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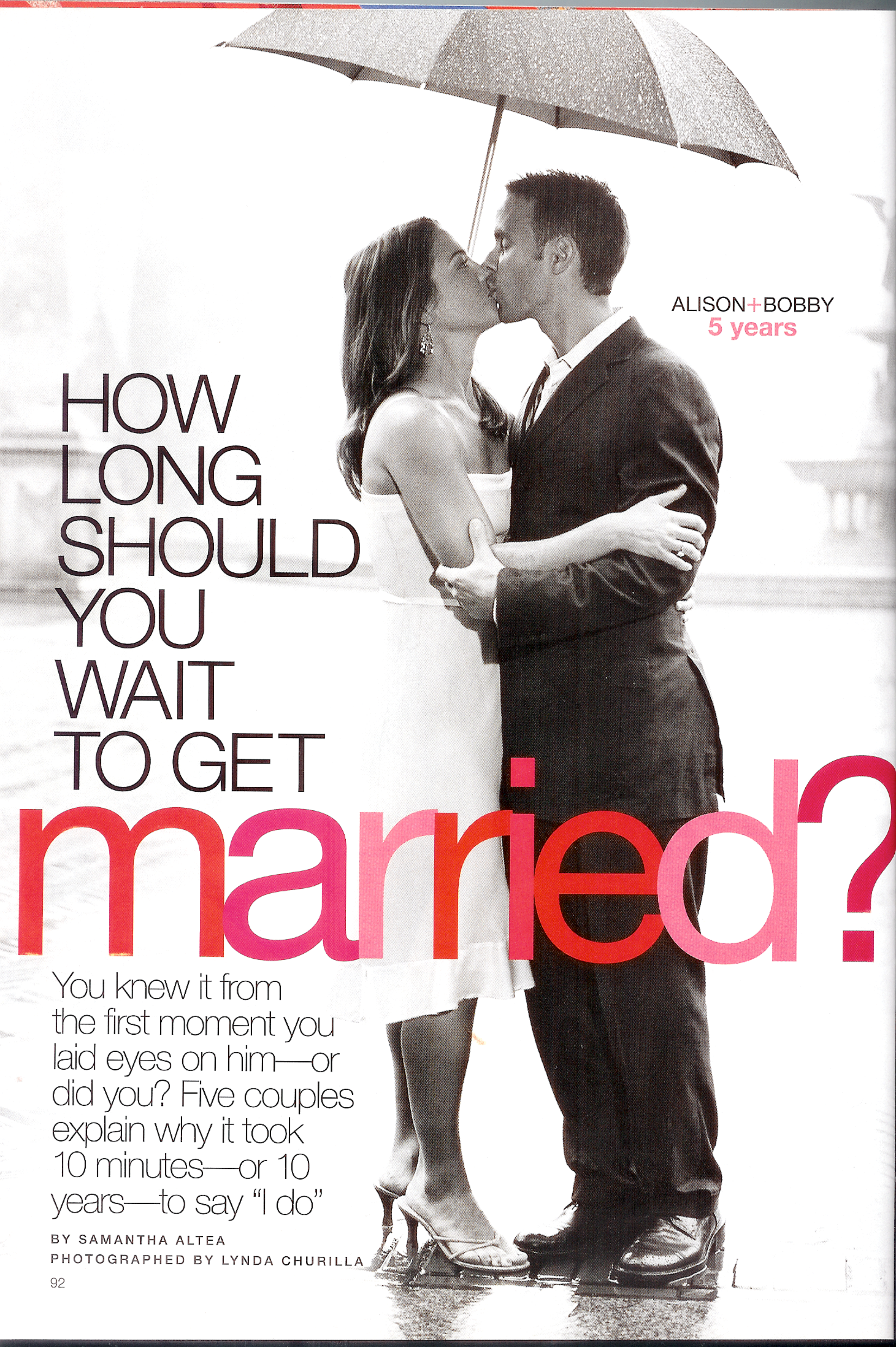
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5 years

HOW LONG SHOULD YOU WAIT TO GET married?

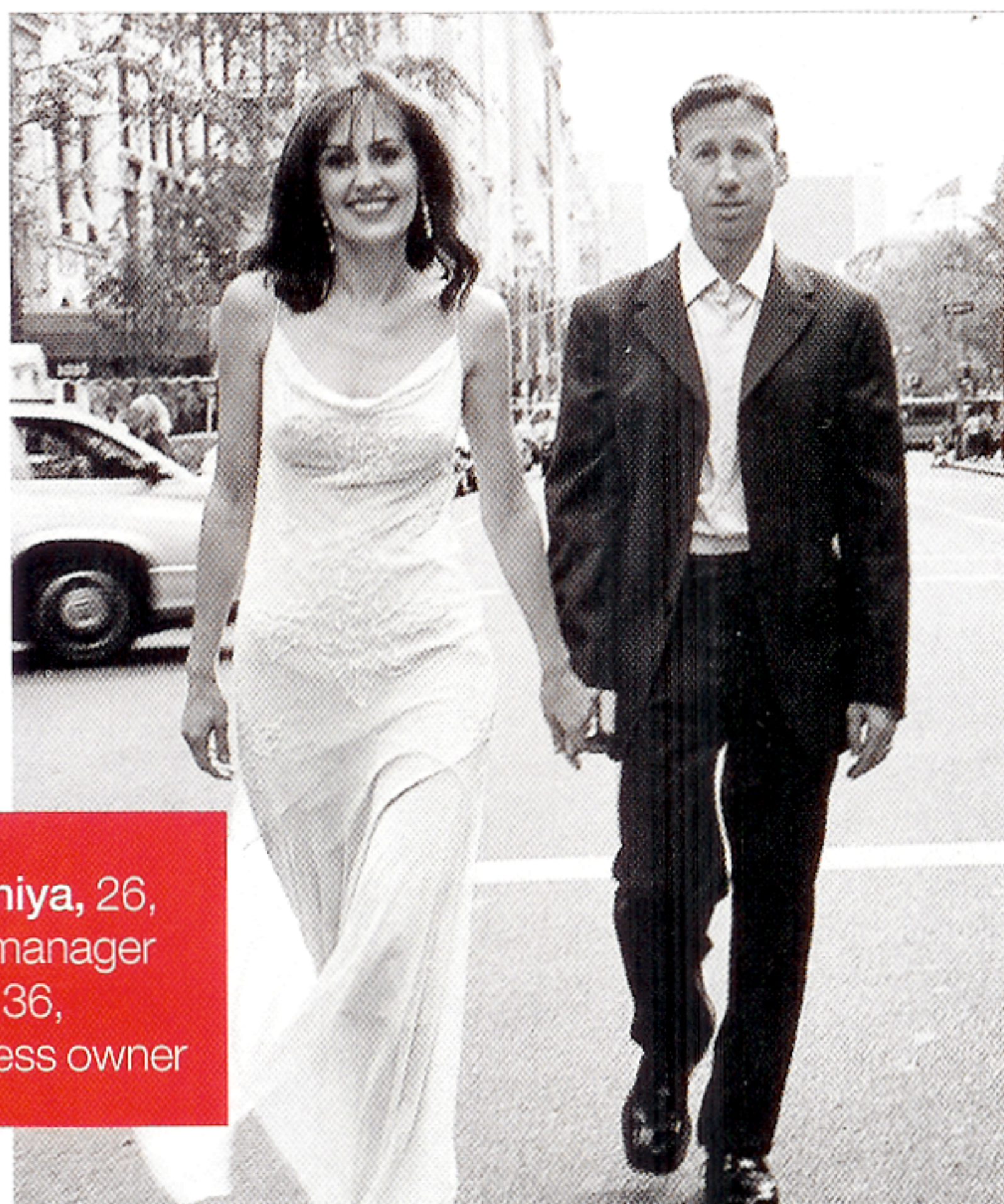
You knew it from the first moment you laid eyes on him—or did you? Five couples explain why it took 10 minutes—or 10 years—to say “I do”

BY SAMANTHA ALTEA
PHOTOGRAPHED BY LYNDY CHURILLA

"Nick and I feel like soul mates
and have made a promise
to be together forever." —Soo

SOO + NICK
maybe forever

HOW LONG SHOULD YOU WAIT TO GET MARRIED?



Evgeniya, 26,
retail manager
Gary, 36,
business owner

5 MONTHS

“Only two days into Gary’s visit, he asked me to marry him!”

■ I’m from Russia; Gary is from America. But together, we discovered that love has no boundaries. When my mom’s friend posted my profile on an Internet dating site, I laughed. I never imagined it’d lead me to the love of my life—across the world!—and that after only six weeks, we’d be engaged.

Things were different with Gary than with any other guy I’d ever met. I knew he was the one. My past boyfriends had wanted me just for my looks—or liked me for my brains but were intimidated by my looks. I’d never met anyone who loved all of me, as Gary does. From the start, we didn’t play games. We had the exact same opinions about everything. Even my very first glimpse of Gary—his Internet user-name, “X-Files”—struck a chord; it’s my favorite TV show.

Before we even met in person, we knew we were soul

mates. So, after six weeks of intense e-mails and phone calls, when Gary asked me what I wanted for my upcoming birthday, I said all I wanted was him. I got my wish: He came to Russia! Our first day together was magical; we slept together that night. And only two days into Gary’s visit, he proposed. He’d even brought a ring! I was shocked, but it just felt so right. We knew we wanted to be together, and getting married was the easiest way for us to be able to live in the same country. It was the only time I’ve ever rushed into an important decision.

Shortly after Gary’s trip, I moved to the U.S., and five months after our first e-mail, we were married. At first, we had some language issues, but now, I speak near-perfect English. We’ve been married for more than three years, and we’ve never been more in love.

ONE YEAR

“After only six months, Phil was joking about rings.”

■ Phil was already a good friend by the time we started dating, so everything just fell into place. We didn’t have to bother with all the getting-to-know-you stuff. Since we have similar lifestyles, we connected on so many levels: He’s a bass player and I’m a pianist, and we’d already spent a lot of time playing music together. When we finally started dating, it felt so comfortable that after only six months, Phil was joking about rings.

When I first met Phil, I was attracted to him—but dating someone else. Still, meeting Phil helped me realize there were better men out there, and I ended my relationship. For about a year, Phil and I spent time together as friends. But when I was just about ready to date again—and hoping that Phil would make a move—another guy asked me out.

That gave Phil the push he needed. He swooped in and asked me out—admitting he’d been wanting to for a year.

The first time we kissed, I told him I wanted to take things slowly and wouldn’t have sex before marriage. He said I should take as long as I needed—but I soon changed my mind!

After that, Phil and I became inseparable, and a year later, we got married. Looking back, I think it was good that Phil and I

took a while to start dating, because once we did, we were really “ready.” We needed only a year of romance to perfectly cement our relationship. ▷

Sarah, 35,
musician
Phil, 32,
musician



5 YEARS

"We each needed to reach a certain plateau in our careers before we could devote ourselves to a lifetime together."

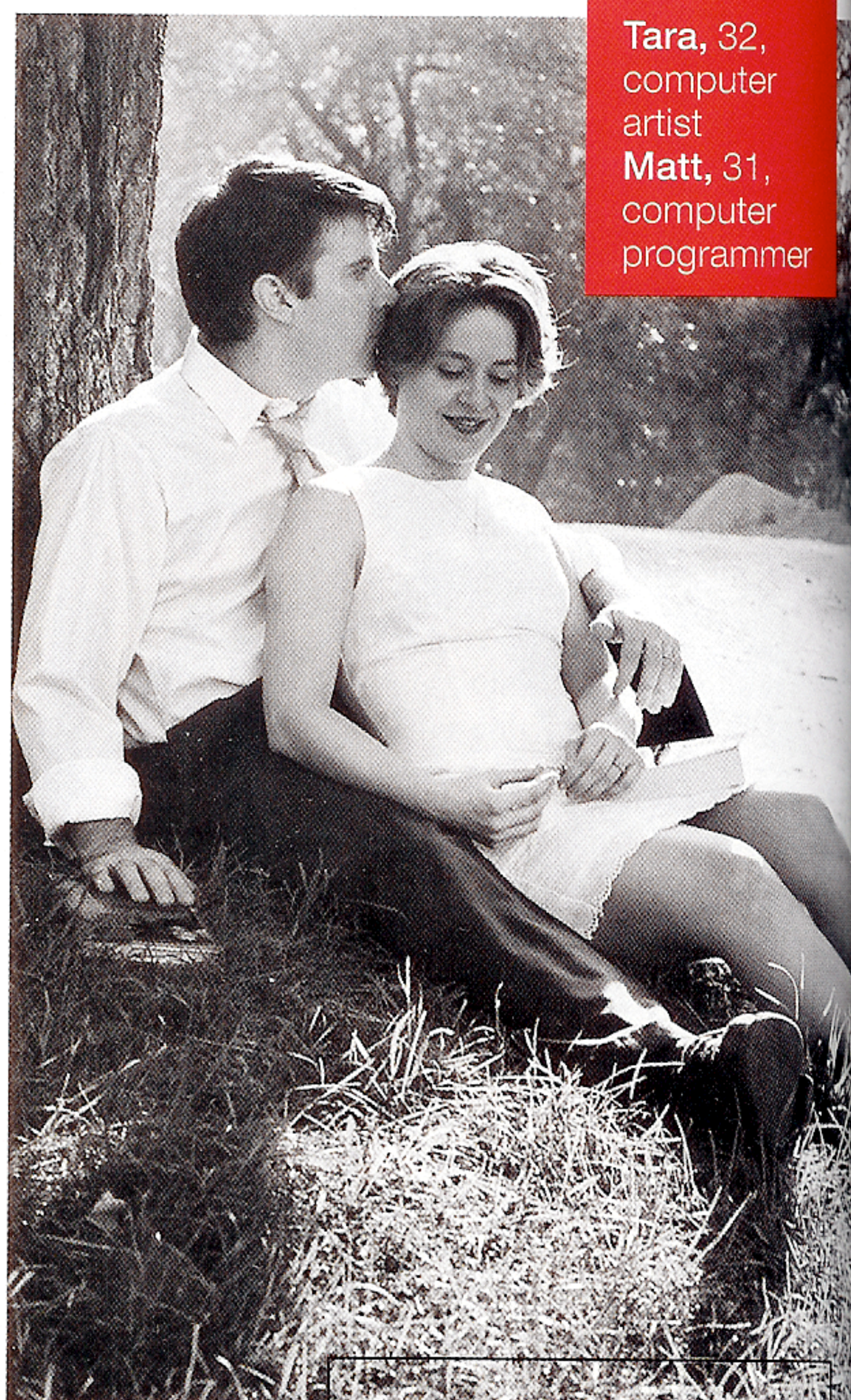
■ Waiting five years before getting married was necessary for Bobby and me. We're both very hardworking, ambitious, and committed to our jobs; we each needed to reach a certain plateau in our careers before we could devote ourselves to a lifetime together. Five years went by so fast. If we'd needed to, we could have waited 50—though it never felt like "waiting," and I never wondered *if* Bobby and I would get married. We were just extremely busy and very focused on our professional lives.

Alison, 31,
children's-
program
manager
Bobby, 30,
ad executive

Bobby and I met through a friend. Immediately, I thought Bobby was adorable, and we completely hit it off, but we lived in different states. Nevertheless, our connection was so strong that we started long-distance dating, traveling back and forth to see each other, spending as much time together as possible. After about six months, Bobby found a great job in New York, where I was living. So he moved—but only because it was a great opportunity for our relationship *and* for his career.

About two-and-a-half years later, I was accepted into a master's program at Princeton University, an hour south of New York. It was an amazing, though extremely intense, opportunity—a challenge I needed to accept to feel truly accomplished as an individual. Going back to having a long-distance relationship was difficult for the two of us, but the entire time I was in school, Bobby remained my calming force, my inner peace.

Toward the end of my second year at Princeton, Bobby bought a new apartment in New York. Though he didn't say it, I knew he was buying it for both of us. Our lives were starting to fall into place: His career was taking off, and I was only a few months away from receiving my master's. Shortly before I graduated, Bobby proposed, and after graduation, we got married. We're still working hard—but also living happily ever after.

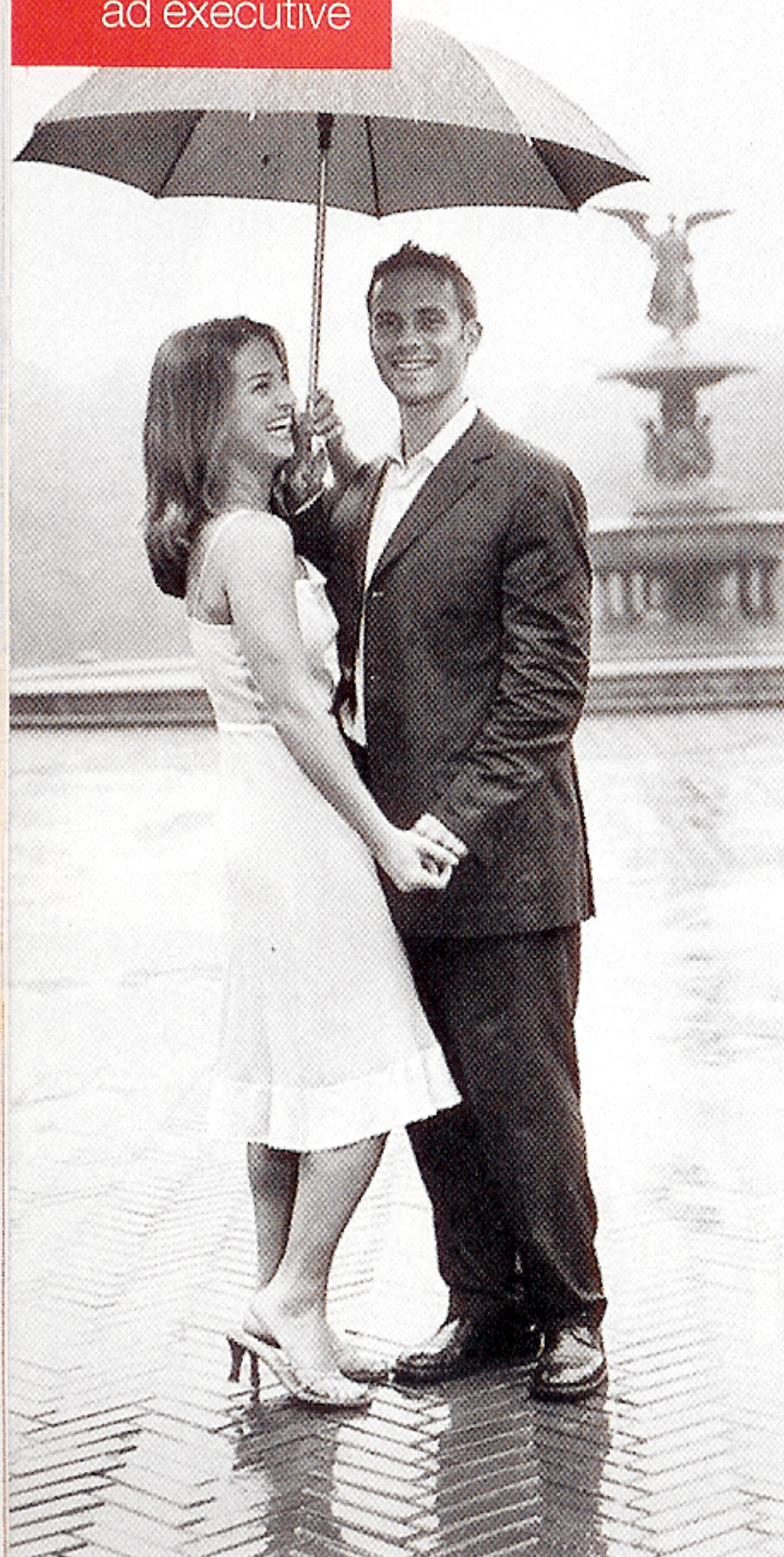


Tara, 32,
computer
artist
Matt, 31,
computer
programmer

9 YEARS

"We just didn't know what we had until we'd been with other people, emotionally and sexually."

■ Matt and I met when we were both living in the same college dorm. I couldn't resist his dark hair and blue eyes, so I asked him out—and we stayed together for more than two years. Then I found out he'd kissed another woman. At the same time, I'd become interested in another guy, >



HOW LONG SHOULD YOU WAIT TO GET MARRIED?

so I ended our exclusive relationship. We were young; I think we both needed the thrill of other people.

For six months, I dated this other guy and hardly saw Matt, which was hard for him. He still loved me, and to be honest, I preferred his company, too. But I was immature and confused about the meaning of love. Eventually, the guy I was dating moved away, and I moved to Italy to study. But I kept in touch with Matt. Through everything, he remained my rock.

After a few months, when I came back to the States, I began dating Matt again—and stayed at his place. Despite all we had been through, we were still each other's support system. Yet we weren't ready to give each other *everything*, so we continued to date other people. I know that sounds kind of strange, but somehow, our arrangement suited us. I think deep down, we both knew we loved only each other—and always would.

Within a few months, I received an opportunity to study at Cornell University, so I had to move and leave Matt behind again. He continued to date other people, but I hardly did. Eventually, we missed each other so much that Matt moved to be with me—this time for keeps. We were finally done sowing our wild oats. Now that we had experienced other people, really knew what love was, and knew we could rely on each other no matter what, we were ready to maintain a real commitment. We just didn't know what we had until we'd been with other people, emotionally and sexually. We finally knew—absolutely—there was nobody else we'd rather be with. And two-and-a-half years later, we had the perfect wedding.

FOREVER?



Soo, 31,
digital design
director
Nick, 31, actor

"Nick and I feel safe and happy just the way we are."

■ Nick and I feel like soul mates and have made a promise to be together forever. But unlike most couples, we don't consider marriage. We think it would spoil things. Marriage makes people complacent and gives them an excuse to take each other for granted, to neglect their relationship. Once people have a legal bond, they seem to stop working on their troubles. After all, why bother? They're already involved in a "done deal." Nick and I are constantly working at our relationship. We never want to reach that type of plateau.

Our level of commitment to each other is actually pretty

amazing when you consider how awkward our first meeting was. The first time I met Nick, he came across as extremely bold, especially when he asked, "So when are you going to let me seduce you?" I was shocked by his directness—but also a little intrigued.

When our paths crossed a few months later at a party he was throwing, I was a bit wary. But I happened to have an unusual book with me that Nick actually knew. I was impressed, and we wound up chatting the whole night—and having a great time together.

The following week, I tried calling Nick because I'd left the book at his apartment (by accident—I swear!), but he didn't return my calls. Eventually, he called back and convinced me that he'd been trying to reach me, but no one had answered. I was annoyed but agreed to pick the book up at his place. It was that third meeting when Nick really opened up. Once again, we ended up talking all night, and he told me how he was ready for a meaningful relationship. He wanted something substantial and real—and he implied he wanted it with me.

Ever since then, Nick and I have been a serious couple. Today, we've been living together for more than three years. Marriage may be the answer for other people, but Nick and I feel safe and happy just the way we are. □