

ROMANCE *in the* CITY

Atlanta

101 GREAT
DATES

Cool ideas for
hot romantic
outings

PAGE 65

MODERN LOVE STORIES

MY VERY FIRST DATE

BY LUKE DITTRICH

MARRIED, WITH KIDS

BY "THE REBEL HOUSEWIFE"

SEX INSPECTOR ON CALL

BY MICHAEL ALVEAR

50 YEARS OF TRUE LOVE

BY JUSTIN HECKERT

ON THE DOWN LOW

BY CHANDRA R. THOMAS

CRAZY ABOUT LOVE

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plus

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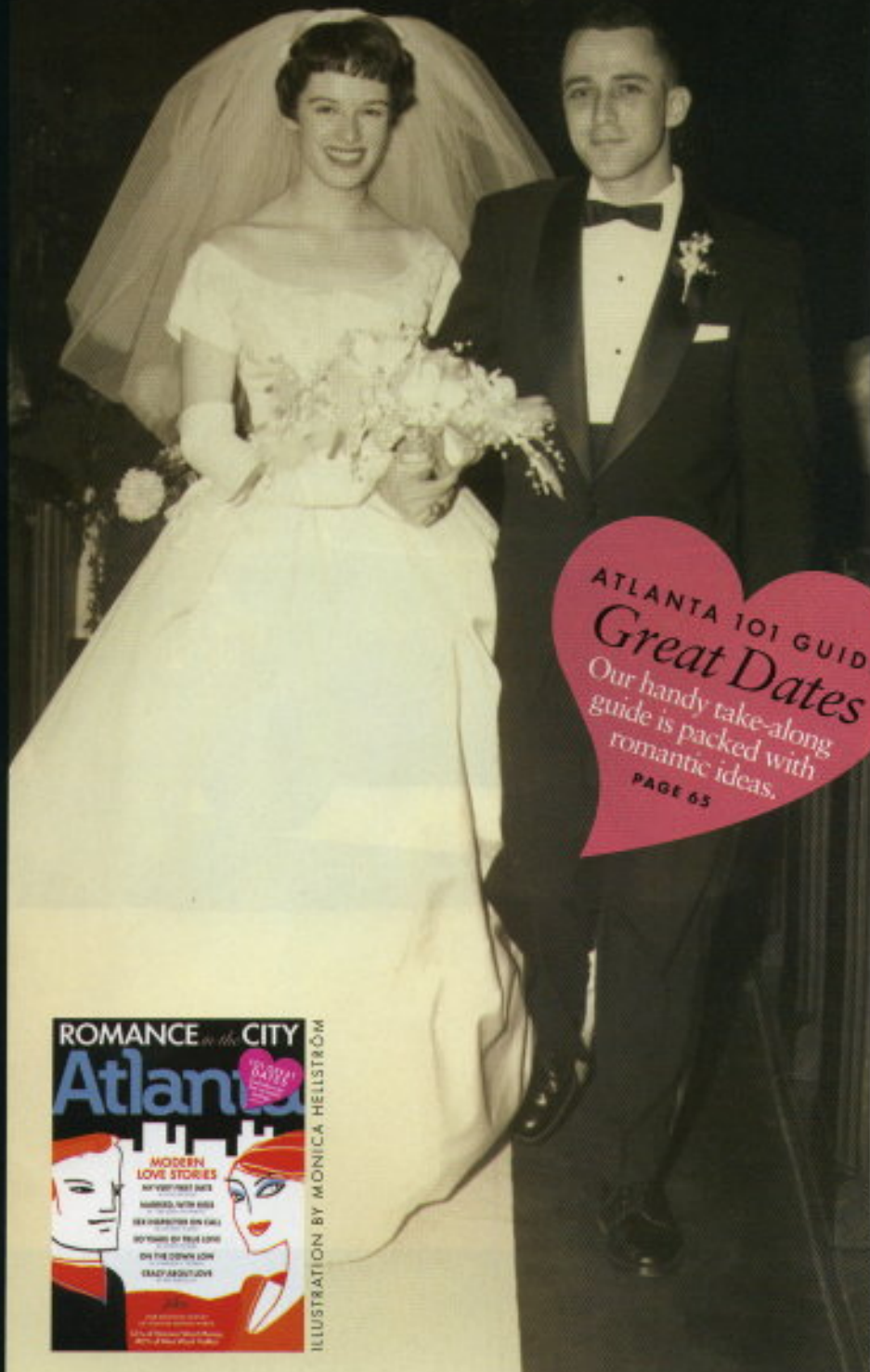
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ATLANTA 101 GUIDE
Great Dates
Our handy take-along
guide is packed with
romantic ideas.
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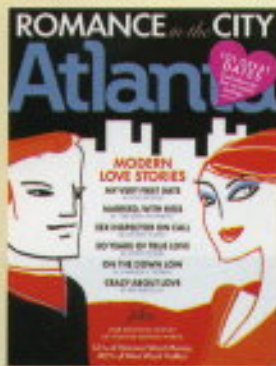


ILLUSTRATION BY MONICA HELLSTRÖM

PHOTO BY MICKEY GOODMAN

'TIL DEATH
DO US PART?
On December 18,
1960, those words
seemed an eternity
away for Mickey and
Phil Goodman.



The 60s

Love Story

Widowed after 42 years of marriage, I miss every little thing about us.

BY MICKEY GOODMAN

My husband, Phil, kept his cassette player within arm's reach during his unending hospital stays. Classical music sustained him through surgeries, radiation and chemotherapies. When he lost his final battle to cancer, National Public Radio broadcast the news of his death and a CNN banner scrolled across the bottom of television sets across the country.* The man who never thought he accomplished much would have been stunned.

He also would have been confounded by the scores of people who came to say farewell. There were former colleagues from GPTV and Peach State Public radio (where he was the founder and director), ham radio buddies, friends from every phase of our lives, the now-adult kids who used to hang out in our den, neighbors new and old.

Some just hugged me, others wiped away tears of their own. Words were unnecessary. Their presence said it all.

There are books, pamphlets and Web sites devoted to practical matters that must be dealt with following the death of a spouse—advice on attorneys, wills, insurance policies, retirement, Social Security, bank accounts, *ad nauseum*. There is no advice on dealing with people who crush your spirit. Like the friend from my teaching days who had also lost her husband. When she approached me, I expected a life preserver. Instead, she tossed me an anchor. "You'll have to join my group," she said. "We call ourselves the Merry Widows."

Once our family and friends returned to their normal lives, the flowers wilted and thank you notes were mailed; I was left in silence. Without my love and best friend, our house groaned, shadows jumped through the windows, a sudden glare from the deck's motion lights spelled terror. A house once filled with love and laughter—even during the final, difficult years when cancer ruled our lives—became a tomb of memories.

I often think it's the little things I miss most. I long to see Phil's eyes light up when I walk into a room. I miss his quick wit and offbeat sense of humor, his ability to think clearly in the midst

of chaos, his confidence; this was a man who never met a household project he couldn't fix.

Even in this 21st century, I've lost half of who I've been for the last 42 years. I miss everything about coupledness—quiet dinners together, evenings out with friends, a hand to hold, a warm body at my side during difficult nights, a sturdy shoulder to cry on. I still light a candle nightly to connect tenuously with my love. I've had brushes with the five stages of grief, but we're not intimate yet. "Sorrow, anger and depression" are all consuming. "Acceptance" is an oxymoron.

People told me there would be black days. They didn't tell me that navigating life without Phil would be like paddling a canoe in the midst of a tsunami. Waves keep sucking me

I've had brushes with the five stages of grief, but we're not intimate yet. "Sorrow, anger and depression" are all consuming. "Acceptance" is an oxymoron.

out to an angry sea. A sentimental piece of music on the radio sends me reeling. A glimpse of an aging couple holding hands brings quick tears. Just checking the little square "widow" box on a standardized form is cause for depression. No one warned me I would lose my brain and my decision-making abilities along with my lockbox key and checkbook register.

There are things you never know until you're picking up the pieces of a broken life. I never suspected that close couple-friends would stop calling. That anyone would suggest that I'd be more "comfortable" if I joined an all-women's book club. It never entered my

lonesome all alone at night, just call me on my cell phone—any time." I was too numb to feel anger so soon after Phil's death, but I can barely contain my rage if I run into either of the couple now.

No one rang a warning bell that my home would conspire against me, too. Phil's voice disappeared from our answering machine before I had an opportunity to save the tape—a mystery that haunts me still. The bulbs in the hall ceiling fixtures failed in unison. Who knew you had to remove eight screws in order to replace them? The washing machine gasped its last in the middle of a full load of sheets—an incident that normally would have elicited expletives. Instead, it turned catastrophic when I was forced to purchase a major appliance without Phil's input. The poor salesman didn't know what to do as I dissolved into audible sobs in the middle of the showroom floor. I didn't know what to do with myself, either.

Slowly emerging from a semi-catatonic state, I began the notification process advised by the experts. Social Security was first. With the speed of an American eagle they sucked out the current month's payment from our checking account. Apparently, there is no proration—even if the death happens at 11:59 p.m. on the 31st of the month.

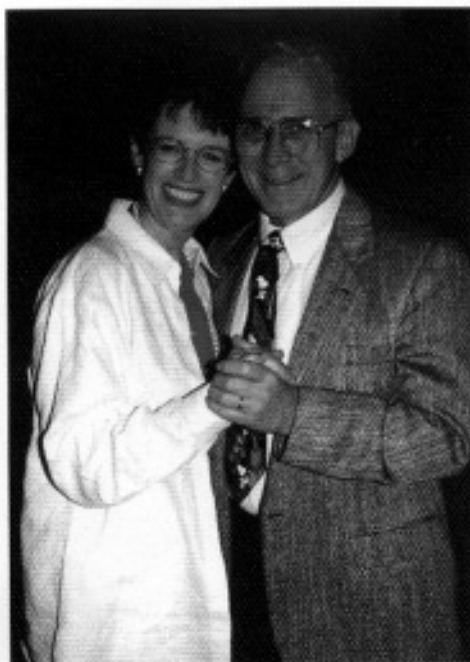
Another disconcerting call was to the State Merit System to discuss Phil's retirement and health insurance benefits. Unlike Social Security, the system didn't reach a long arm into my checking account. Instead, they withheld future funds too long for comfort. Even worse, my health care benefits were suspended for more than a month while they converted their records to reflect my new status. They dubbed the time a "nuisance period." I would have given it a very different name had I required hospitalization.

By the end of the first round of calls, I felt

much more prepared I might have been had we researched the various bureaucratic regulations and kept a notebook showing the location of all the important documents—bank accounts, *original* life insurance policies, mortgage information.

Instead of a major annoyance, a change in my cell phone plan became a blessing in disguise. Because it was in Phil's name, the megacompany not only denied my request to drop our second phone, they dropped me. "So sorry. Regardless of the circumstances, you'll have to reapply," the representative told me. Angrily, I tried to sign on with another provider. Once again—despite an impeccable credit record—I was refused service. This time it was because my Social Security number revealed "an odd code." I gritted my teeth and contacted Social Security again. That "odd code" became the biggest debacle of all. Along with coding Phil's account "deceased," the clerk had inadvertently killed me off. Once again funds were withdrawn from my checking account. It took three months for the Feds to declare me among the living and return the missing money. During those first horrific months, I often wished they were correct.

"You quickly learn who your friends are in good times and bad," a friend said recently. No one ever told me how many would soar with the angels to ease my way. Our neighborhood dinner club took over the open house that followed Phil's funeral. They brought mountains of food, (wo)manned the house while we were gone and cleaned up



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY WICKY GOODMAN

afterward—leaving enough meals in my freezer for weeks to come. Writer friends took over my assignments. My next-door neighbor checked on me daily and still calls frequently. Phil's buddies have initiated me into their Monday lunch bunch. My children were (and are) my sustenance; my seven young grandchildren, dessert.

On the first anniversary of Phil's death, just a few months ago, our family gathered to plant a memorial triangle of trees in front of the house. Across from my mother's Japanese maple we planted one for my dad. Phil's tree stands at the peak, much as he stood at the apex of my life. Each time I pass by, I can hear strains of the music he loved, and the song of his life echoes in my heart. * ❁

Memories are made of this:
Dancing at an "oldies"
convention on Jekyll Island,
2000.

*People told
me there would
be black days.
They didn't
tell me that
navigating life
without Phil
would be like
paddling a
canoe in the
midst of a
tsunami.*