



First loves found again
By Randy B. Hecht



Whatever happened to your first love? It's a question you're bound to ask yourself from time to time. You may even be tempted to look into the answer.

Should you try to find and make contact with your first love, you won't be alone. *In Lost and Found Lovers: Facts and Fantasies of Rekindled Romances* (William Morrow, Inc. 1997), Nancy Kalish, Ph.D., wrote about a study she conducted between 1993 and 1996 of 1001 couples who rediscovered one another years after they had ended their relationships and lost touch.

"Even before the Internet, people didn't have any trouble finding each other," she says, and now that various websites have been created to facilitate these searches, it's become "trendy" to try to reconnect with a long-lost ex. "People want to know where their classmates are. They go in, they look around and decide, 'Hey, I wonder what happened to that person? I'll just write a little hi,' and they don't realize that these old feelings come back for many people."

Are those old feelings based in nostalgia? Or is first love, even when it's something our elders (and later even we) dismiss as "puppy love" more real than grown-ups think it is?

Kalish's research says those lingering feelings for a lost love are not just illusions or fantasy. "The fantasy is that you see this person the way they were. You look at this 80-year-old woman and you see a 16-year-old. That's the idea of the fantasy. But that continues; that's a wonderful thing, and that's a sexy thing, and that's one of the reasons that sex is skyrocketing in this population."

The question, Kalish says, is why these feelings are real. She dismisses the idea that we "just happen" to meet "the right person" when we're 15; what's more, she dismisses the idea of the soul mate, the idea that there is one perfect person in the world for you. "I believe there's a lot of people we can love, and the seniors bear that out" she says. "They have these wonderful marriages; the spouse dies, and they never think they can love again, and then suddenly the lost love comes around, and they're blessed twice."

There is, of course, the possibility that you and your lost love will not be as lucky. For starters, there's the little complicating issue of marital status: Kalish says 80 percent of the couples in her original study included at least one person who was married to someone else when contact was re-established. Anyone thinking of searching for a lost love should be aware of that chance and factor it into their reasons for wanting to re-connect.

On the other hand, if you're both single and interested, you may very well be able to rekindle that romance. Kalish's study indicates that if the bonds in your youth were real, there's a good chance they'll have endured. "The sharing of roots is very significant," she says. "These people, the ones who are most successful, were dating when they were...22 or younger, what we call adolescence, and they basically grew up together. They shared classes; in most cases they knew each other's families...they really knew each other, and they have a lot in common because they grew up in the same way."