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Love, Illinois Wesleyan Style

Alumni couples share details of their campus romances.

By Tim Obermiller
Portrait Photos by Marc Featherly

Maybe there's something about the way that moonlight filters through the leaves during a late-night stroll through the quad. Maybe there's something in the water. Whatever the explanation, Illinois Wesleyan University has provided the setting for countless romantic moments, and a springboard for thousands of loving relationships that have lasted lifetimes.

Skeptics of this claim should note the following statistic: of the University's some 17,000 alumni, 3,200 are married to another alumnus. That makes for 1,600 couples, comprising almost 20 percent of the total population of IWU alumni.

To celebrate this tender tradition, we recently asked our readers to submit reminiscences about their campus romances. More than 30 alumni couples and several individuals responded with detailed accounts of their amorous adventures as Illinois Wesleyan students. What follows is a summary of highlights of those entries. Complete versions of all the entries can be read by clicking on the icon at the bottom of this story. Also included are past and present photos of many of the couples, as well as a place where you can submit your own romantic memories for possible inclusion on our Web site.

First Impressions

Whether it was instant chemistry or a more slow-burning attraction, IWU couples reveal how their relationships got started.

When Lillian Harbert Roeske '42 first met her future husband Franklin Roeske '41, she admits she fell hard for him—literally.

"I was coming out of Buck Library," she recalls, "when I caught my heel on the top step and tumbled down the whole flight of concrete steps, landing at the feet of a tall, dark, and handsome student. He picked me up, introduced himself, and made sure I wasn't hurt. He asked me for a date and the rest is history."

Stanley Lantz '39 had his eye on Evelyn Cornelius Lantz '41 from their initial meeting as freshmen at the Grind, an annual fall mixer. But with both working jobs for room and board, there was little chance to socialize. So, the following fall, Stanley hatched a plan. Twice-weekly chapel attendance was mandatory, with seats assigned to check attendance by Professor of Religion Isaac Corn. Stanley persuaded the good professor to make sure that Evelyn would be seated next to him.

Later, "with the first event that called for our Activity Card for admission, Stanley asked for mine so we could go together," Evelyn recalls. "Well, he never returned it! Any ball game, any play, any visiting artist, or any concert, I had to go to with Stanley." You might say, the cards were stacked in Stanley's favor.



Lillian '42 and Franklin Roeske '41 (above) had their love story begin outside Buck Library, after Lillian tripped down the steps.

Stanley wasn't the only alumnus willing to give Cupid a nudge in the right direction. Mary Hartwig Winn '43 first met fellow music major James '41 "somewhere in the bustling, music-making corridors of Presser Hall."

"Attraction clicked right away," writes Mary, but she helped it along by "learning his schedule, in order to cross paths on campus." Later, "I managed to move into a Presser Hall locker right beside his, so contacts were more frequent."

That great American male pastime of girl-watching paid off for several alumni in their search for mates. During the Depression, "none of the students had cars," remembers Raymond Temple '40, so walking became both the primary means of transportation and a good way to pick out potential love interests. Raymond and his roommate Frank Soeka '40 were hanging out on the front porch of the old Sigma Chi house when Raymond spotted Alice Sutter '40. The future Mrs. Temple was walking by with another pretty coed who happened to be Frank's girlfriend at the time. Frank arranged a double date so that Raymond could meet the apple of his eye in person.

From the same Sigma Chi porch, Jack Hornberger '44 first spotted his future wife, Jean Miller Hornberger '44. "I lived with my grandmother on Market Street," Jean writes, "and Jack lived at the Sigma Chi house on Main Street. He used to see me walking to school in the morning and asked Annie [Margaret] Baker ['44] to fix us up with a date."

The old Theta Chi house on Main Street provided the means for Joe Anderson '67 to catch his first glimpse of Sylvia Monti Anderson '66, who he remembers was "occupying the third or fourth chair from the door along the east wall of the basement....The occasion was a ritual called a 'pledge exchange sweater dance' which I recall because I was a 'townie' on scholarship." Joe also remembers "running down to Al Baskin's men's store as I did not own a sweater before that afternoon event, which was mandatory for pledges."

Several couples reported that their first meetings were of a more academic nature. Jane Johnson-Carr '92 discovered her future husband Andrew '92 during their first week of freshman classes. "We were in the Thursday morning lab section of general chemistry and ended up across the lab bench from each other....It took us about six months to realize that there was definitely a chemistry between us."

A sophomore-year Spanish class provided the means for Nancy Gruber Beaty '96 and Shawn Beaty '96 to get acquainted. "Somehow we managed to sit next to each other that first day of class and were instructed to introduce each other in Spanish," Nancy reveals. "They required you to choose a Spanish first name that you pair with your 'American' last name. So for a good year or so, we just knew each other as German Beaty and Mercedes Gruber."

Proof that relationships can get their start in unlikely places was provided by Alicia Westwood Sackett '60 and her husband Ralph '60. "How about starting a 46-year relationship in a sheet line?" Alicia explains that "in the fall of 1956, IWU provided a sheet service: clean sheets once a week (for a fee, of course) for the semester. The line formed on the first day of Freshmen Week behind Pfeiffer Hall, and yep, there he was, beanie and all, right in front of me.

"I said I was there because I was too lazy to wash sheets, and he said he was there because he could not afford to buy them!"

True Love Conquers

*Illinois Wesleyan couples surmount world wars
and other obstacles to keep their love alive.*

The Great Depression nearly prevented Chrystal Krueger '31 from meeting future husband Glenwood Brown '33. As Chrystal told their daughter, Marcia Brown Popp '61, hard economic times deprived her of tuition money to start her junior year. To help her out, Chrystal's younger brothers each chipped in five-dollar gold pieces, a gift to each from their grandfather when they were born. Fate was on the couple's side again when Illinois Wesleyan announced it would take farm produce instead of cash for college expenses, which enabled Glenwood to use fruits and veggies from his parents' grocery store to help pay his way that fall, when he met Chrystal.



The romance of Glenwood Brown '33 and Chrystal Krueger '31 (above) overcame hard economic times. *(Photo provided by Marcia Brown Popp '61)*

World War II had a profound impact on IWU relationships. More than 1,000 Illinois Wesleyan men and women served in the war, at least 48 died, and when it was over, hundreds of veterans funded by the G.I. Bill crowded the campus. Many rekindled old flames, others ignited new passions. The end result was lots of babies.

When Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor provoked America's entry into the war, the University's male population quickly dwindled. Recalls Bunny Bane Wood '45: "We went to class and it was all girls, the four F's [those men deemed unfit for military service], and the ministerial students." Wood had met her future husband Tom '45 at a school dance before the war, but their relationship was put on hold when Tom joined the Allied effort, playing in a military band formed by swing maestro Glenn Miller. When Tom returned to IWU on a 45-day leave, he began trying to convince Bunny to marry him. Just five days before he was scheduled to return overseas, she agreed. Tom might have been better off to take the example of Jack Hornberger '44, who made sure to pop the question to Jean Miller Hornberger '44 before he left for Army life in 1942.

For Richard Lester '42 and Mary Cullings Lester '43, the burning question wasn't whether they wanted to marry, but when. Richard had just one weekend open—on the July Fourth holiday—between stints serving in the Signal Corps and working on America's secret Manhattan Project. They asked for help from their religion professor, Isaac Corn, who married them in the Bible Garden next to Buck Library. "We have also claimed that the whole nation celebrates our anniversary, and that we declared our interdependence on that day," Mary jokes.

A literary wartime romance was described by Harry Ahlers '43 and Janice Snider Ahlers '46, who carried on their courtship through correspondence when Harry left IWU his senior year to serve as a B-17 pilot in England. The couple bonded through their wartime letters, and as soon as Harry was discharged in 1945, Janice eagerly agreed to be his wife. They were wed over Christmas vacation, but not before Janice, who was still a student, obtained permission to marry from IWU President William Shaw, in accordance with the rules of that time.

The Vietnam War cast a dark shadow over the early relationship of Debbie Sowers Bliss '72 and husband Roger '72. Debbie writes: "Early in second semester of our senior year, we decided we wanted to stay together, and marriage was the next logical step, especially with the uncertainty of the draft (his draft number was 87) hanging over us. We just decided to shop for rings one day at a jeweler in downtown Bloomington, and I had a 'candlelight' at the SK house to announce the engagement." They married the August after graduation and before Roger enlisted in the Air Force. "He thankfully ending up in Okinawa instead of Vietnam," Debbie notes.

Though not as dramatic an obstacle as war, other couples overcame the burdens of time and distance to keep their lovelights burning. Donna Copas Moravec '83 graduated a year before her future husband Dave '84 and took a job in Gibson City. "We kept the romance going along IL Rt. 9 while I finished my senior year," Dave writes. Another highway romance was described by Natasha Mattingly Theobald '96 and husband Jeremy '96, who credit I-55 for keeping their blossoming love affair alive. After just meeting, they were forced apart by

summer jobs that kept Jeremy in Bloomington and Natasha in Chicago. They traveled thousands of miles of interstate in those three months. “We survived that first summer apart,” Natasha writes, “and have never been apart since.”

Phyllis Krahmer Tremper '56 should consider selling movie rights to her story of love beating the odds. As a voice-performance major, Phyllis endured long hours of rehearsal in Presser Hall. “One day a Sigma Alpha Iota sister came into my practice room and said, ‘Have you seen the new guy in music school?’ I had not but she raved so about him and my throat needed a water break—seriously—so we decided to go take a look at this new specimen on the steps of Presser Hall. We had not even gone outside the front door yet when I stopped and said, ‘I’m going to marry him someday!’ My sorority sister said, ‘Oh, sure you are!’”

The “specimen” was Frederick Tremper '58, who was resuming his education after spending six years in the Air Force. He and Phyllis did date, she wrote, but “as I was ready to graduate in June and he had several years to catch up...we broke up and I went off to the Big Apple to seek my fortune.” Phyllis had some success as a singer, “but mainly I worked for Columbia Records’ publicity office as a secretary for [music record executive] Mitch Miller.

“About three years later, on a very chilly Sunday afternoon in December,” she continues, “the telephone rang in my apartment...The person on the other end did not say ‘Hello’ or identify himself, but just said, ‘Are you ready to get married now? Have you done what you wanted to do?’ It was Fred, the love of my life from Illinois Wesleyan University....We were married the following June. We have just celebrated our 44th wedding anniversary and are living happily ever after.” Roll the credits.

This Magic Moment

Alumni pairs describe episodes in their courtships that hold special meaning.

“This one will last.”

That’s what Phi Mu Alpha president Richard Farrell '39 told Mary Hartwig Winn '43 and husband James '41 one memorable evening after James gave Mary his Phi Mu pin, a gesture that signified their relationship was getting serious.

Besides pinning, IWU’s Greek system inspired many courtship customs. One involved a “lavalier,” a charm with Greek letters of a chapter on a pendant that fraternity members gave to their girlfriends to signify a higher level of commitment than dating. Debbie Sowers Bliss '72 writes that she and husband Roger '72 were lavaliered “on Oct. 18 [1968] at the bell tower (trespassing on private property) behind the football field, and dated steadily the rest of our four years of college....I always cast a fond look at the bell tower when we go to IWU football games.”

Sara Lee Powell '72, who married her IWU beau Charles '70, recalls how women let their housemates know if a relationship had gotten serious. “The housemother would ring all the bells,” Powell recalls. “The girls would scream and run down to the living room for ‘a candlelight.’ We’d stand in a circle. The housemother would light a candle, and we’d pass it around the circle from girl to girl, until one girl blew the candle out.” If the candle went around the circle once before being blown out, it meant “the girl got lavaliered,” Powell explains. “Twice around the circle, the girl got pinned.



Nancy '96 and Shawn Beaty '96 of Bloomington (above) at the bench near Shaw Hall where Shawn popped the question.

Three times around, she got engaged. Then we'd all sing 'sweetheart' songs, clap, cheer, scream, and hug...all those girly things!"

Joe Anderson '67 recalls a similar tradition among fraternity members. "Serenading couples who had taken the ostensibly 'pre-engagement' step of becoming 'pinned' was still observed in those simpler, almost idyllic years," writes Joe, who married Sylvia Monti Anderson '66. Among the tunes favored by Theta Chi were "Dream Girl" and a parody of "Don't Fence Me In," titled "Don't Take My Pin."

Academic life provided a venue for some notable moments. LeAnne Stafford Edgeton '78 and husband Jim '78 recall the beautiful music they made, literally. During the numerous trumpet recitals he gave during his four years as a music-performance major, Jim always insisted that Leanne accompany him on piano—except for his senior recital, when Leanne played drums instead. The only sour note in this musical relationship that Leanne can recall is "the semester he tried to teach me French Horn—yikes!"

When the time came to propose marriage, several alumni went out of their way to make the event memorable. Darryn Dunbar '90 put a lot of thought into where he might pop the question to Denise Wachtl Dunbar '90. After considering the Bible Garden on campus, he chose Bloomington's Miller Park, where he made his proposal over a romantic picnic lunch (courtesy of Avanti's). "It was symbolic," Darryn explains, "because Miller Park was where she and I spent the day together after our first formal in March of 1988."

J. Brian Maloney '95 concocted an elaborate ruse to get H. Michelle Privia Maloney '94 to the place where he wanted to propose: Evelyn Chapel. "He asked me out to dinner, but we had to walk across campus first because we had to meet his roommate to help him with his car. I wasn't happy about that because it was raining, and I was dressed up!....When we got to Evelyn Chapel, his friend wasn't there yet. Brian suggested that we wait inside the chapel so we wouldn't get wet. I didn't like that idea either, because there were people inside practicing for a concert or something. He convinced me to go in and wait upstairs near the big window so we could see his friend arrive. By this time I wasn't very happy with him. We went upstairs and sat down. Then he got down on one knee and proposed—what a shock! Obviously, I said yes." Outside, a white limousine stocked with champagne was waiting to take them to a special dinner at Jim's Steakhouse. "I stared at the ring all through dinner! Afterwards, the limo drove us around town."

Nancy Gruber Beaty '96 and husband Shawn '96 began dating their junior year and after graduation landed jobs in separate cities. Nancy assumed "the distance would be the demise of our relationship" but accepted a dinner invitation from Shawn that August. The couple met in Bloomington. After dinner, "we spent a good half hour talking about our time at Wesleyan and how strange it would be not to be coming back as students in the fall. We stopped and sat on the old stone bench near Shaw Hall....It was there that Shawn proposed to me. He had said that since I was such a big part of his life while at Wesleyan, he thought it would only be appropriate to have me as the biggest part of his life for the rest of his life."

Beth Hastie Burger '94 recalls that in the midst of her busy senior year, future husband Brent '95 "surprised me at work in the piano prep office and got down on his knee and asked me to marry him. Of course I said yes, but I had to go to an evening practice for my student teaching—so a hundred high school students found out before my family."

Winona Mefford Patterson '96 and husband Adam '96 accomplished the ultimate fusion of their student and married lives when they combined their wedding and graduations into one exhausting day. "We graduated May 5, 1996, at 11 a.m., and our wedding ceremony began at Forest Park in Bloomington around 2:30 that very same afternoon! It was a very hectic day, but what a start to the wonderful life we've had together," writes Winona.

Eric Gardner '89 is likely the only alumnus who can boast that he married his college sweetheart even before they began dating. Eric recalls walking around the quad with some friends, who were discussing the fact that

Eric had caught the garter at a cousin's wedding the previous weekend. When the group, including Jodie Betts '91, asked Eric to reveal his own plans for marriage, he casually replied that he intended to wed Jodie.

A few days later, friends staged a mock wedding for the couple in Eric's third-floor Gulick room. The bride wore white, along with the groom's Red Sox hat. Eric's best man, John Savage '89, was attired in a coat, tie, and boxer shorts. Because the ceremony went so well, Eric and Jodie decided to start dating a month later. Their real-life wedding occurred in June 1990. Jodie again wore white, but left the Sox cap at home. Reprising his role as best man, Savage elected to wear pants this time. True to the zany origins of their relationship, the couple paid for the marriage license by "literally digging for pennies," Eric recalls. "The Ford County clerk didn't take checks. Who knew?"

Another story that captures the intoxicating exuberance of young love was provided by Carol Smith Tuschhoff '48, who recalls a magical spring day when friends invited her and future husband Jack '45 to "go out to Lake Bloomington for a picnic. We had a large basket of food, pop, and blankets with us at the curb....Our friends drove up in a roadster. That gave us two seats for people and picnic food. Jack and I decided we could fit in the trunk if we had a stick to hold up the lid and a rope to secure it in place.

"We packed the blankets and pop around us and anchored the picnic basket between us with our feet on the bumper. The trunk was huge and cozy, and the conversation centered around, 'Wouldn't it be great to get married!'" They did exactly that during Carol's senior year.

After the wedding, they moved into a new house that had little in the way of furniture. "One bed, a picnic table for the kitchen with four chairs, four orange crates turned on end that held a small oven, a two-unit electric burner, and the bottom of a Silex coffee pot," Carol recalls. "Timing was everything! But a hot dinner could be served to more than four, if the guests brought a chair."

For Jack and Carol Tuschhoff, and all of Illinois Wesleyan's other great romantics, the true test of love came in those daily struggles that followed their initial courtship—late bills, dirty diapers, and all the other trials that a lasting relationship must endure. But all of the alumni couples who shared their love stories seem to hold a special place in their hearts for the place where those stories began. As Dave Moravec '84 writes, he and wife Donna Copas Moravec '83 still enjoy visiting the IWU campus, and their three children often come along as they "reminisce about the days gone by.

"When we see young couples at IWU holding hands, we can't help but wonder if 20 years from now they will have a story to share," muses Dave. Future IWU Magazine editors, please note—this is one story that definitely deserves a sequel.