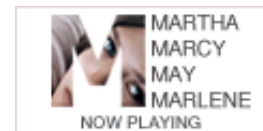


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Skype Postpones Sweet Sorrow

By JENNIFER CONLIN

THEY met in Costa Rica, on a summer community service program for teenagers. Within days they had fallen in love.

“It was like a movie,” sighed Gabrielle Brown, 17. For one romantic month, they worked and played together. “My favorite moment was when we swam together in a lagoon under a waterfall,” said Eric Rodriguez, 16. Said Ms. Brown: “I remember kissing him in the rain.”

It had to come to an end, of course. Ms. Brown went back home to high school in Ann Arbor, Mich., Mr. Rodriguez to 11th grade in Philadelphia. Still, in the ensuing months, they have watched movies together on Netflix, stared into each other’s eyes for hours on end and once spent the night together — all despite being hundreds of miles apart.

These days, thanks to Skype, summer really can be endless.

“We would usually Skype for about three hours a day,” said Ms. Brown of the couple’s first months apart. Once, she said, they both fell asleep on their beds next to their computers. “At one point I just listened to him sleep,” she said.

Skype, the Internet video conferencing service, has been a godsend for parents with children away at college, for far-flung relatives keeping tabs on one another, and, of course, for long distance lovers. But with autumn the high season for Skyping among teenagers returning to real life after summer adventures away, some may be starting to wonder: Are summer romances meant to be continued or are they better off as a sweet memory?

For parents of teenagers, Skype dating may offer a bit of comfort over the in-person kind. “Here’s the good news: parents won’t have to worry about a pregnancy scare through Skype,” said Josh Shipp, the author of “The Teen’s Guide to World Domination,” who is considered an authority on teenage behavior. “But how young people control their feelings of love, or what is more commonly infatuation, is a concern to me because now it can lead to non-stop texting and Skyping, and become all-consuming.”

Oliver Field, a sophomore at Occidental College in Los Angeles, knows too well how the Internet

can transform a summer love affair into a long-term Skype affair. He and his girlfriend, Elizabeth Chamberlain, a sophomore at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Wash., had spent many summers as friends at their West Coast camp before finally becoming a couple two summers ago.

“It is definitely not the easiest situation,” Mr. Field said, citing meddling roommates who pop up on the screen. “But at least with Skype we can actually see each other’s facial reactions when we are apart.”

His girlfriend does not always find Skype as easy. “He was sick one morning and felt so ill that I stayed on Skype with him all day to make sure he was O.K.,” she said. “But then I also had to sit there and watch while two girls, who are his friends, came in and gave him soup. I wanted to be there instead of them.”

Lauren Trefny, a senior at the University of Virginia, said she will never forget this last summer in Italy, and not just because of the fabulous art course she attended. “I met him in Rome,” she said, dreamily. “He was Danish, sweet, intelligent and handsome. It was so romantic. It was the perfect summer fling.”

When they parted a few months ago, they turned to Skype, but before long, they discovered it didn’t work so well. The six-hour time difference between them made scheduling hard. “On the one hand we could open up so much more on Skype than we could on a phone,” Ms. Trefny said. “But then one of us would often miss a Skype date. And then it became impossible because we would argue, and you can then see how upset the other person is but you can’t reach out and touch them or comfort them.”

Ms. Trefny used Skype in a previous long-distance relationship, with her high school boyfriend. But she said they knew each other well enough to weather those difficulties. “Skype might be a way to continue the magic of a summer relationship,” she said, “but I am not sure it is the best way to develop one.”

Indeed, though Gabrielle Brown and Eric Rodriguez have visited each other three times since they left Costa Rica in late July, they decided at the airport on their last visit to break up.

“We love each other and can see spending our future together, but right now it is too hard for both of us,” Ms. Brown said. Their schoolwork began to suffer, she said, from all the Skyping. Added Mr. Rodriguez, sadly: “I find it hard to look at her but not be able to hold her or kiss her.”

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