

Love, Sweet Love: Six Phoenix Couples' Stories

Written by Written by Nichole Brophy, Melissa Larsen, Ryan Lorenzo and Christine Whitton

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As AFM pays homage to weddings this month, we mustn't forget that marriage is more magical than all the cake tiers and engagement rings in the world. Here, we chat with six local couples about how they met, their engagement stories and their happily ever afters.



Nan and C.A. Howlett Wedding Date: Dec. 6, 2003

Photographed by Cassandra Tomei

A Colorado proposal and wedding sealed the deal for Nan and C.A. Howlett, even though their first interaction was a little less than love at first sight.

"When I moved back to Phoenix from Paris in 2001, we were set up on a blind date for lunch," says Nan, a community volunteer and chair of the 2008 Heart Ball, in addition to numerous other Valley organizations. "It was probably the most inauspicious beginning of all time because the events of 9/11 had just taken place, so C.A. was very preoccupied." During their date, C.A., vice president of public affairs for U.S. Airways, maintained close communication with officials in Washington on one cell phone and Diamondback executives on another, due to the Diamondbacks successfully making it to the World Series. "So we basically didn't get a single solitary word in and yet it still worked," Nan says.

However, C.A. became much more vocal while proposing to Nan on a snowmobiling trip in Telluride, Colo. "All of a sudden, we got off the snowmobiles in the middle of nowhere and he got very philosophical and I thought, 'What is he talking about?'" Nan recalls. "And the next thing I knew he was down on one knee, practically up to his armpits in snow with a diamond ring. I could have fainted, honestly."

Though the pair maintain busy schedules, Nan says their ability to keep the spark alive rests in reserving time for one another. "We just always make the most of the time we have alone." —N.B.



Daniela and Alex Roher Wedding Date: May 10, 1975

Photographed by Cassandra Tomei

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Daniela Roher, a psychotherapist and couples counselor, and her husband, Alex, a research medical doctor for Alzheimer's Disease at Sun Health Research Institute, joke about their work—they both study the brain: Alex the hardware, Daniela the software.

The courtship of these two lovebirds began 36 years ago at a scientific conference in Italy, but it was not until attending England's prestigious Cambridge University that their love flourished. Two and a half years later, Alex asked for Daniela's hand in marriage.

Today, as one of the industry's leading experts, Daniela uses her knowledge on how to balance life, emotions and marriage to help guide couples. "I learned that when you're married for such a long time you have not been in one marriage, but in many marriages because life changes you and your partner," Daniela says. "I also learned that falling in love is very easy and beautiful, but [falling in love] doesn't last forever. It is the love in part that is difficult, but it is the love in part that keeps you together."

Daniela and Alex are celebrating their 34th wedding anniversary this month. Their secret to so many wonderful years together is simple: Keep the lines of communication open. —C.W.



Meredeth and Jim Moss Wedding Date: Oct. 18, 2003

Photographed by Jackie Mercandetti

For Meredith Moss, group director for the Arizona market of Tiffany & Co., and Jim Moss, owner and president of Hop Cassidy Pools, love was twice as nice the second time around. The couple was set up on a blind date by mutual friends in early 2001, soon after Jim had separated from his former wife. "I'd been single for nine years," Meredith says, while Jim notes, "I'd been single for nine weeks."

After that fateful first date ("I knew the night I met her, that if she felt the same way, it was going to be forever," Jim says), it wasn't too long before the couple said "I do" in front of hundreds of family members and friends at the Phoenix Desert Botanical Garden, following three fun-filled days of celebration. The festivities leading up to the wedding day included brunch at The Phoenician Resort and a rehearsal dinner at Cave Creek's Buffalo Chip Saloon & Steakhouse—a dichotomy that perfectly depicts this blissful pair. "When we were first dating, people would say we were 'leather and lace,'" Jim says, citing his penchant for blue jeans, cowboy boots and Harleys and his wife's love of five-star resorts and her career with one of the world's most high-end brands. However, even with their differences, the Mosses are one dynamic duo. "If anyone could have half the happiness we have, they'll have a great life," Jim says. —M.L.

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Kim and Lee Hillson Wedding Date: Jan. 22, 2000

Photographed by Cassandra Tomei

For some, a glass of wine and some chocolates do the trick. However, for Lee Hillson, executive chef of T. Cook's at the Royal Palms Resort and Spa, the art of wooing started with a cup of tea and a few slices of pizza. Lee and his wife, Kim's, love story began when they met more than 10 years ago at a charity culinary festival in Newport, R.I., where they resided at the time. "I was representing my hotel and she was representing her hotel," Lee says, noting that Kim was a concierge. After drinks with friends, the two ended up at Lee's house flipping through his brother's wedding photos over tea and 'za. Little did he know at the time, Lee would be the groom less than two years later and Kim, the woman who he describes as having the "most beautiful smile and eyes," would be his bride.

The couple became engaged when Kim least expected it: Upon flying to Kim's high school reunion in Arizona, Lee walked up to the front of the airplane and proposed to his beloved over the loudspeaker. Then, in January 2000, Lee and Kim officially became the Hillsons in an intimate Vegas wedding. After nearly a decade of marriage, Lee has learned that the key to a happy marriage is really quite simple: "Never forget why you were together in the first place." —M.L.



Tram Mai and Stephen Kraus Wedding Date: March 29, 2008

Photographed by Cassandra Tomei

Co-anchor for 12 News Today, Tram Mai has been a prominent Valley fixture since January 2003. Prior to relocating to Phoenix, Mai traveled to Chicago where she met future husband Stephen Kraus through a mutual friend. It was then that Kraus, a North Phoenix business owner, became her biggest fan—and it's safe to say she became his.

As for popping the question, Kraus knew his best work could only be done with the cameras rolling. "Stephen was the mastermind behind this elaborate plan," Mai says. "I thought I was taping an interview with the host of TLC's 'Perfect Proposals.' So, I read the intro, 'Here to talk to us is Nikki Boyer. Nikki?' Then, in walks Stephen. My immediate reaction was, 'What are you doing here?' I thought what bad timing for him to walk right in the middle of my interview. I had no idea he was about to propose until he asked for my hand. He told me he loved me, asked me to marry him, and the next thing I knew, all my co-workers came out cheering."

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Currently, the couple have two four-legged friends, Napa and Crema. As for children, they're in the plans, but first the couple wishes to travel. —C.W.



Duffy and Pat McMahon Wedding Date: June 9, 1984

Photographed by Jackie Mercandetti

At the age of 19, Duffy was at a Creedence Clearwater Revival concert when her friend spotted Pat McMahon, one of the stars of the local sketch comedy TV show, "Wallace and Ladmo." Duffy joked to her friend, "I'm going to marry him someday."

Many years later, the pair reunited when Duffy, who worked as an executive for a phone company at the time, ensured Pat's business phone was fixed. They had fun banter back and forth and, as a result, became phone pals. They finally met in person months later when Duffy hired him as a speaker for a company engagement. After the ceremony, he treated her to dinner and wine at Different Pointe of View. The next day, Duffy told her mom, "If I was ever to get married again, he would be the kind of man I would marry."

When it came time for the proposal, the two had been casually dating and were driving back to Arizona from San Diego. "Pat was explaining how much he liked me, but he said, 'I'm not ready to get married yet,'" Duffy says. "I looked over and said, 'Who said I was?'" By the end of the car ride, though, he had proposed while sitting in the passenger seat, and she accepted. They married a year and a half after their first date in a private ceremony at Duffy's parents' house. Next month marks their silver anniversary. As for big plans, Pat quips, "I've decided to grow more silver hairs."—R.L.