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compare and judge

yourself against people of the opposite sex as harshly as your own. You accept them without trying to analyze their motives or idiosyncracies. You just assume it's something beyond your comprehension.

A true friend of the opposite sex can often be more supportive than competitive.

Though not exactly like being married (for obvious reasons), life with female housemates did give me a good idea of the give-and-take involved in buying groceries, cooking, cleaning and maintaining a house.

Melanie and I finally got to the point where we would play married at work and call each other "honey" as a joke. She once turned down a party invitation just to meet my parents when they visited. (My parents, incidentally, ended up thinking this was all a grand idea.)


We hardly argued. The only time was when I bought a Rolling Stones album that was severely criticized. Melanie and I were ravenous and cooking dinner. She was about to hit me with a frying pan because I said I liked "Emotional Rescue."

"This is no time to have a domestic quarrel," I said.

While washing dishes in the evening, we invented an imaginary child "Missy" at whom we shouted in British accents. It was great fun.

Yes, the people next door and at work thought we were a bit different. But you don't worry about being pegged as "weird" when you're with good friends. And that's what we ended up being.

"How do you stand each other? Don't you drive each other crazy," people asked.

"No," we said. "Three's just good company." 

Mark Murrell is features editor for The Daily Tar Heel.



Casual 'company'

From page 1

have much choice, since I was thousands of miles away.

Mom couldn't resist a dark warning, though.

"Strange things can happen when you live with someone like that," she said in a disturbed voice. "You be careful."

Our bosses at the newspaper where we both worked didn't say much about the situation, though the city editor promised to drop by "when you least expect it."

To others we knew, though, our explanations were amusing but definitely unconvincing.

"Sure you're just friends," they said knowingly.

Luckily, Mark and I were good enough friends to laugh it off without becoming paranoid ourselves.

But it didn't take long for me to develop a burning hatred of the cast and creators of television's "Three's Company."

The usual exchange went something like this:

Friend: "Where do you live?"

Me: "In a little house near UNC-G with two friends from Chapel Hill."

Friend: "Who are they?"

I say the names, the eyebrows jump and the grin spreads slowly across Friend's face.

Friend: "Oh Yeah? Who sleeps with whom?"

Me: (Heavy sigh.) "Nobody. We're just friends."

Friend gets a brilliantly original thought.

"Hey, Just like 'Three's Company.'"

SINCE my female roommate worked late nights, Mark and I spent the most time together. No, I didn't wear cute

little ponytails and terrycloth jumpsuits. And Mark didn't spend his time chasing Dinita and me around or leaping over the sofa.

We were more like an old married couple whose marriage had long since run dry of passion. We spent pleasant evenings reading, listening to the Sex Pistols and eating Pigs in Blankets for dinner.

Oh, it was cute, all right. After work I'd sit out on the porch, while Mark put the headphones on and destroyed his mind with punk rock.

We did all the usual domestic things. I cooked, he cooked. The macaroni and cheese was his department.

We went to the laundromat. We grocery-shopped. We dressed up in miniskirt and dog collar and pogoed in local clubs. Domestic life was fun, we discovered.

Suspicious looks came our way constantly. Mark could never remember our phone number, and when the receptionist at work heard me rattle it off for him she started praying for our lost young souls.

There were some pleasant surprises for me. I admit, I had stereotyped the American male pretty thoroughly as a messy, careless, noisy animal, based on three years of life in a coed Carolina dorm.

But Mark was neat, no cruder than I and left me lots of food. For some reason, I got along with him better than I had with any female roomie ever, including my own sisters.

I think the key lay in leaving each other alone. If he headed off for Wendy's at 2 a.m., I didn't worry. If I sat in the dark for three hours, he let it go without prying.

Privacy is an essential that often is not respected by same-sex roommates or lovers, I guess.

Also, there was no hint of the competition or comparison felt so often between roommates.

And he didn't wear my clothes.

The summer had a lot of unique moments. Guests in our home always asked where Mark slept, and it didn't help that his bedroom was a converted den and that he had a hide-a-bed.

I'll never forget the weekend I passed up a trip out of town to do the ultimate in any relationship.

I met his parents.

Visions of the encounter haunted me the night before. What if his parents were members of the clergy? I could just see his mother hitting me with a Bible and calling me "that woman."

I dreamed they looked like Dagwood and Blondie.

They were great, though. The whole thing actually was kind of fun. Strange, but fun.

The summer was gone all too quickly, and finally it was the night before we had to leave the little house. We both moped around.

"We'll eat lunch together a lot," we promised each other.

But it was inescapable. We'd have to go back and live with people of the same sex.

I could almost hear a voice in the back of my head saying:

"They're messy. They eat like pigs. They never do their laundry."

"Women are terrible roommates." 

Melanie Sill is editor of Weekender.

that romantic

Penny Rue
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