HARTFORD SWEETHEARTS

So many alumni couples wanted to tell us their sweetheart stories that we couldn't fit them all into the winter issue. Here are six more couples and their stories.
We’re Not a Couple, Just Friends

Esther Lewin Griffin ’79 (A&S) and Brian Griffin ’80 (CETA) met in Professor Tom Grant's freshman English composition class in September 1975.

“Grant knew we were a couple before we did! If one of us was absent, he’d ask the other one where the absent one was. ‘How should we know?’ we’d say. ‘We’re just friends. . . .’

Brian had a girlfriend from high school who was a year younger. Esther met someone her second day on campus and was dating him in no time. She and her boyfriend, “John,” hung out with Brian a lot. “It was usually a bunch of engineering guys and me, the psychology major,” says Esther.

During that freshman year, Brian went out on dates with quite a few girls. Since he and Esther were just friends, he even asked her one night to take a picture of him with another girl all dressed up to go to a dance. Esther went to the dorm room and took pictures of them but said it killed her that he was going out with someone else.

“Somewhere around April of freshman year, there was an evening at dinner where I was sitting next to John in one of the booths in the dining commons but holding hands with Brian under the table,” says Esther. “Guess that was a turning point. John dropped out of school after freshman year, but we still saw each other through the summer. I hitchhiked to New York one day in October (looking back, way stupid, right?). I broke up with John, and Brian and I became official. Can even give it a date: Oct. 13, 1976.”

Esther graduated in 1979 and went on to graduate school for a master’s in special education at Temple University in Philadelphia. She waited for Brian to finish his five-year engineering co-op and begin working for RCA in South Jersey. They married in 1981 and in 1988 moved to Oregon, where they have lived since. The Griffins came back to campus in 1989 with their two young sons and visited with Grant. He pulled out his grade books from the composition class and looked them up. He remembered Esther but not Brian. She says, “I guess Brian and English classes are a forgettable combination.”

Feeling Lucky to Know Someone

Jennifer Wagner Doctor ’86 and Barry Doctor ’86 met at age 14 through a religious youth group while in high school but were not friends and “definitely were not attracted to each other,” says Jennifer.

Jennifer remembers being nervous as she walked into her first class as a freshman. It was Introduction to Government, taught by Guy C. (Chuck) Colarulli, now associate provost and dean of undergraduate studies at the University. She even remembers that it was taught on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 10 a.m. in Hillyer Hall. Between the two of them, she and Barry can name about 20 people who were in the class with them and have reconnected with a number of them via Facebook after losing touch for years.

As soon as she walked in, Jennifer saw Barry sitting alone in the second row. “Thinking I was lucky knowing anyone, I went over and said hello before I sat down next to him. Within three weeks we were dating. Four weeks to the day from graduation four years later, we exchanged vows,”
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Jennifer, "At the end of the first semester, he told me he was going to marry me. I laughed. When school finished that spring, he said it again, and I said, 'I know.'"

Jennifer and Barry, on campus to attend an alumni event with their young son, Charles, in 1991, ran into "Dr. Chuck."

"Surprisingly, he remembered us," says Jennifer, "and, in true 'Dr. Chuck' style, he promptly claimed he was the reason we got together and that it was fitting that we had named our son in his honor. He's probably still claiming that!"

The Doctors live in Minneapolis, Minn., and both work in product management/marketing.

Mr. Know-It-All

Shel Frolich Tschere '99 and David Tschere '99 met in their second year in 1996 in a Politics 100 class. Shel thought the class was her worst and hid in the back of the room, hoping not to be called on. David sat in the front and appeared to know everything. Afterwards, she complained to her roommates.

"I went back to my apartment and shared with my roommates that there was this annoying guy in my politics class that seemed to know it all."

Shel ended up running into David a lot but was in a serious relationship with a high school boyfriend. During junior year, David became part of her social circle, and they became good friends.

In fact, he was such a good friend that she was reluctant to date him. "I knew that things would be forever changed if we went down that road," says Shel.

In the fall of their senior year, Shel changed her mind. She says she thought of it as a senior fling at first, but things turned out differently. After their graduation in 1999, they both moved to Massachusetts—Shel to work at the New England Center for Children and to attend graduate school, and David to study for his physical therapy licensing exam while working in a retail store.

They had planned to dress up as Fred and Wilma Flintstone for Halloween in fall 2001, but the cold and rainy weather and the anthrax scare after 9/11 canceled trick-or-treating and ruined David’s proposal plans. He recovered, however, and they were married in August 2002 and now live in Marlborough, Mass., with their two daughters. Shel is a stay-at-home mom who is starting doula training this spring, and David is director of rehabilitation at a nursing home. He received his master’s and doctorate in physical therapy in 2008.
The 1998 Preseason

Erin Meyer Zeller ’01, M’02, and Michael Zeller ’02 (both Barney) officially met in the common room in E Complex in August just before the beginning of their first year, but they had been eyeing each other in the training room for several days before that.

“He was a soccer player and I was a volleyball player,” says Erin. “All the fellow soccer and volleyball players were surrounding us in the common room that day and literally said, ‘Watch, you two are going to get married!’”

Mike, a walk-on, played on the Hawks soccer team that won the America East Championship in 2000. In their first-round NCAA tournament game, he scored the only goal against the University of Connecticut, which would have won it if a last-minute goal by UConn hadn’t caused the game to go into overtime.

Erin and Mike were excellent student-athletes, so it was a surprise to learn that they sometimes did their studying in the car. “I hate to admit that during finals week when we were seniors, we would drive to Mohegan Sun or Foxwoods in the middle of the night with some of the other soccer players. We studied all the way down there and back and just went straight to our finals—acing them!” Erin graduated magna cum laude and Mike graduated cum laude.

Seven years after they met, Erin and Mike got engaged in New York City on the bridge over the skating rink in Central Park.

“Our wedding came less than a year and a half later, in 2007, in San Diego, and it was a completely crazy night,” says Erin. “We ended up without power because a drunk driver hit a transformer on the San Diego Freeway, taking out the lights at The Prado in Balboa Park where we were married. Everything had to be lit with candles. Filets were cooked on barbecue grills.” The band for the reception brought a generator from Las Vegas so they could play. “There were three alums in our wedding—one from the soccer team, one from the volleyball team, and my college roommate,” she adds.

Erin is a human resources manager at Daymon Interactions, and Mike is regional distribution manager for Mor Furniture for Less. They live in San Diego, Calif., with their two children, Jordan and Olivia.
He Said He Was Psychic

Russell Butkiewicz ’07 and Marissa Torento ’05 first met in the architecture studio in the spring of 2004—back when the architecture program was still in East Hall. They were both audio engineering technology majors. Russell introduced himself to her by saying that he was psychic and already knew her name, which he told her. Surprised at first, Marissa soon figured out the source of his information.

“I had apparently forgotten I was wearing my Red Key sweatshirt that day, with my name on the sleeve,” explains Marissa.

They started dating in 2005. At the reception the night before her graduation that May, it was President Walter Harrison who told her father that she and Russell were dating. Her father was surprised—not to hear that they were a couple but to realize that they knew the president of the University on a person level.

And how did the president know?

“I have no idea!” says Marissa. “I would assume he’d seen us together at a few Hillel events—we were both active in campus organizations. . . . I was as surprised as my dad that he knew!”

Russell and Marissa are legacy graduates of the University—three previous family members attended UofH: Russell’s dad, Henry Butkiewicz ’77 (BS, College of Engineering); Marissa’s cousin, Dean Negrelli ’87 (BS, College of Engineering); and Russell’s cousin, Nick Fontaine ’01 (BS, ENHP).

“We are currently living in Tonawanda, N.Y., just north of Buffalo and the Great Lakes ‘snow band,’” says Marissa. “I work as a junior architect and project administrator at E.I. Team Architects and Engineers in Buffalo. Russell is the architectural consultant for the Early Childhood Research Center at the University at Buffalo and also works at Advanced Auto.
She Had a Lizard Tattoo

Joshua Hyfler ’08 (A&S) and Krystl Wells ’08 (A&S) first laid eyes on each other in front of A Complex. It was a warm day in 2004, the first week of school during freshman year, and Krystl was wearing a skirt. Josh happened to notice a tattoo of a lizard wearing a crown on her leg—a reference to Jim Morrison and The Doors, his favorite band.

“This was clearly a conversation starter,” says Josh. “We began to talk and ended up going back to her common room where some of her friends were hanging out. We spent the evening talking.”

They didn’t formally date but spent most of their free time together. During a telephone call over that first Thanksgiving break, Josh mustered up the courage to ask Krystl to be exclusive. Initially, she wasn’t sure, but later she would agree. He says he worked very hard when they returned to campus to ensure that they would be a couple.

“I often think about what if I had made the decision to go to any of the other schools where I had been accepted,” says Josh. “I cringe and smile all at once.”

Krystl, a criminal justice major, works for an investigative firm in Chicago, and Josh works at New Trier Township High School outside Chicago during the day and at a pediatric therapy clinic at night.

“Our wedding date is not yet set. Since work for both of us is currently so hectic, we are looking at the spring of 2012,” says Josh. “What’s eight years between soul mates anyway?”