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Photo by Ted Kirk

Race not deterrent, say more couples

By Terri Willson

Sue, a UNL student, wants to marry Jerry. She is white, he is black.

Lincolinites Josephine, white, and Don, black, already are married. They plan to have children.

Amid a history of racial prejudice, a tiny change toward integrated marriages is beginning to drift across the land. Sues and Jerrys and Jos and Dons are pairing off "for better or for worse."

Josephine (not her real name), 19, works at a quick-serve hamburger restaurant downtown. She finished one year at UNL and plans to return, possibly to major in English. Dan works at a university office and is working on his master's in English.

They met each other a year ago at Neihardt residential center, where both lived. Once they started dating, the ice was broken for other mixed couples there to date, Josephine said.

For Josephine, skin color was not important in choosing a man to marry, she said.

But it was to her parents. And to her "so called" friends, as she called them. They told her she would throw her life away by marrying a black man. But her parents have "had to accept it, to keep correspondence with me," Josephine said.

Don's family accepted the marriage more readily. According to UNL marriage and family instructor Nicholas Babchuk this is often the case because blacks, subjects of discrimination all of their lives, do not want to show prejudice themselves.

"They love me," Josephine said of Don's parents. And despite their disapproval, her parents welcomed Don to their Omaha home to stay during the summer without any problems.

Josephine and Don, in his late 20s, plan to have children. Their philosophy is that times are changing, and people today will accept their child more than mulatto children were accepted in the past.

Since children from such marriages tend to look black, they usually are raised in a black culture, according to Babchuk.

Because Don and Josephine work, they are not often seen together in public. Sometimes when they are, they get a not-so-funny look or other unpleasant reaction, they said.

There is no rule forbidding interracial marriage in the Catholic Church or in Protestant churches. However, finding a clergyman to perform the marriage ceremony might be a different story. Most interracial marriages, such as Josephine's and Don's, are performed in civil court.

And what about the clergyman—marriage counselor—what does he think?

The Rev. Edward Tucek, marriage counselor for the Catholic Social Service Center in Lincoln, said there is a greater tolerance today for inter-faith marriages than there is for interracial marriages. But he believes acceptance of the latter is growing.

In counseling a mixed couple who is considering marriage (he said he has dealt with a few), Father Tucek said he warns the couple that "people will raise their eyebrows."

Most engaged couples are idealistic and think they can battle any forthcoming difficulties, he said. This idealism prevents them from looking openly and objectively at themselves.

The couple must think of their possible children, their schooling, teenage and dating years and eventual interest in marriage.

"In spite of all this... it is the couple's decision," he said.

One case which fits the above category is that of a white, 20-year-old UNL psychology major (She also asked not to be named, and will be called Sue) and her 26-year-old boyfriend, a black medical student in Omaha (whom we call Jerry).

Sue met Jerry at Love library. She said she was frightened at first because she did not know what others would think, seeing her with him. When they started dating, she was sensitive to stares.

She told herself she was his friend and she would not fall in love with him. Jerry is the first black man she dated, although Jerry had a white girlfriend before.

"My folks always taught me not to be prejudiced," Sue said. "But my dad always made jokes about black people. He isn't mean, just of a different generation."

White her mother doesn't particularly approve of the idea, she has accepted the fact that Sue might marry Jerry and wants what will make her daughter happy, Sue said. Sue's father, however, is opposed to his daughter's marrying a black man.

The family comes from a small Nebraska town, with no black residents. The word has spread, and their reputation has suffered, Sue said. But Jerry's parents, from Omaha, have accepted Sue.

By dating Jerry, Sue has caused a terrible rift between her and her father, she said. But her parents maintain she will always be welcome in their home, she said.

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How do you think Lincolinites react to black - white couples who are about to be married? Turn to p. 2 for results of our simulated engagement.

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