We asked alumni couples to tell us what sparked their romances. Read what they had to say.
The Rumble Seat of a ’34 Ford

George Robinson C’60, ’61 (HAS), says his Hartford romance began in the rumble seat of a ’34 Ford, but not in the way you may think.

Robinson was seriously injured in his senior year of high school when said Ford rolled over on a sharp curve. He spent the last month of high school in the hospital.

While recovering, he would go down to the nurse’s station to chat in the evenings. There he met Mrs. Palmer, a nurse, who introduced him to her daughter, Gretchen C’60, ’61 (HAS), a high school sophomore. There were no initial sparks, but a year later, after seeing Gretchen at a sock hop, George asked her out to a movie. Since Mrs. Palmer thought George was “a nice young man,” Gretchen agreed to the date, but a relationship didn’t develop.

They both enrolled at the Hartford Art School (then at the Wadsworth Atheneum) in the fall of 1956. Initially, they told their classmates they were friends, not a couple, but eventually they ironed things out and began dating seriously. Gretchen proposed, and they were married on Thanksgiving evening in 1958.

Now married for 52 years, they have lived near St. Paul, Minn., since 1969, when George began teaching printmaking at Bethel University. Since retiring in 2000, he has begun painting in oil, acrylic, and mixed media. Gretchen became an accomplished potter. “We both continue to work in our respective studios,” says George, “and exhibit our work on a regular basis.” The Robinsons have two children and four grandsons. There’s no word on whether they own a Ford.

A NY Giants’ Football Game

Although Mary Cirmo Shuldman ’81 (HAS) and Bennett Shuldman ’79 (Barney) met on a blind date, they owe being a couple to Monday Night Football.

Mary and Bennett first saw each other the second night after moving in at an RA meeting in Complex C in September 1977. She was a freshman living in Malcolm X and he was an RA in Dubois.

“I immediately noticed how handsome Bennett was. At the same time, one of Bennett’s co-RAs noticed how beautiful one of my roommates was,” recalls Mary. All this “noticing” led to Mary’s and the co-RA’s putting together
a double blind date. “The date was fun, but not very successful,” she admits.

The following Monday night, Bennett was making his RA rounds in the dorms and stopped in his tracks outside Mary’s doorway. “I didn’t notice him standing there because I was busy screaming at the TV and the N.Y. Giants’ defense for not blitzing on Joe Theismann,” Mary says. Bennett thought it was “pretty cool” that she knew so much about football, and “as they say, the rest is history.”

While on campus, both Mary and Bennett were Hawk cheerleaders, members of the Student Government Association, and Orientation advisors. They married in 1983.

Today, Mary is a sales associate at The Whitney Shop in New Canaan, Conn., and Bennett is a partner in Deloitte & Touche LLP in Stamford, Conn. The Shuldmans have two grown sons and live in Ridgefield, Conn. And they’re still Giants fans.

Love in The Pub

Although Tracy Spagna MacLeod ’84 (HAS) and Malcolm (“Mal”) MacLeod III ’82 (Barney) actually met during her first week on campus, Tracy was so absorbed in a personal crisis that their first meeting didn’t really register. Mal was visiting another student, Mary Walsh White ’82, in Crandall when Tracy burst in.

“I had run into her room to tell her how one student I had just started dating wanted me to meet his parents while my ex had showed up out of the blue and wanted to work things out. I was talking very fast and so concerned about my issue, I hadn’t realized Mary had a guest, Mal. After she made the introductions and helped me with my situation, I said it was nice to meet him and ran out.”

At the beginning of spring semester, Tracy was in the basement of Gengras Student Union buying books and ran into a handsome guy who said he loved her new haircut. Puzzled because she didn’t recognize him, she asked his name. “Malcolm MacLeod,” was the reply. He said he’d like to talk again and gave her his work schedule at The Pub, also in Gengras, where he was a bartender/bouncer.

At the time, Tracy was dating someone else and didn’t pursue it. But a month later she visited The Pub and soon found herself talking with him for hours during several shifts at the on-campus club. They started dating, and Tracy was hired as a waitress/security person, often working the same shifts as Mal. They married in 1986. Their maid of honor was Lisa Fonda Barden ’83 who, with her husband, Marc Barden ’83, also worked at The Pub.

Mal is the director of insurance for OneShield, a company that Web-enables insurance companies, and Mary is the technology operations specialist for the Town of Franklin, Mass. The couple has two children and lives in Franklin.

More Sweethearts!
Read the stories of Esther Lewin Griffin ’79 and Brian Griffin ’80; Jennifer Wagner Doctor ’86 and Barry Doctor ’86; Shel Frolich Tcherne ’99 and David Tcherne ’99; Erin Meyer Zeller ’01, M’02, and Michael Zeller ’02; Marissa Torento ’05 and Russell Burkiewicz ’07; and Joshua Hylger ’08 and Krystal Wells ’08 at www.hartford.edu/sweethearts.
A Risky Business

Colleen Epple Pine ’88 (Barney, with a paralegal certificate) and Marc Pine ’88 (Barney) owe it all to Tom Cruise.

It was a Sunday in the fall of 1986. Colleen was stuck in her room with a case of bronchitis. Her roommates, Rosemary (Compagnone) Bellerive and Amy (Barnett) Kauffman, were determined to cheer her up. They trekked out to a video store, returning with a rented VCR and a Tom Cruise favorite, *Risky Business*.

Rosemary and Amy set to work fidgeting with wires and cables, but nothing but white fuzz appeared on the TV screen. “I heard a few profanities from behind the TV, and then Rosemary went into the bedroom to make a phone call. In an instant, our next-door neighbor appeared. I glanced over at him briefly and felt a flush come across my cheeks. He was standing just a few feet from me—surely he could smell the Vicks VapoRub.” Colleen didn’t know whether to say hello or just slip under her grandma’s afghan and pretend to be asleep.

Marc seemed oblivious to her brown fleece robe, jumbo-jet slippers, and the decorative circle of used tissues at her feet. He just stood looking at her, speechless. Finally, he was interrupted by Amy’s call to the task, and within seconds, a black screen appeared, followed by the rolling intro of *Risky Business*.

Just as Colleen was hoping that the neighbor would leave before she had to blow her nose, he spoke. “Hi. I’m Marc Pine. Feel better . . . and when you do, I’d like to take you out to dinner.”

Marc and Colleen were married in 1989 with many Hartford friends there to celebrate. Marc is a senior claims administrator at Great American Insurance Co., and Colleen works for the law firm of Carroll, McNulty and Kull LLC as a paralegal. They have two daughters and live in Basking Ridge, N.J.

We Could Talk for Hours

When Shawntell Zeigler Layaw ’95, M’97, and Jeff Layaw ’95, M’97 (both Barney), met in a class during their junior year, Shawntell was engaged to a nonstudent. After her engagement ended, she and Jeff started dating in May of their senior year. Then Shawntell broke things off when she went home for the summer, thinking it was too soon after her engagement to start another relationship.

“When I returned for graduate school [in fall 1995], we began hanging out again and rekindled our friendship. What was different about Jeff than any guy I’d met was that we could talk for hours about anything. We started dating again in May 1996.”

After earning their MBAs in 1997, they moved to Boston, became engaged in 1998, and married on Sept. 18, 1999.

“We took our engagement photos on campus because no other place would do,” says Shawntell. “The photo we chose to frame for people to sign at the wedding is of the two of us standing on the sidewalk that leads to the doors of the Barney School. A smaller version of the photo sits on our kitchen windowsill to this day.” That photo appears at left.
When people first meet Shawntell and Jeff, they are surprised to learn that they are college sweethearts because Jeff is six years older. He began going to college part time while working and later stopped working to finish full time. Shawntell says, “I tease him sometimes and say that he did it on purpose because he was waiting for me to finish high school so I could meet him at college!”

The Layaws now live in Windsor, Conn., with their three children. Jeff works for CDI-Aerospace in Windsor Locks as an earned value (EV) analyst lead, and Shawntell is a financial analyst at XL Insurance in Hartford.

A Trip to the Math Lab

Jeannette Haug Smith ’01 (A&S) and Nicholas Smith ’00 (Barney) met about a month into her freshman year, after a professor referred her to the Math Lab for tutoring because she was struggling in first-year math.

“So, I show up at the lab and see the tutor sitting at the desk with his feet up reading the newspaper,” says Jeannette. “Great, I thought. ‘This is going to go really well.’ I introduced myself and pulled out my homework and the calculator that I had yet to master. After a few sessions with the tutor, I gave up. He and I just didn’t click. Eventually the semester and the math class ended, and I pretty much forgot about the math tutor.”

That is, until the following fall, when Jeannette ran into Nick at a campus party and they spent hours talking. He told her that he had thought she was whiny when he was tutoring her, and she laughed and agreed it was true. They learned that they had a lot in common, including friends, and were together constantly after that.

On May 5, 2000, shortly before his graduation, Nick threw a surprise 21st birthday party for Jeannette in the Village Quads. After opening gifts from friends, she realized that Nick was down on one knee and proposing to her—after he recovered her ring, which he had dropped under a chair.

The couple married in 2001 in West Hartford with many University friends in attendance. Jeannette has since earned a nursing degree and stays home with their children in Wenonah, N.J., not far from Philadelphia, Pa. After graduating with an actuarial science degree, Nick joined CIGNA and is still employed there.

A Musical Connection

Janet Nelson McKinney ’03 and Ryan-Allen McKinney ’03 (both Hartt) met in Professor Saunders’s guitar and recorder class in the early weeks of their first year. They were both music education majors with vocal emphasis and found that they had several classes together. Ryan kept asking Janet to do things around campus. She accepted but always brought her suitemates along.

Ryan proposed in their junior year at the Sigma Nu White Rose formal. “It was a running joke that Ryan would not refer to me as his girlfriend—just to push my buttons,” explains Janet. “The night of the formal, he ‘officially’ asked me [to be his girlfriend]. Later that evening he took me outside, underneath a trellis by the water, and asked me to marry him. Now he says we were only together for a couple of hours before we got engaged.”

Since they couldn’t invite all their friends to the wedding, Ryan and Janet held a mock wedding ceremony on campus during Spring Fling their senior year while Vanilla Ice was performing. “Everyone in the wedding party wore ridiculous outfits, we said silly vows, and everyone toasted at the end,” says Janet. The real ceremony was July 19, 2003.

Ryan pursued a master’s in higher education college administration and is now the associate director of campus activities at Catholic University of America. Janet earned dual master’s degrees in musicology and library science and is a music archivist at the Library of Congress. They live in Maryland with their son.

Instant Messaging until Dawn

Caitlin Bailey O’Neill ’07 (A&S) and Chris O’Neill ’05, M’07 (CETA), played Cupid for her sister, Erin Bailey Roina ’05, M’06 (ENHP), and his roommate, Jon Roina ’05 (Barney), within weeks of finding each other.

Caitlin transferred to the University in the middle of her first year. Her older sister, Erin, a physical therapy major, was already here. Just a week into her first semester, Caitlin wandered into The Informer’s office and asked for a job.

“There was an opening for a layout editor,” says Caitlin. “That fateful offer would eventually see me pick a journalism major, work my way up to editor-in-chief of the paper, meet an advisor who would land me my current job, and find me a husband. And a brother-in-law.”

Informer managing editor Megan Close ’05 took the new girl under her wing. Telling Caitlin she needed to meet people, she invited her to a party hosted by two of four male roommates. The third was off shredding powder at his parents’ ski house, and the fourth was a quiet onlooker.

After the party Caitlin went back to her room in E Complex. “I brushed my teeth and climbed into bed just as an instant message alert dinged on my computer. ‘Hey, it’s Chris! Wake up!’ It was the shy observer from the party. Caitlin sat at her computer until the sun came up, learning about Chris O’Neill, the quiet architecture major.

Just a few weeks later, the two learned that Chris’s roommate, elusive snowboarder Jon, had a crush on Caitlin’s sister. The two couples had their first official dates in February 2005.

“Chris and I said our vows on April 24, 2010,” says Caitlin. “My sister was my maid of honor and Jon was our best man. We returned the favor on Sept. 25, 2010, standing beside Erin and Jon as they said, ‘I do.’

Caitlin and Chris live in Newington, Conn. Chris is now a project manager with Quisenberry Arcari Architects, LLC. Caitlin is the communications coordinator for the Connecticut Society of Certified Public Accountants. Erin and Jon live in Maine, where she is a physical therapist and he is a financial analyst.