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Coming Full Circle

Allegra Gallian '09
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Contact: Allegra Gallian, '09, (309) 556-3181

Coming Full Circle

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – It can be a challenge living with a stranger, but at Illinois Wesleyan students have met that challenge. Kim Stabosz, class of '09, and Erin Wondrak, class of '09, have been living together since freshman year.

Stabosz said she was nervous about the initial meeting, which did not go quite as expected. “The entire time Erin was pretty silent, and I freaked out because I didn’t know why she wasn’t talking. I was so scared she was going to be quiet,” Stabosz said.

Needing an escape from parents and siblings who were helping them move in, the newly formed pair explored their residence hall. “The second we were away from our parents it was instant relaxation and we just clicked,” said Wondrak and the bonding began.

The Office of Residential Life (ORL) (<http://www.iwu.edu/~orl>) has a responsibility to pair compatible students as roommates. To promote positive roommate relationships, ORL’s First-Year Experience (FYE) Program is hosting its second annual “Celebrate Your Roommate Week” Oct. 13 to 17 (see schedule of events below) to remind students that having a roommate should be a pleasurable part of the college experience.

“The event was created to help students understand how to value their roommate. Conflicts may arise around this time of year, and we are hoping this will progress communication,” said Stacy Ploskonka, Gulick Hall residence director. “Celebrate your roommate week is about ensuring that there are good relationships between roommates and encouraging them to get to know each other better.”

ORL looks for similarities when matching roommates. Stabosz and Wondrak discovered they both had a passion for dance, so they auditioned for the dance team and the Student Choreographed Dance Concert (SCDC) together. They watched many movies together as well, including, *The Princess Diaries*, and they would talk for hours at night.

According to ORL, the roommate matching process begins early in the summer. First-year students are mailed a letter asking them to fill out a survey online about their lifestyle habits and their interests. The survey includes categories of questions about bedtime, cleanliness smoking, social environment and pet peeves. Students are sent basic contact information about

their roommate so they can begin talking before they arrive at Illinois Wesleyan. ORL suggests that students talk to their roommates before they officially move in together.

“We use a listing of about 20 different preferences that have been determined as key concerns for students. Differences in lifestyle preferences such as drinking and smoking habits or living habits such as cleanliness or desired temperature in room are issues that can easily cause roommate conflicts,” said Terrance Bond, assistant director of Residential Life. “By asking some of these questions up front, we can attempt to pair students with others who closely match their individual preference.”

Some matches, like Stabosz and Wondrak, are so successful that the students continue living together all four years. Seniors Teresa Sherman and her roommate, Alison Heim have roomed together since freshman year, but before coming to Wesleyan they started getting to know each other through phone calls and e-mails, making their first meeting less awkward.

When they did move in, Sherman and Heim first bonded over a hairbrush.

“I had one of those circular hairbrushes,” Sherman said, “and it got tangled in my hair. We were laughing trying to get it out, and we were very aware that this was a roommate bonding moment.”

Jessica Block and her roommate, Sherry Reiss, are also seniors who have been roommates for four years. They also got to know each other during the summer before their freshman year.

“Once we were matched up we talked semi-frequently online,” Block said.

Reiss said she and Block bonded over making jewelry and watching their favorite television shows. They also found a unique icebreaker. “Sherry was closing the curtains and she had this weird look on her face,” said Block. “She pointed to a light-up casket in the window of a funeral supply shop across the street. Neither of us could believe it or stop laughing.”

Sherman and Heim said that sharing the same group of friends and having relaxed personalities helped them remain roommates for the past four years.

Though they may share common interests, roommates do not have to share the same academic plans. Sherman thought it was interesting that as an English and history double major, she was paired with biology major.

Wondrak and Stabosz also experienced a difference in academic pursuits. “School -wise we’re completely opposite,” said Wondrak. “She’s English and I’m business. I like taking tests and she likes to write papers.”

As with all relationships, conflicts do come up from time to time, however these roommates have learned how to work things out.

“I think the fact that we’re able to act like siblings sometimes helps,” Sherman said, adding that she and Heim don’t experience many conflicts. When they do, Heim and Sherman discuss the problem and decide on the fair thing to do.

Stabosz and Wondrak said they don’t experience petty conflicts but for bigger issues, they talk and find a solution because they said it’s not worth it to stay mad or hold a grudge.

“You do fight and you do get on each other’s nerves but it becomes more of a family relationship. There are days you get annoyed with the person, but it doesn’t matter because the next day you love them more than anything,” said Stabosz.

For these sets of roommates, after their freshman year, there was no question that they would continue living together.

“We just fit so well, and it was just good from the start,” said Heim.

“Ever since freshman year Kim has been my best friend at Illinois Wesleyan, and it’s because the University *told* us we had to be roommates,” said Wondrak.

Celebrate Your Roommate Week Schedule of Events

- **Monday, Oct. 13:** A table will be set up outside Bertholf Commons (104 E. University St., Bloomington) where students can display their favorite roommate memories.
- **Tuesday, Oct. 14:** Dress like your roommate day. Students are encouraged to dress like their roommate normally does.
- **Wednesday, Oct. 15:** “The Newly Roomie Game” in the Hansen Student Center (300 E. Beecher St., Bloomington). Students can compete for prizes by knowing information about their roommate.
- **Thursday, Oct. 16:** Appreciate your roommate day. Students are encouraged to do something that shows their roommate how much they appreciate them.
- **Friday, Oct. 17:** Have lunch with your roommate day.

For additional information, contact Ploskonka at (309) 556-3129 or sploskon@iwu.edu.

