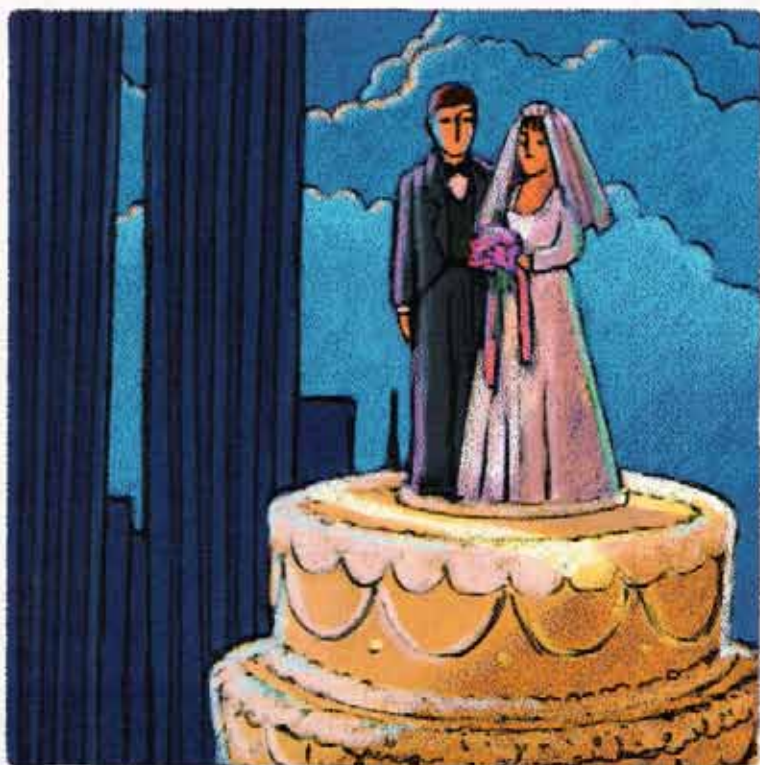


PHOTO: JIMMY

thoughts kept drifting back to my upcoming wedding, just days away. Friends called to see if the ceremony was still on. With air travel at a standstill, dozens of relatives and friends on both coasts started phoning in their love and regrets. For some family members, my wedding would have been a long-awaited reunion. Now it was not to be.

## From Tragedy, A Silver Lining

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those last few days.

We canceled our long-awaited Jamaican honeymoon because air travel was still uncertain. Instead, my sneaky fiancé managed to pull together an impromptu trip to New Orleans by overnight train, keeping the destination a secret from me until we boarded the train.

On our 19-hour ride from Chicago to New Orleans, I collapsed. Exhausted from wedding planning and watching media coverage, the emotions washed over me. While fixing my makeup in the tiny train bathroom, the tears started falling.

No, I wasn't sad because we weren't headed for sunny Jamaica. They were actually tears of joy because I was so happy to have married my husband, my partner of eight years. We survived a long engagement, the financial pressures of planning a wedding, and, now, we had pulled each other through a time of crisis.

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During our week-long stay in the French Quarter, we explored New Orleans' romantic cafes and jazz halls without the usual revelers. We started our new life together in an unfamiliar but exciting adventure — probably the first of many.

In today's uncertain world, terrorist attacks and war keep us up nights whenever we think about traveling, getting married or starting a family. What will the world be like 12 months from now? Even six months? We cannot know for sure.

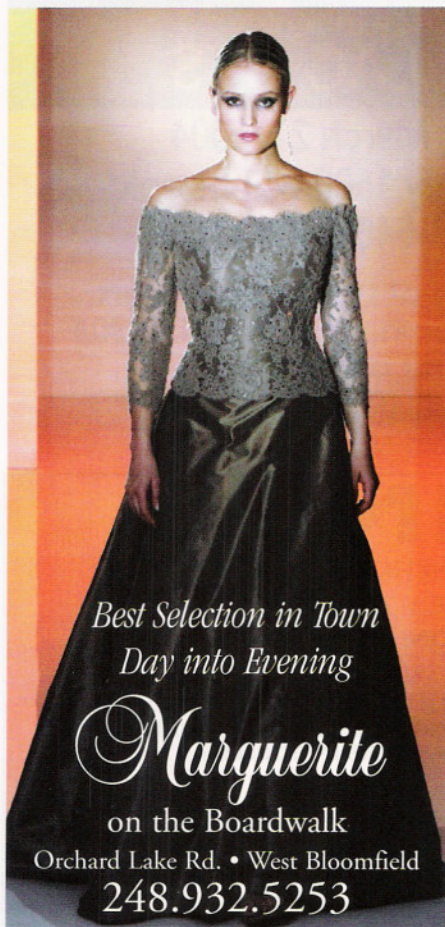
Things my generation used to take for granted — especially peace — are not so certain anymore.

Still, for me, the horrific events of 9/11 held a small but powerful silver lining. They made me grudgingly accept that I won't always be in control.

Before 9/11, I spent countless hours obsessing over attendants' gifts, dinner menus and wedding photos. I was consumed by creating a picture-perfect wedding that met society's elusive expectations. I somehow lost sight of the big picture.

I had great friends, a supportive family, and best of all, a loving fiancé. We were healthy, together and in love. It was time to stop worrying. It was time to start having fun and enjoying marriage.

That revelation was a true gift at a time when I really needed it. I still consider it my favorite wedding present. □



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