

DAILY NEWS

Jilted bride married her real true love

Ten years ago, Nicole Contos dreamed of her first dance in the arms of her husband, but ended up dancing alone in front of 350 high society wedding guests.

Hours after gutless creep Tasos Michael left her at the altar, Contos showed her moxie by taking to the Essex House dance floor solo as the band played "I Will Survive."

A decade on, she's proved the song was a great choice.

"I'm so happy, so incredibly happy," she said last week, days before what would have been her 10th anniversary. "I felt that I owed that to myself, to be strong, to say to him, 'How dare you? To hell with you!'"

"I could have spent the past 10 years weeping and going through therapy, or I could pull myself together and get on with my life. There was no choice.

"Now, I am so glad he didn't turn up."

Contos' misery hit the front pages of newspapers across the world - and Michael became New York's most-reviled man.

Her whirlwind romance with the London lawyer ended when his best man arrived alone at Manhattan's Holy Trinity Cathedral.

"He told me the wedding's not going to happen," remembered Contos, now 37. "It was surreal. I remember all these images flashing through my head, and around me people going crazy. My florist had the best man by the neck."

As she chose to go on with the \$75,000 reception, Michael left town. He was later found by the Daily News, sunning himself alone in Tahiti, the paradise isle the couple had planned to honeymoon on.

"I heard that and thought, 'You embarrassed me in the worst way possible, and then you took my honeymoon?'" Contos said. "It was so cowardly. I couldn't believe anybody could do that, especially to someone they were supposed to love."

Michael contacted Contos a few days later. "He said he regretted it," she said. "He said he was nervous, his feet had turned to jelly."

"He said he wanted me back. I told him to write a letter apologizing to every single guest and, of course, he never did. I haven't seen him since."

Instead, she moved on. Eight years ago, a friend set her up on a blind date with Dr. George Liakeas.

Two years later, she walked down Holy Trinity's aisle again. This time the groom was waiting.

The couple owns an upper East Side health spa and has two daughters, Caroline, 4, and Alexandra, 3.

"I see my daughters growing up to be very strong girls, and they get that from their mother," said Liakeas, 36. "I am immensely proud of how she handled herself then."

For Contos, Nov. 22 is a date she will barely notice.

"I don't think about it," she said. "All I know is Tasos did me the biggest favor by not showing up."

Michael could not be reached for comment last week.



Antonelli/News

Ten years later, Nicole Contos says she is happy that Tasos Michael abandoned her at the altar. Contos found true love and married Dr. George Liakeas, at left.