



Photographs by Chris Maynard for The New York Times

VOWS

Catherine Ellis and Lawrence Savell

By LOIS SMITH BRADY

EVEN during the most mundane moments, Catherine Jane Ellis fills her life with romance. Friends describe her as ethereal and independent, the sort of person who eats candlelight dinners with Champagne and fine china, even if it's mid-week and she's alone with her Chinese takeout.

As a single woman, she often bought herself flowers and on Saturday nights sat alone in elegant restaurants without embarrassment. "Being alone and lonely are two completely different things," said Ms. Ellis, 39, who manages travel services at Bear, Stearns & Company, the New York investment bank.

Her blue and yellow duplex apartment, which she describes as "a Martha's Vineyard cottage in Manhattan," is filled with lavender-scented candles and couches as soft and therapeutic as mud baths. She's a homebody who loves flannel pajamas, but also rides motorcycles and parasails.

"She manages a large department for Bear Stearns, and yet she's very real," Jack Mizrahi, a friend, said. "Cathy has a little bit of hippie in her. She'll pull out a rock album and say, 'Check out this riff.'"

On Valentine's Day weekend 1997, as she flew home from a ski trip in Colorado, Ms. Ellis turned to the personal ads in New York magazine. There was one that she read over and over. "I was way up in the clouds, and I felt very dreamy, and it seemed like the ad was written for me," she said.

It was placed by Lawrence Edward Savell,



TARRYTOWN, N.Y., FEB. 14 Above, the Castle at Tarrytown, a fairy tale setting for a wedding. Top, the first day of happily ever after.

who described himself in the ad as an athletic, creative, humorous man who had just made a "40th birthday resolution to end pointless (albeit pleasant) dating to concentrate on the search for a life mate."

When Ms. Ellis returned home, she lighted lots of aromatherapy candles and composed a letter of reply in the style of a fairy tale. It began, "Once upon a time, there lived in Manhattan a sweet and sexy (sometimes sassy) lady who was young in heart, spirit and body, who loved life and lived it fully." The letter ended: "She realized that if this wonderful man had the courage to place the ad just to meet her, then she had the courage to answer him. He called her and they lived happily ever after. Can't wait to meet you!"

In many ways, Mr. Savell's life style was the opposite of hers. A counsel at the New

York law firm of Chadbourne & Parke, Mr. Savell lived in a dark and drab apartment he described as "early fraternity house."

"I had stickball bats, a small pool table, computers all over the place," he said. "On one side of my bed was a treadmill, on the other was an exercise bike. My clothes decorated the bike like Christmas ornaments."

When he received Ms. Ellis's letter (hers was the 121st response out of 160), he liked it so much that he called her right away. Over the days that followed, they had long telephone conversations. "My experience had always been, if you have a nice conversation before you meet, that's the kiss of death," said Mr. Savell, who had already met several women who answered the ad. "So I said to Catherine, 'I think this is going to be a disaster.'" Instead, by the end of their first date Ms. Ellis said she was silently trying on his last name. And after that night he stopped opening responses to his ad.

Last August, in a London hotel, he proposed as they sat with hot chocolate and cookies in front of a fireplace in matching striped flannel pajamas.

They were married on Valentine's Day at the Castle at Tarrytown in Tarrytown, N.Y., in a room decorated with carved stone balconies and murals of knights on white horses.

"In most fairy tales, it's the man who finds the woman," the bridegroom said. "This was a concerted mutual effort. Our fairy tale was two people, both on white horses, who deliberately sought one another."