

Twenty-five years ago,

I was sitting on the steps of Harkness when sophomore Nicole Nolan skipped by with friends. My eyes followed her across Harkness Green as she threw her head back in repeated laughter, reconnecting with friends after the summer break. Unbeknownst to me at the time, Nicole would become my student adviser. Our first conversation occurred the next day, when I objected to her insinuation that men didn't know how to operate washing machines. Three weeks later, we would begin our two-and-a-half-year romantic odyssey.

by Crai Bower '84

Last spring, 22 years after our final break-up, we shared lunch in Central Park to reminisce and consider the nature of college romance.

Finding Nicole 25 years after meeting was as easy as searching the Connecticut College Alumni Online Community. A simple, e-mailed "hello!" led to swapped stories of raising boys, current professions and a lunch rendezvous in Manhattan. Lunch in Central Park on an 80-degree day in April could have lasted for hours. Recollections of friends intertwined with memories of young, insouciant love, both the joyful and the painful. We departed knowing that we would not be the people we are now if it hadn't been for our 30-month relationship in the early 1980s.

If college offers the template for intense romance, the Connecticut College campus provides an impressionist's palette. Slip into the arboretum, and you disappear amid "A Midsummer's Night Dream." Stroll along Harkness Beach, and the spirit of Venus accompanies you as the waves lap at your feet. Need a special date? In just over two hours you are dining at Da Silvano or strolling beside the Charles River in Boston. Even the vista of the last rays of sun on Long Island Sound, as you return from Harris on a Sunday's eve, is accompanied by the sound of violins coming from the practice rooms in Cummings.

Nicole and I arranged schedules, dorms and social calendars around each other. We would collect one another from class; she even walked down the hill to Dayton Arena to meet me after hockey practice, ignoring the howling wind off the Thames. I never missed a Conn Chords concert; she knew every word of every CoCoBeaux tune. She learned to skate; I studied German. Campus life afforded the independence to cast our dependence.

The carefree nature of college encouraged us to ignore our obvious differences. Our campus challenges involved demanding dance schedules and carving time for teammates. We never faced accounting difficulties or reconciled my desire to travel west with her determination to return to New York. As Nicole's senior year progressed, however, it became obvious that the world was charting separate orbits for each of us.

Not so for many others who first meet upon the steps of Windham, at Cro or in a Sophocles seminar. According to alumni information from 1975 through 1995, more than 10 percent of Connecticut College students marry a fellow Camel. (Perhaps Aphrodite spiked the drinking supply from 1984 to 1988, as 74 people from the Class of '88 married other Camels, the most for any class.) Not every partnership is the result of meetings in the dining hall, however.

Occasionally, couples connect elsewhere, discovering a coincidental New London affinity. Studying the Connecticut College Online Community confirms assumptions ("of course they married; they were *already* married!") and reveals surprises ("those two must have met after Conn!")

I recall one teammate in 1980 who fell so deeply in love with another student that nothing, not even the rumor of her hometown engagement, failed to dissuade him. The two married shortly after graduation. Today they are thinking about college again, for their teenage child. One can't help but wonder what will be said when their daughter first calls home to confess that she has fallen in love with a classmate. If this nascent relationship fails to last, however, perhaps the couple will rediscover friendship two decades hence, via a simple, e-mailed "hello!" ●

Bower lives and writes in Seattle. Nicole Nolan Koester '83 lives and works in New York City. The two are pictured here in Key Largo, Fla., on spring break 1982.

Memories of a CC romance

The One that Got Away