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Chicago couple blazed the trail for Internet love

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They said it wouldn't last.

Really. A whole bunch of people said it. To their faces.

"What?!" Don Dunn remembers responding when his son, Chris, said he had met his future wife. "I thought it was a joke, right?"

Chris, you see, met the love of his life, Pam, via computer. In 1982.

Chris Dunn and Pam Jensen met on a CompuServe CB Simulator program that linked computer users nationwide in an early version of a chat room. After a few months of virtual chatting, Chris booked an April 23 flight from New York to O'Hare International to meet Pam face-to-face. They spent the weekend together. One year later, to the day, they married.

Last month they celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary.

"I happened to find the person I fell in love with on a computer," said a nonchalant Chris. "And 25 years later we're still in love."

Chris and Pam's courtship and wedding caused a bit of a media frenzy. The couple appeared on "Good Morning America," "The Phil Donahue Show," "20/20" and in numerous magazine and newspaper articles, including a Chicago Tribune story on Jan. 26, 1983, headlined "Cupid and Computers Conquer All."

"We got married at City Hall," said Chris. "Me, my wife, three friends and five TV cameras."

Now, of course, a couple falling in love online is hardly noteworthy. But Pam and Chris were operating in uncharted territory.

"At that time," Pam recalls, "computers weren't as pervasive in our homes and our daily life. To a lot of people, especially my parents' generation and their friends, it seemed very alien, a very suspicious concept to even be communicating like that."

But Chris, a technophile from an early age, was hooked on CB Simulator from the moment he logged onto it in his New York City apartment. Pam, a zookeeper at the Lincoln Park Zoo at the



time, was less enamored of machines, but happened upon CB Simulator at a friend's birthday party one night and proceeded to spend the next five hours "chatting."

"It wasn't this lonely-hearts-club-type thing," Pam said. "Back then I had been pretty adamant about not getting married. I was of the mind that a woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle. It just didn't seem important to me.

"But then," she added, "I met Chris and we clicked so profoundly that I really wanted to be with him."

Today the couple lives on the North Side, where they care for their three cats and Bichon Frise and enjoy occasional nights out at the Fondue Stube on Peterson Avenue. Chris, 51, works at the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, where he's the technical operations manager. Pam, 56, has retired from zookeeping and is concentrating on getting healthy—she was diagnosed in January with uterine cancer.

"If it weren't for the way we met, I think we could just be any other 25-years-married couple," said Chris. "I've always adored her. She adores me. It's very easy to love my wife, I guess that's just the way I am."

And Papa Dunn? Asked whether he was surprised that Pam and Chris have logged 25 years together—and seem primed for a good 25 more—Don sounds happy to have been proven wrong.

"Obviously they're a great match," he said. "I guess it was fate—and CompuServe."

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