

COLUMBIA SPECTATOR

ARCHIVE

Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume CXVII, Number 21, 16 February 1993 — FOCUS Sex at Columbia: how are students making out? [ARTICLE+ILLUSTRATION]

FOCUS

Sex at Columbia: how are students making out?

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When Rob Reiner's film *When Harry Met Sally* hit the box offices in 1989, it spurred much discourse among the sexes regarding relationships. Do you have to have a significant other to lead a fulfilling life? Is it absolutely necessary to have someone to kiss on New Year's Eve? And, finally, can men and women really be friends (without the sex thing, as Harry lamented time and time again throughout the movie, being just sort of "out there")?

In conjunction with our post-Valentine's Day blues, we, being the investigative-minded Lois Lane wanna-be's that we are, decided to take it upon ourselves to ask these very questions, and many more, of the Columbia community.

Is romance dead in this cement anthill we fondly call

New York? Has AIDS removed all the

spontaneity and magic from modern-

day love stories (if you dare call

them love stories)? How is that

flower man's business on

the corner of 116th Street

and Broadway doing?

And just what are Co-

lumbia students look-

ing for in a modern-

day relationship (if

they are looking at

all)?

Our trusty *Specta-*
tor notebooks in hand,

we ventured out one
night to speak to you,
the Columbia commu-
nity, as well as those who
know you all too well, such

as area bartenders, waiters and waitresses, and other observers of romance or lack thereof.

Looking for answers to these oft-discussed relationship questions, we chose to hit local bars and hangouts where we knew the tongues would be loose and philosophical and the answers would be honest and deep. Read on to determine for yourself the status of romantic relationships within the Columbia bar circuit.

West End Gate

Wanting to get an early start before the din of the crowds drown out our pressing questions, we arrive at the West End Gate just when the regular crowd is beginning to shuffle in.

We spot a bartender serving up the customers. Flagging him down, we ask him about the status of the bar and relationship scenes among Columbia students.

“In the last six years, I’ve seen people become less aggressive,” he says, referring to the dating and hooking-up scenes. “I’ve noticed fewer people are coming out to the bars. Maybe it’s AIDS. Could be the economy.”

Moving on, we spot the West End’s resident Cupid. Standing at his post beside the entrance, host Onel Perez shares with us his observations of Columbia youth.

“They’re not as romantic as you think,” he says, noting that students seem inhibited today when it comes to hand-holding and other such public displays of affection.

Perez does, however, get to play Cupid on occasion for West End clientele.

“I get a lot of guys coming up and asking me if I know a certain girl, if I know her phone number,” he explains. Among other Cupid duties, Perez says he delivers notes between potential loves—carrying them from one end of the bar to another.

“I haven’t gotten a really mushy one yet,” he says.

Joining Perez in his debut interview is Sabrina Furer, fellow host.

Observing the bar scene, Furer contends that much of the collegiate socialization in the West End parallels “ships passing in the night. They know they’re going to move on with their lives after they graduate.”

Comparing today’s trends to those of yesteryear, Furer says that people today are staying at bars longer rather than heading off to someone’s apartment.

“I think that the relationships are becoming much more monogamous. They’re not going to go to the bars to pick up people any more,” she says.

Cannon’s

Moving on to Cannon’s, we spy a table crowded with several members of a Columbia fraternity. Chowling down on wings, these brave young men are only too happy to philosophize about life, women, and relationships with us for a

while—all on the courageous condition of total anonymity.

For these guys, happy hour is more than simply an hour of the day—it's a way of life. And how.

"We're loving our beer right now, not our women," explains one of the men, noting that Cannon's is their home away from home Wednesday through Monday nights.

Turning to talk of relationships, the men insist that, while Cannon's is a place for the boys and beer, it is not the place to find one's soulmate.

"Relationships begin elsewhere—like FBH at lunch. One-nighters begin at Cannon's," one says between wings.

FBH? Okay. Whatever you say, although the sandwich line hasn't exactly been rumored to be a bastion of romance before.

In all seriousness, one young man insists that bars, though fun places to hang out, are, "not conducive to deep, intimate conversations."

Complicating the bar scene is the alcohol factor

"Alcohol is interfering with meeting the real person,"

involved, so you're not one guy says, explain-lie about both their identifying that people are more apt to

ties and their true feelings in a bar environment.

“A lot of people use the excuse of ‘Hey, I’m drinking. I’m drunk’ to do whatever they want. One night stands are pretty dangerous,” offers another, referring to AIDS and *Fatal Attraction*-style predicaments in which one partner may feel closer than the other after sex.

Relationships—truly good relationships that last longer than a matter of hours—require friendship as a basis.

“You have to get to know someone—not in the Biblical sense. But really get to know them before you can have a good relationship,” one of the guys says.

Several agree that men who form the best friendships and relationships with women are those who have grown up with sisters.

“I have a great relationship with my sister, and I feel more comfortable with women,” one says, adding that such a relationship has helped him to both appreciate and respect the opposite sex more than what he would had he grown up with only brothers.

All men agree that their views of men, women, and relationships will take a dramatic turn should they one day have daughters of their own. All too aware of the ulterior motives of young men with raging hormones, one man says emphatically, “My daughter isn’t going to be let out of the house until she’s 45.”

Getting back to the issue of romance in actual relationships, these men take the cynical approach. Responding to the accusation that young men no longer have the good ol’ Rudolph Valentino spirit about them, the Greek gang insists that modern women are not open to romantic overtures.

“The girls seem to think that romance is cheese,” one says, insisting that although Columbia and Barnard women say they want romance, they laugh and chide the guys for their attempts.

“They assume every guy’s a scammer. Twenty percent of the guys are causing 80 percent of the problems,” laments another man, referring to the insensitive men who love, leave, and hurt women, thereby giving men a bad name.

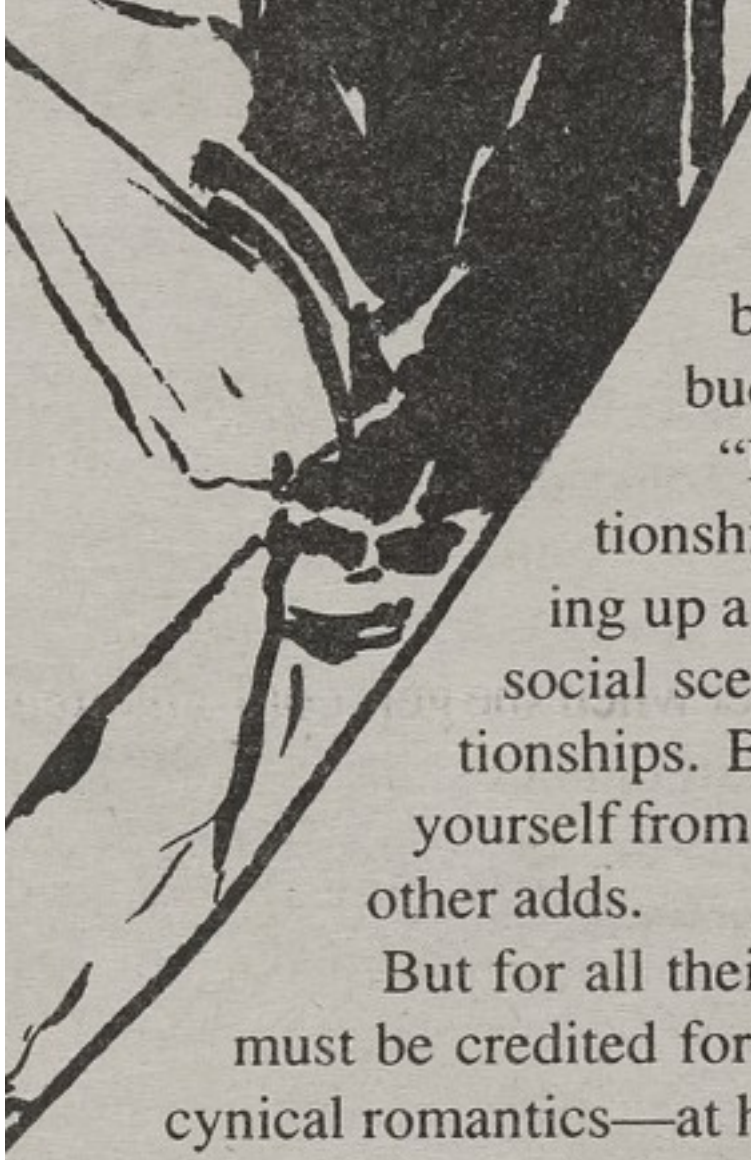
“I think they idealize romance. They don’t give us a chance to be romantic,” yet another man surmises.

That seems to suit some of them just fine, however. They are not, after all, looking to get married any time soon. Most agree that the walk down the aisle can only come after the walk across the stage to receive medical and law degrees.

And these men do, after all, have each other in the male-bonding, fraternal sense.

Gathered around the rustic table, clad in matching Greek attire, these men believe that, for right now, strong male bonds often take precedence over those bonds shared with women.

"It takes more for a guy to make a commitment than for a girl. If you have a lot of strong friendships with guys, it's hard to have a relation-



ship," says one, referring to the time commitment conflicts that arise when one is torn between his girl and his buddies.

"If you have a close relationship in college, you're giving up a lot. You're giving up the social scene. I'm not against relationships. But you shouldn't isolate yourself from a whole community," another adds.

But for all their macho talk, these guys must be credited for being romantics—albeit cynical romantics—at heart.

"For Valentine's Day last year, I wrote a song, and my friend played in a band, and we serenaded [my girlfriend] below her window," one brags.

Another young Cassanova made a picnic lunch for his

true love and even went so far as to call her mother in advance to find out her favorite kind of sandwich.

Don't trust every Columbia Romeo, though.

One young man went to great lengths to woo back his true love. "I mailed her a rose and a poem," he explains.

"We got back together. Then I dumped her six months later. In her face!"

Over at the bar, Eddie, a life-long resident of the area and a Cannon's bar tender for the past nine years, keeps watch.

"Columbia students are more studious now. Five or six years ago, we'd have a crowd here on a Tuesday night," he says.

Nevertheless, Cannon's, he admits, is still a place to "hook up." Today, however, the women are making more of the moves.

"More girls send drinks [to guys] than guys do [to girls]," he says, adding that he wishes they would get more aggressive with him.

As aggressive as they may appear, however, Eddie adds that modern times have made them safety-conscious as well. "The girls stick together. They don't let one go home without another one," he says.

Cathedral Cafe

At the Cathedral Cafe, Dean, the bartender, informs us that "Lynda-with-a-y" is the area authority on modern-day relationships.

"Hi, ya' wanna' talk sex?" asks the blonde waitress. "I'll be right with you."

Sitting herself down on a barstool beside us, Lynda, a life-long resident of the area, reflects back on the good ol' days.

"When I was 22, it was fun-o-rama. I would dread waking up tomorrow and being 22-years-old again. Now it requires living through emotional hassles, fearing you're going to die from sex," she says.

"I'm curious to see what's going to happen 10 years down the road for these kids who haven't been able to sow their wild oats—if they're going to have a mid-life crisis at age 32—a backlash," she says.

On a brighter note, Lynda says that some things have changed for the better in the course of the last two decades.

"Women, I believe are more comfortable calling a spade a spade. It's no longer 'I don't have a boyfriend. I'm a zero,' " she says.

Men, too, she believes, have learned to pay attention to their female counterparts.

To young people today, she offers this advice:

“Women, don’t take any bullshit. Don’t let these guys try and bamboozle you. Men, think with your head and not with your dick. The sexiest organ of the body is the brain.”

Back at the West End

Back at the West End, we approach two Barnard women and one Columbia woman for their insights regarding the relationship matter.

For the most part, all three conclude, romance is not necessarily dead on the Columbia campus. It simply, like all things in New York, takes time and effort that people may or may not be willing to give.

“New York kind of hardens people so they’re not as sensitive to things. You sort of have to schedule in romance. On Valentine’s Day, you’re like ‘Okay, I’ve got to be romantic today,’ ” one says.

“I’d also say, even if you don’t have a significant other, you can be romantic about life in general—sensitive to the details around you,” adds another.

Turning to the subject of current trends, all three women agree that society has progressed in a number of respects in the last decade. “People are less afraid to talk about sex and to go to the store and buy a condom,” one says.

On the other hand, although they agree that monogamous relationships do exist, so, too, does promiscuity.

“In some ways, it doesn’t seem that AIDS has had much of an effect on [people’s sexual activity],” one concludes.

The West End, hours later, continues to hustle and bustle with Columbia students intent upon celebrating the commencement of another weekend. Seated in a booth near the door are three Barnard women, ready to spill their guts regarding the r-word.

“Romance isn’t dead,” one insists, referring to Columbia. “It’s just sort of comatose—on life support.”

Although one of the young women boasts that she is fortunate to be seeing a young man who brings her flowers and offers his sweater to her when she gets cold, all three agree that today’s rat race world of relationships leaves something to be

desired.

One points out that while 40 percent of the relationships she knows of are monogamous, the remaining 60 percent are of a hook-up, one-night-stand nature.

"I think we've lost our sensitivity to sex. You see Madonna, and nothing is sacred anymore," she laments.

"When our parents were growing up, sex was taboo. Now it's dangerous," adds another woman.

According to the threesome, sex needs to be taken seriously by both sexes—as seriously as women have been taking it all along.

"Women do take sex more seriously. They do it because it feels good mentally. Men do it because it feels good physically. Women are letting someone in, instead of letting something out. That's a big difference," one of the women says.

And what leads these women to commitment, to let another person into their lives?

"When he thinks about you without you having to encourage him or explain it to him," one young woman answers.

"When there's honesty, and trust, and a lack of walls in the relationship," offers another.

"When he actually remembers your name," concludes the third.

Moments later, five Columbia seniors, engaged in deep conversation, agree that romance is, for the most part, dead on the Columbia campus and offer to give advice to underclassmen.

"Don't look too hard or you'll never find him," offers one woman.

“Play the field. Everything’s a learning experience, even if you get screwed over,” offers another.

“Try to avoid domestic pseudo-marriages. And if the guy offers to pay, don’t fight it,” a third concludes.

Turning to more important matters, the group mulls over the true meaning of Harry and Sally’s relationship.

“Can men and women be friends? Not really, there’s always that underlying sexual thing,” says one.

“I think it is possible for there to be sexual tension and to overcome it,” offers another.

“I think the ideal friendship still is within the same gender—women and women, men and men,” a third says.

“Maybe it’s possible, but there can’t be any attraction. Somebody’s gotta’ be really ugly,” offers a fourth.

And friend number five a true disciple of Harry, concurs.

“No, the sex thing is always out there.”

Tom’s Diner

We sit in Tom’s Diner now, savoring a chocolate milk and Diet Coke, respectively. What does it all mean, we ask ourselves? Is romance gone with the wind, blowing in the wind, or simply reduced to a bag full of wind? Was this past week’s Valentine’s Day hoopla all that it was cracked up to be, or was it reduced to a million-dollar day for Hallmark executives?

Although we can not purport to know the answers to questions so large and timeless, we can conclude that the Columbia campus, though cynical, is composed of numerous closet romantics. Romantics who may not have found—yet—just what it is that they are looking for. Romantics who may be saving romantic ventures for years to come. Romantics who have their definite opinions regarding modern-day relationships and related safety issues.

A wise man once said that there is a fine line between cynicism and romanticism. Our advice to all of you closet romantics is this: Seize the day. And cross that line into a romantic netherland.

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End Gate

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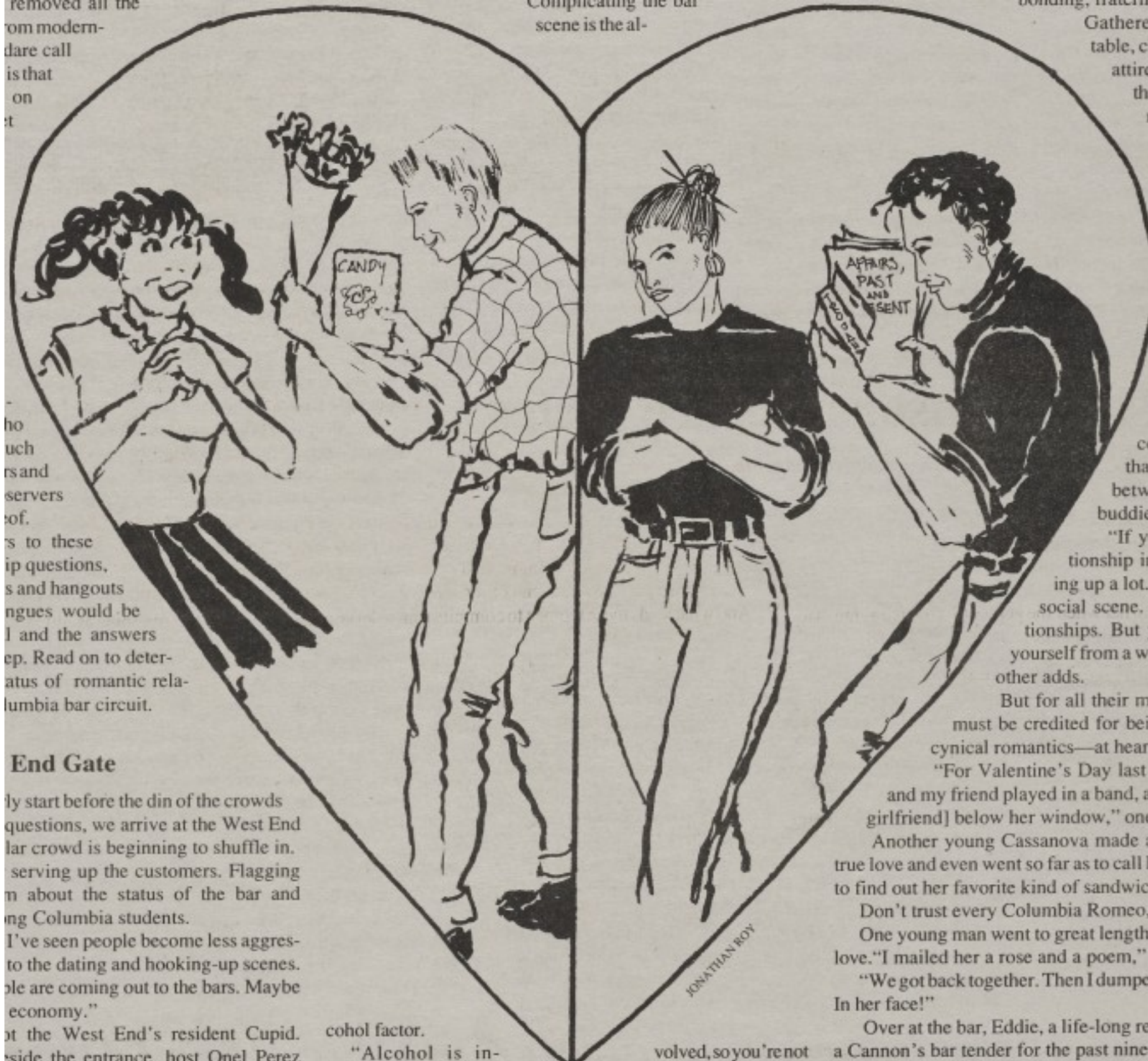
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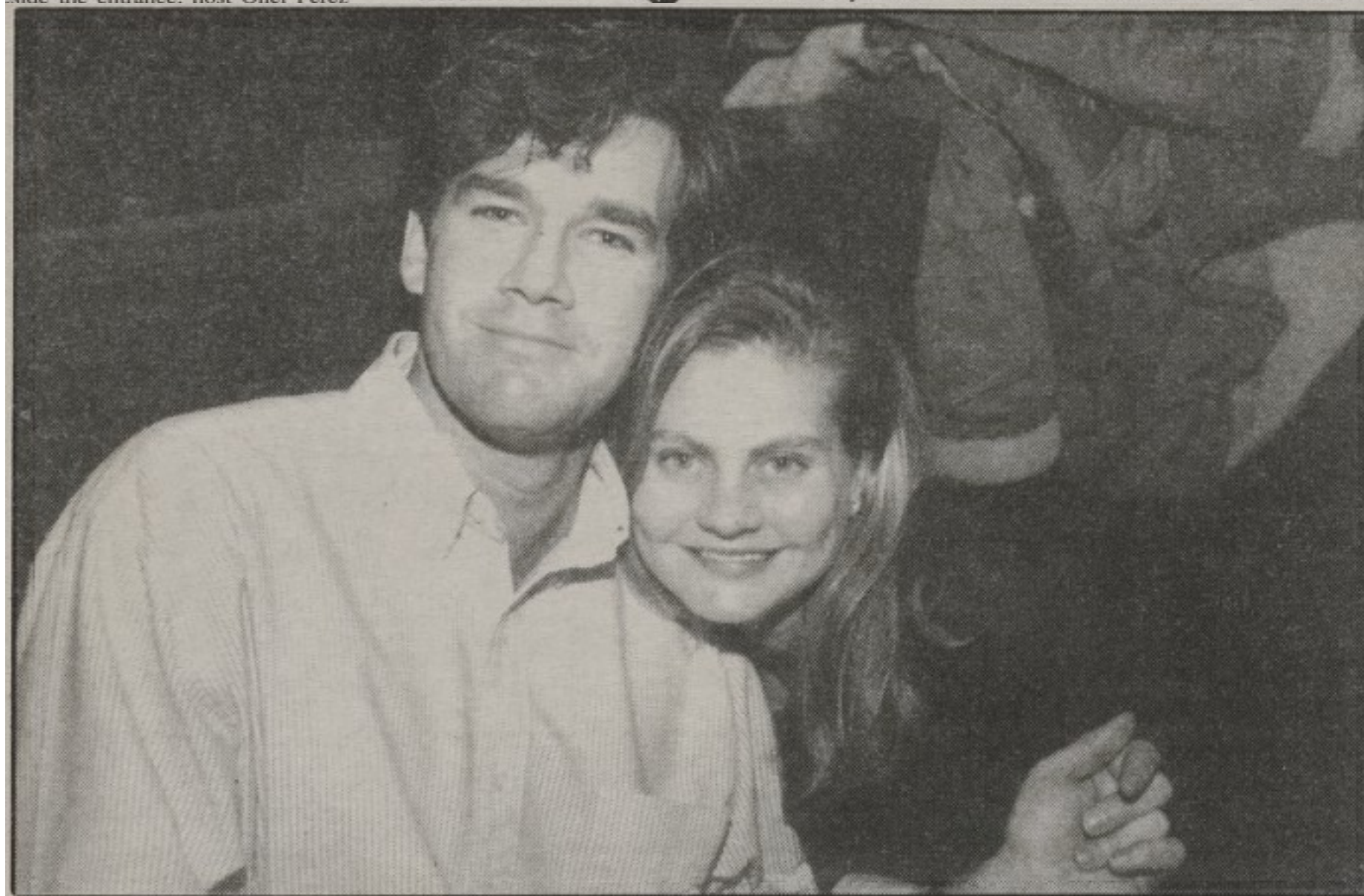
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Over at the bar, Eddie, a life-long resident
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SPECTATOR/MOSHE SAMBOL

Romance at Columbia—alive and kicking at the West End.



SPECTATOR/MOSHE SAMBOL

Lapping up the beer and good times, several students gather at Cannon's on a Thursday night.