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SEX AND OUR CITY



Shira Miller (from left), Samantha Worthen, Abby Schonier-Marcuse and Stephanie Weaver raise a toast at Miller's Sandy Springs home.

ALISON CHURCH / Special

Best friends' escapades rival those of NYC quartet

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They've dated Mr. Bigs who wouldn't commit and hunky men with lousy technique.

In fact, some dating escapades are referred to simply by titles — "The Intimacy Contract" and "Is He Bisexual?"

They are Shira, Samantha, Stephanie and Abby — a real-life version of the "Sex and the City" characters who are about to hit the big screen in a much-anticipated reunion.

Friends for close to 20 years, the now 40-some-odd share a plethora of wacky, even bizarre, Atlanta dating stories.

They also share a sisterhood bond that has outlasted a string of lovers, jobs and, in some cases, marriages.

From Oscars-inspired birthday parties and white weddings to bad breakups, major career changes and ailing parents, they've stuck together through life's highs and lows.

When Samantha Worthen left a secure sales management job to pursue her dream of acting, her friends applauded her move even when the Emory grad took an evening job waiting tables. And they didn't drop her from their social scene. Instead, they moved quality girl time up to lunch meetings at the Sunflower Cafe.

And when Shira Miller's dad died, her friends cleaned her apartment and stocked her fridge with milk and sliced fruit.

"They even took the time to clean the sheets on my bed so that when I came home there would be clean sheets," said Miller, who owns a small PR agency.

"It's like we have this wonderful, warm envelope of trust around each other."

As Carrie, Miranda, Charlotte and Samantha slip into new chapters on the movie screen, these Atlanta gals grapple with their own, real-life script that will con-

► Please see **FRIENDS, E7**

Friends: Bond predates TV show



ALISON CHURCH / Special

Friends watch a "Sex and the City" episode before movie release.

ABBY'S "SEX AND THE CITY"-LIKE DATING ADVENTURES

A mix of Miranda with a shot of Samantha's characters, Abby Schonier-Marcuse has had her share of "SATC"-like moments.

She once dated a man who wanted her to sign a privacy contract before they became intimate. (She tore up the contract, and they went their separate ways.)

And then there was her new boyfriend whom she introduced to her gay male friends. Before a group outing, she'd told him it was important that he be "comfortable" around them. Once at the club, though, she eats those words.

"I realize it's just him dancing with my gay friends. And I am thinking, 'Uh-oh, maybe he is too comfortable.'"

But the one scene of her life that's almost right out of the TV show took place one stormy night when a tree collapsed on her house. With the lights flickering, she checked her computer.

"There was this e-mail that said, 'It's not you. It's me. You deserve better.'"

Schonier-Marcuse calls it the "Post-it. E-mail. What's the difference?" in reference to the episode in which Berger breaks it off with Carrie with a Post-it note.

"I was crying and it was sad, I remember thinking how it showed how men could be cowards, but we could also find the humor in it, too."

tinue long after the film curtain closes.

Two are recently married. And Miller, 41 and single, is considering adopting a baby.

Real-life reflection

Always comfortable sharing intimate details of their personal lives, the "Sex and the City" friends often sparked lively, even unexpected real-life conversations.

Like the episode about finding a white hair in private places.

"We had some fun with that one," Miller said. "That's something you don't normally talk about. But it's something women can relate to."

They saw themselves and their relationship reflected on the screen — vibrant, attractive women in their 30s and 40s who were single but definitely not alone.

When Miller turned 27, her pals orchestrated a "Trains, Planes and Automobiles" birthday bash. They insisted she take a seat at the airport's Concourse B/Gate 26.

Once at the gate, they cheered, "Departing 26! Departing 26!" and then snapped another photo at Gate 27.

For Samantha Worthen's more recent big 4-0 birthday, the women surprised her with an Academy Awards-like ceremony, rolling out a red carpet and setting up fake paparazzi. They handed her a gold Oscar-like statue called the "Worthy Award." It was engraved to "the Most Fabulous and Extraordinary Samantha Worthen."

"When I got up to talk, I just cried," Worthen said. While they delight in celebrating with flair, the friends are also at each other's side in times of crisis.

About three years ago, Worthen was struck by a sport utility vehicle while walking to the gym.

Stephanie Weaver picked her up from the hospital and stayed by her side for days.

"Whatever I needed done, it was just done, I didn't even need to ask," Worthen said.

After the accident, she

struggled with post-traumatic stress disorder.

"There would be times when I would just start crying at the smallest trigger, and it was safe to be with them and totally let my guard down," said Worthen, who has since recovered.

Sometimes, just as the TV characters, the Atlanta four-some must adjust when loves comes around unexpectedly.

'Hopeless romantic'

About a year ago, Abby Schonier-Marcuse joined Yahoo Singles. A personal trainer and yoga instructor, she wasn't seeking marriage, only companionship for the occasional dinner.

Michel Marcuse was a divorced engineer with three kids. Not her type, but she

kissed him anyway at a Cars performance at Chastain Park.

"And it was one of those knock-you-off-your-feet kind of kisses," she said. The two got married last June.

Miller sees major life changes ahead whether a man enters the picture or not. She wants kids someday and is considering adopting a baby solo. Twice divorced, and a self-proclaimed "hopeless romantic," she believes she'll one day meet the One.

"The right guy will know that no relationship is an island and that every woman still needs her girlfriends," she said.

"It really makes life more complete."

But no matter what, she'll have her girlfriends.