## CLINTON J. SHEERR

218 Little Sunapee Road, New London, NH 03257

How I spent my first quarter century since graduation...

The first significant date in the rest of my life came just a week or so after graduation, June 14, 1969, which marked both my marriage to Lucy Bethel a block from Pierson College where I first picked her up at a mixer and, at the other end of the block, the burning of the A&A building, which contributed to the chaos that I experienced while attending the School of Architecture the next three years (I won an award for graduating at the top of my class, but we didn’t have any grades, so figure that one out!). I worked half-time during the school years, full-time summers, and for a year afterwards for the New Haven Redevelopment Agency’s Wooster Square office, where I learned more than I did in architecture school. One low light of my graduate school years was that I contracted Hodgkin’s Disease, for which I underwent radiation therapy.

My immediate superior at NHRA had a college roommate who worked for I.M. Pei & Partners in New York City, which didn’t hurt when I applied for ajob there. From July 3, 1973, to July 3, 1976, I worked on the much acclaimed new East Building of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., which was I.M.’s favorite building in the office. It was my best architectural education yet, learning how the profession was practiced at the very top. I got to do everything from participating in programing sessions with J. Carter Brown through hopping on the shuttle to inspect construction. My medical mishaps continued: on one trip to Washington, my lung collapsed, which eventually led to two parietal pleurectomies; and I had a recurrence of Hodgkins Disease and was treated with chemotherapy. At this point in my life, although I loved where I worked and I remained convinced that New York was the center of all life, I decided there had to be a better way to live—one without taxes, crime, and dirty air.

I moved to New Hampshire on August 18, 1976. We both liked to ski in Vermont; I had gone to summer camp in Maine; and I knew that the Granite State was the second fastest growing state east of the Mississippi, and that there would probably be a demand for new buildings, which dovetailed nicely with the fact that I was ready to open my own architectural practice. I had done some residential and office projects for my oncologists in New Haven while I was still in New York (you know your prognosis is good when your doctor hires you to design his new office); and that work carried me through my first year in New Hampshire, where I didn’t know a soul!

I had also lived my first two years in New Hampshire, before my parents moved to Westchester County in New York, so there was a certain symmetry to all of this. I also am very fond of our license plates here, with the motto “Live Free or Die.” That kind of sums it up for me. The air is clean here, and the politics, while slightly Neanderthal, are also clean. This little state has the third largest legislative body in the free world (after the U.S. Congress and British Parliament), so everybody knows their legislators; and we have something called “town meetings” once a year where all municipal business is transacted and anyone can speak (and they do). There are two keys to living here: making a living and surviving winter, which is easy if you like to ski. I discovered that the leaves are off the trees more than they are on; and there is no spring (only mud season and black fly season, neither of which is desirable). Summer and fall, though both short, are glorious; so, on balance, it works out okay.

Meanwhile, Lucy was not as taken with New Hampshire as I, and we split up after about twelve years of marriage. I never thought it would happen to me, and I was crushed. However, I quickly got on with the rest of my life, and in fact, was rather enjoying my newfound bachelorhood after marrying so young, when I experienced the next significant date in my life, June 8, 1982.

I had gone to Honolulu to the national convention of the American Institute of Architects, representing my growing firm but mostly seeking a suntan, when I attended an intimate luau for twenty-five hundred architects at a place called Paradise Cove, forty minutes outside the city. It was there, about 10:30 p.m., on the way back to the buses which were to take us back to the city, that I picked up a red-headed architect named Deirdre McCrystal from Denver, Colorado, who had just won a National Honor Award, our profession’s highest award for design excellence. We sat in the back of the bus and exchanged resumes and discovered we had three things in common: we both had had splenectomies; could recite the first stanza of Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales (thank you Mrs. Miskimin for those silly freshman English exercises!); and flipped coins for all our important decisions. We spent nineteen magical hours together in Hawaii, and she went back to Denver with a second prize: my heart.

After five months of a wild, airplane romance, we were married at her parents’ home in Shoreham, Long Island, overlooking Long Island Sound (and in the distance...yes, New Haven!). We honeymooned that April in Paris (and environs) and then settled near my mountains, not hers. Seven months after we married, we started Sheerr & McCrystal, Inc., which is about to have its tenth anniversary, just as we have. It has been a remarkable experience living and working together, since we design completely differently. Self Magazine even sent two editors, two photographers, and a make-up person (for her, not me) to New Hampshire for four days to write a feature article entitled “Great Romances of the 80s: Together 24 Hours a Day.” We have somehow survived that article and working together, but it did create some stress. I think that early stress may have contributed to yet another recurrence of Hodgkins Disease in January 1985. The doctors tried their best to kill me, but another round of chemotherapy plus meditation and a positive attitude fixed me. A couple months after my last treatment, we went backpacking in the High Sierra above Yosemite. We like climbing mountains a lot, although two days of thunderstorms and hail while backpacking in the Maroon Bells in Aspen last summer may have finally convinced us to shift to car camping.

Despite the depression in the construction industry in New Hampshire, our firm still has the same six employees we had before it all went to hell up here, and we like to think that we are designing significant buildings that help to preserve the special quality of life up here. We win a lot of design awards, and in June, I become the President of the New Hampshire Chapter of the A1A. I’ve never been lucky enough to have any children, so I guess I’m trying to leave behind some good buildings as my legacy. That, plus I’ve just started writing a novel. I majored in English and always wanted to write one, but I thought I had to have the whole plot mapped out before I began. I never did figure it all out, so I just started, and it seems to be flowing (I’m now on Chapter Fourteen).

As far as keeping in touch with Yale, I really haven’t. I always send in checks to the Alumni Fund, but the only person I’ve spent much time with was one of my roommates, Norm Resnicow. He was at both my weddings, and he just dropped by with his family as recently as last month for a weekend of skiing, which was great fun. This month, I went to my first Yale Club of New Hampshire event in the seventeen years that I have lived here. I don’t know what’s happening. I think relationships are becoming more important to me. I’m even looking forward to our twenty-fifth reunion next year.