



Love Story: Annette Rogers and Alden Davis say their strong common values sparked a romantic relationship.

A Spark, Great Passion And Strong Values

M.A.C. LYNCHSpecial to The Courant

"When I met Alden, we were going out for lunch. ... When we sat down, he bent his head and said his grace to himself. It was at that point, I thought, this is a man of values and he wasn't ashamed of his values; he wasn't trying to hide them," Annette Rogers says.

As a corporate consultant with United Technologies Corp., Alden Davis was invited to lead a process improvement in the admissions department at the Hartford College for Women in February 2002. Annette was the head of admissions.

"It was the most fun I had in a long time," Alden says. Annette brought "spark, great passion ... and from that a great project grew."

In June 2002, "Right after 9/11 in New York, a 5,000-person discussion was put together at the Javits Center (the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center in Manhattan), and we went to facilitate tables. Our relationship was forged in the ashes of 9/11," Alden says.

Combining Annette's academic background and Alden's practical experience, they began presenting workshops together in 2004. "Leading through Excellence" was one of the first programs they presented nationally and in New Zealand and Mexico.

Over the next few years, they collaborated on several workshops together. "We began with a work relationship," which developed into a supportive friendship, Alden says. They both had been married for more than 25 years and had children, who always stood as their first priority though the marriages had ended.

"We have a very strong set of common values that way," Alden says.

After several years, their friendship "grew into a romantic relationship," he says. "You're involved with each other through work. ... All of a sudden you realize you are very comfortable with that person."

Annette began working as assistant dean at the University of Hartford's Barney School of Business, and in 2007 she started pursuing a doctorate in Educational Leadership. On Labor Day weekend that year, she drove home to Avon from the university and noticed signs along the way stating, "Today's the Day." She did not know of any event going on in the area, and was surprised when she saw "a group of people standing in our yard with tents. They were friends from everywhere," Annette says.

On one of the tables Alden had arranged three clamshells, each with a message inside like a fortune cookie. "It was a reveal," Annette says.

"I was shocked, shocked" to find an engagement ring, she says. She had told Alden the preceding night that they needed to have a serious conversation about where their relationship was headed.

On July 4th, 2009, they were married by Alden's cousin, a retired minister in his 80s. Alden's son, Steffon Davis, a violinist and composer, wrote a song for their wedding, based on the Hebrew word dayenu, meaning, "If that's all there is, we're grateful. ... it's enough. When we found each other, it was dayenu," Alden says.

Alden left UTC shortly after the wedding and started his own consulting business venture, MyValueTree.com. "Our goal was to practice together. ... We used all our planning tools to visualize a positive future."

Annette completed her doctorate in 2011, and left the university to join MyValueTree in 2013.

But soon, Annette was invited back to the Barney School as an assistant dean and clinical instructor of management in the MBA program. "Alden and I still do workshops together, but I always had a passion for being involved in education," Annette says.

"She's the smart one," Alden says.

"He's the smart one," she volleys back.

"Our goal now is to reposition ourselves so we can maximize our time together. ... Our enjoyment is doing cool projects in cool places with cool people," Alden says.

Their presentations include "Change Management," "Strategic Planning," "Management Development," and one of their favorites, "Critical Thinking," which focuses on the way one process data.

"Team Pasta" is a popular program in which they guide members of a group in making pasta from scratch. "It is a great way to get groups to be in a different setting and to create something together ... to see each other outside of the work environment," Annette says.

She introduced the program to the student leadership council at the Barney School five years ago and it is now an annual event to prepare a meal honoring select faculty.

Recently, they developed "God's Quality Standard," an interactive workshop that they have led in Arizona and in East Hartford. They realized how they had grown and succeeded as a business team in 2014, when they finished a business workshop in Manhattan looking down on the World Trade Center site, where their collaboration started.

"Our work is our fun. ... It is our relationship, our marriage, our love," Alden says.

When they aren't brainstorming together on their business, they ride their tandem bicycle for pleasure. "The tandem bike is symbolic of what we do," Alden says. "You've got to be patient and purposeful about creating a shared experience. ... We try to get out any time the weather is good."

They also love ballroom dancing, which they often do at home.

This past summer they led workshops together in Beijing, China, and Annette presented her solo program: "Finding Courage — A Woman's Challenge."

"I have a passion to help women," Annette says. She grew up in an orphanage with her brother and sister until she graduated from high school. "For me, everything I have is a blessing."

"I grew up in a house where faith was part of who we are," Alden says. "Never taking the next meal for granted" was part of his upbringing as a descendant of itinerant Baptist preachers and staunch New England Methodists.

"I am thankful every day for Annette in my life," he says. "Soon after I met her, I knew I could trust her with my checkbook. She has such an honest spirit."

"We are kindred spirits," Annette says. "Two halves of a clamshell."