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FINDING THAT SPECIAL SOMEONE
A look into the college relationship and the effects of social media

BY KELLY SCHIRO  DESIGN SARAH NEIGHBOR  PHOTO RILEY EVELETH
Jess Engelking, a second year veterinary student, was asked by her boyfriend Dan Kassen, a senior in mechanical engineering, to go to their favorite park, Ada Hayden, after a dinner date last September.

While they were at the park, Jess suggested they go up the hill to their favorite bench. When they approached, Jess noticed a paper bag sitting on the bench. Thinking it was just trash, she was surprised when Dan went to look in the bag.

Not knowing where the bag came from, Jess said, “What if we’re walking into someone’s proposal?”

Dan then sat Jess down and she began to realize what was going on—it was her proposal. Dan pulled out picture frames with all of the significant places in their relationship.

“Where we first met, Aug. 17, 2010” with a picture of the dorm where they both lived.

“Where I asked you to be my girlfriend, September 16, 2012.”

The last one was a picture of the bench where they were sitting on and it said "Where I ask you to marry me, September 6, 2013."

Nobody actually knows when or where they will meet their future wife or husband. However, the Huffington Post reported on a study done by Facebook that showed 28 percent of married couples on Facebook met their spouses in college.

The way people view couples getting married right out of college has changed in the past 30 or so years, as has the way couples communicate in college.

Too Young?

Professor Dr. Jennifer Margarett from the Department of Human Development and Family Studies says people are now waiting a couple of years to get married if they met in college. Margarett says this is “because they are pursuing education and women in particular have more options now compared to previous generations.”

Mark and Deb met in the fall of 1979 at Iowa State, fell in love and got married when Deb graduated two years later. They both had jobs doing concessions but they met at a co-workers’ party.

After work one night, Deb and her roommate were invited to go but her roommate didn’t want to go. A short time later her roommate told her that a guy, Mark, had called and asked if they wanted to go to the party. Her roommate was curious as to why a guy they didn’t know invited them to a party so she begged Deb to go.

While they met at the party, Mark and Deb got to know each other through work. Mark says, “I was attracted to the qualities that she possesses—intelligence, humor, kindness and thoughtfulness.”

Mark, a 1978 ISU graduate of agricultural engineering, had no idea he would meet his future wife in college. He said, “At that time you pretty much left it up to fate, so when it happened, it happened. But I have been thankful for going to work at the Center ever since!”

Deb, a 1980 ISU graduate of industrial administration (today’s equivalent of an accounting degree), recalls that about half of her friends married people they met in college.

“Getting married shortly after college was not unusual,” she says. Deb couldn’t even guess the amount of weddings she and Mark attended over the two years after college.

When asked how society responds to people getting married out of college today, Deb said, “I think it has changed a lot.” People didn’t live together back then and it was normal to get married right out of college. Now she’s just glad her daughters don’t seem to be in a hurry to get married.

Margaret’s analysis of the research suggests that some people find spouses during college but the overall average age of marriage has been increasing. However, she still recognizes that a good number of young adults are finding long-term romantic partners in college.

According to a Huffington Post article, the average age of marriage for Americans has reached a historic high with the average of women at 27 and the average of men at 29. This is a major jump from 1990 when the average age was 23 for women and 26 for men.

While people haven’t outwardly questioned Dan and Jess’s young age, Dan has gotten the impression that their friends might be thinking he and Jess are too young to get married. However, Dan thinks that most people understand that he and Jess are ready to get married.

Dan proposed to his girlfriend Jess Engelking this past September. Despite only dating for about a year, they have known each other for over three years. Dan told Jess that he knew from the very first date that they were going to work.

They met when Dan moved into Harwood House, located in Old Richardson Court area, as a freshman. Harwood is a well known house among honors students.

It is a tight-knit community and alumni often keep in contact with each other.

Erik Sandal, senior in management information systems, has been researching the history of Harwood house, including the residents who live there. Sandal says in the last 20 years there have been seven couples who lived in Harwood and got married and three that are engaged. Dan and Jess are one of the three couples engaged.

Jess was a sophomore when she met Dan. After the first week when she and her roommate met all of the freshman, her roommate asked which one she liked best. Jess said, “Oh, Dan, he seems like a super great guy.”

Dan hoped he would find his future wife in college. His brother found a longtime girlfriend within the first three weeks of college and he hoped he would do the same. Dan secretly hoped it would be someone from Harwood. He said, “And the irony was that my future wife lived above me my freshman year and I didn’t realize it until I was out of Harwood.”

Jess, a second year veterinary student, had hoped she would meet her future husband in college as well. To her it seemed harder to meet someone outside of college. Despite still being in school, Jess doesn’t think she has gotten the feeling that she’s too young for marriage, even from people her age.

Both couples have their special places on campus. For Mark and Deb the ISU Center is special because “we had a lot of good times while we worked there,” according to Mark. Another special place for them is the Agronomy Building, although it has changed since Mark and Deb went to ISU. The old Agronomy courtyard was the location that Mark proposed to Deb.

For Dan and Jess one of the benches in front of Catt Hall is special because it’s where they had their first kiss. Ada Hayden park is also a special place for them because they like to take walks there and it’s also where Dan proposed to Jess.
Social Media in Relationships

With all of the various social media applications—Facebook, Twitter, Skype—couples today can be in contact with each other at any point of time in the day. There are people who think social media affects the relationship negatively and people who think the opposite.

Communication is a big part of a relationship. Jennifer Morey, a professor in psychology at West Virginia University, conducted a study of undergraduates to see how their use of communication affected their relationship. Morey found “electronic communication channels (phone and texting) were related to positive relationship qualities.”

In a survey of Iowa State students, 49 percent of the participants said they talked in person with their significant other. In order of popularity this was followed by phone, social media, and video chat.

Overwhelmingly, 98 percent of the participants said they preferred face-to-face communication. Nobody preferred social media over in-person, on the phone, or video chat.

The survey revealed 56 percent believed that using social media impacts relationships positively. One student says, “I think it has the ability to [impact relationships positively]. For instance, it is another outlet for me to get ahold of my significant other (in cases of emergency) when his phone is dead. However, I think it also has the ability to be detrimental to a relationship because it makes it easier to not talk face-to-face, which I think is an important part of a relationship.”

Fifty-four percent of the participants that took the survey indicated that they wanted to find a future spouse in college, while 27 percent said they had already found their partner.

Mark and Deb didn’t have access to the technology available today and mostly communicated through landline telephones and meeting in person. They would communicate face-to-face at work. Deb said they would call each other, but not very much.

Mark says, “I think today’s ease of communication affects relationships too much.” He thinks there’s a lack of face-to-face conversations, which he believes is how you really get to know someone. While Mark thinks today’s technology hinders relationships, Deb thinks it’s easier for couples to get in contact.

Dan and Jess had a different situation than Mark and Deb. Dan and Jess got to know each other pretty well because they got to see each other in all situations—hanging out, studying with friends, house dinners, and just living in the same dorm house.

Now that Dan and Jess have moved out of Harwood they have had their fair share of being apart. It was hard on their relationship when Jess studied abroad during the summer.

Dan says, “I think it’s really important that we talk regularly.” Last summer they talked on the phone everyday or every other day. For four weeks during last summer, Jess was in Italy and they had minimal communication, only the occasional Facebook message. He said, “it was really hard on both of us and just felt very disconnected. Writing isn’t nearly as good as actually talking to one another.”

Without today’s technology Dan doesn’t think it would affect their relationship too much, it would just make it slightly less convenient. If Dan didn’t have access to technology like Facebook, he said he would feel less connected to Jess, “but I don’t think our relationship would change too much.”

“The irony was that my future wife lived above me my freshman year, and I didn’t realize it until I was out of Harwood.”

—Dan Kassen

Do you think using social media positively impacts your relationship?

- Yes 55.8%
- No 46.5%

Which method of communication do you use the most?

- In person 49.2%
- On the phone 35.2%
- Social media 10.2%
- Video chat 5%