

MOMENTS

Four Friends And 122 Years Of Marriage Between Them

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SPECIAL TO THE COURANT

Al Watson and Stan Taylor met as freshmen engineering students at Brown University in Providence, roomed together, worked together in different parts of the world and, 70 years later, live as close as they did in college, albeit with the diversions of two special women.

Al met Priscilla Woodbury, a nationally ranked table-tennis competitor, while she was playing in a tournament at Brown in the spring of 1939. She transferred that fall to Pembroke College, the women's college affiliated with Brown, but she didn't see Al.

"He was always too busy with his studies. I was too busy looking for rocks," says Priscilla, who was a geology major.

"I was a little shy of girls," Al confides.

In his senior year, Al invited Priscilla to a dance, and before he graduated in 1942, they began dating. Al and Stan landed internships at Pratt & Whitney in Hartford between their junior and senior years and roomed together at Trinity College. When they graduated, their military service was waived so they could bring their engineering knowledge to work at Pratt & Whitney and they again roomed at Trinity.

With Priscilla's father off to war, her mother moved from Worcester, Mass., and rented an apartment in Hartford so



COUPLES Shirley and Stan Taylor, at left, and Priscilla and Al Watson live near each other at Duncaster Retirement Community in Bloomfield.

Priscilla could visit Al. Sitting in Priscilla's mother's yellow convertible Packard, Al asked Priscilla to marry him. Priscilla finished her degree a semester early and married Al, with Stan serving as best man, on March 22, 1943. Priscilla and Al remained in Hartford for the next eight years and had two children.

Stan, meanwhile, was living the bachelor's life at various West Coast locations, still working for Pratt & Whitney and staying in touch with Al when he visited Hartford on business trips. In 1950, Stan was best man in a wedding in Washington state, where he

was living at the time. He was warned about the maid of honor: "Watch out for her. She can wrap any man around her finger."

She was Shirley Henriksen, who'd been living in Paris and traveling in Europe for two years. She came home because the bride, her best friend, begged her with the promise of providing "the perfect man" for Shirley.

The bride and groom spent a week before their wedding trying to get Stan and Shirley together. At the rehearsal dinner, Stan put a fake ice cube with a fly in it in Shirley's glass. "She didn't say anything about it," Stan says, which

made him think she was a pretty agreeable person.

After the wedding, Stan and Shirley dated a few times. Stan, a native of Providence, spent Thanksgiving and Christmas with Shirley's family in Washington. By Valentine's Day, Stan says, "I was determined I would propose in the most romantic way I could." With a box of candy and flowers in hand, "We went out to a nice little spot, and I proposed."

It was late that night when she came home, but her mother awoke and said, "... Tell me all about it. You're glowing in the dark."

Stan and Shirley were wed on July 9, 1951, shortly before Pratt & Whitney transferred Al to Bellevue, Wash., and Stan and Al found themselves working together again.

The wives devised a plan to have the men commute to work in one car so the wives could have a car at home. But they were only together about a year when Stan and Shirley were transferred to Connecticut. The couple traveled back to Washington every other year with their four children.

Al and Priscilla moved back to Connecticut in 1958 and settled near Stan and Shirley in West Hartford. They attended the same church, and Al, Stan and Shirley sang in the Immanuel Congregation Church choir together. Al and Stan both traveled the world with Pratt & Whitney, and their wives went with them when possible.

"We stayed close always," Stan says of

the couples' friendship. He and Shirley held an anniversary party to celebrate Al and Priscilla's 25 years together. In a month, Al and Priscilla will mark 65 years of marriage, and this summer it will be 57 years for Shirley and Stan.

"These engineers are a personality by themselves," Priscilla says. "The men had to be at their business, and we ladies had to fill in the extra hours," which Priscilla and Shirley did with community volunteer work.

"We both have very strong wives," Stan says.

"You have to be adaptable," Shirley says.

"We both made a point of becoming interested in what each other was interested in," Stan says.

"We're tried and true. . . . We trust each other completely," Shirley says.

Five years ago Al and Priscilla moved to Duncaster Retirement Community in Bloomfield, and last year Stan and Shirley moved across from them.

They eat meals together and give each other rides when one of their cars is being serviced — not much different from undergraduate days for Stan and Al, only better. Now they have their own "tried and true" valentines.

We'd love to hear your love story, or about someone you know. Please send your name, e-mail address or phone number to Carl Dobler at dobler@courant.com, or by mail to The Hartford Courant, Features Dept., 285 Broad St., Hartford, CT 06115.