

*Each year has its tragic disasters, its jubilant celebrations, its senseless wars and its inimitable personalities. But presidential elections come every four years, Olympiads every two, and memory can start to blur. What distinguishes one year from another is the small moment, the gesture. A bridegroom kisses his bride's gloved hand. A young widow reaches to her husband in heaven. World leaders put their heads together, attempting reconciliation. A grateful victor entwines his fingers with his wife's and daughter's as he savors a second win. These fleeting seconds are our souvenirs.*

THE YEAR IN PICTURES



**LIFE**

**LOVE BLOOMS (SOMETIMES)**

Kennedys: AH-H-H!  
Royals: OOPS!  
Michael Jackson: HUH?

**WOMEN SOAR, KIDS RULE**

First Wives, Soccer Moms, Kerri, Shannon, Rosie, Liv

**WEATHER REIGNS**

Hurricanes! Fires! Blizzards! Floods!

**MARS ROCKS**

Aliens invade.

**AMERICA MOURNS**

The victims of TWA 800 and ValuJet 592

**1996**  
**WHAT A YEAR!**

**...AND FRIENDS DEPART**

George Burns, Gene Kelly, Ella Fitzgerald, Erma Bombeck, Tupac Shakur



**CRY THEM AN OCEAN**

Julie Stuart (near right, with Claire Phythian and Heidi Snow) expected to be clutching a bridal bouquet next July. Instead, she will be marking the first anniversary of her fiancé's death in the explosion of TWA Flight 800, en route to Paris. She was meant to be wearing a diamond. Instead, the ring, which was recovered from the ocean floor, remains in FBI custody.

It was to have been an eventful week in the city of love: Phythian's boyfriend was also heading to France, and Snow's had proposed from an airport phone moments before boarding. All three women (photographed for LIFE by Harry Benson, near the Long Island, N.Y., crash site) were to meet their loves in Paris; they never went. Suddenly, they were planning funerals. Half a year later, investigators are still seeking the cause of the disaster that ended the lives of Andy Krukar, Dan Gabor, Michel Breistroff and 227 others.



**LIFE**

JANUARY 1997

**AMERICA MOURNS**

The victims of TWA 800 and ValuJet 592