

1944

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A LOVE STORY

All good love stories must have a beginning, and I suppose ours began in late-summer 1943.

A Westerner from a small town in British Columbia, I joined the Army when I was 17, and following postings in Vernon, Nanaimo and Vancouver in my home province, I was sent to the Trade School at Hamilton, Ontario. I enrolled in a combined Electric-Wireless course, and within a year was promoted to Sergeant-Instructor.

One evening in late August, 1943, I was returning on the street car from the downtown area. I was alone; and sitting about mid-way down the car, also alone, was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. She was tall and slim, and her lovely face, accented by high cheekbones, was framed with a mass of well-groomed, long, wavy black hair. I could not keep my eyes off her and finally she looked my way, and our eyes met and held for a brief moment.

My stop came and I disembarked from the street car, but I could not forget that beautiful girl. Over the course of a month or so, with a lot of snoop investigation, even to the point of following her when again I saw her, I learned her name and address, but I lacked the courage to meet her or even to ask her to dance when once again I saw her at a dance.

In the Army, things never stand still, and a call came out for volunteers to teach ski-mountaineering to the Lord Lovatt Scouts who were coming to Jasper, Alberta from Scotland to train for a possible invasion of Europe through the Scandinavian countries. Having lived all my life in the mountains, I jumped at the opportunity, was accepted, and in October started training at the Columbia Icefields. Even though our time was filled to capacity, I still could not forget that beautiful girl back in Hamilton, so I wrote her a letter, possibly finding the courage because

of the distance between us; and, wonder of wonders, she replied. She said she remembered the Sergeant on the street car, and during the correspondence that continued throughout the winter, we got to know each other, and vowed that we would meet when I returned to Hamilton in May.

And we did, even though it was an accidental meeting. It was my first evening back in Hamilton and a fellow-Sergeant, whom I had not seen all winter, and I went to a restaurant to catch up on what had been happening while I was away. As we walked back to the Barracks, we passed a theatre just as my dream girl and another young lady, who turned out to be her sister, came out to the street. She was just as I had remembered her all winter long, but, as this was our first actual meeting, words were hesitant. However, we did arrange to meet at a convenient time a couple of days hence.

Fate intervened. My father, back in B.C. had requested that I be given a month's furlough to help with the heavy Spring farming work, so I left Hamilton for B.C. immediately.

Again it was back to letter-writing and, fortunately, I was forgiven for standing her up the way I did, and we arranged a date at a specific time and place in June when I returned to Hamilton from my furlough.

This time we met; but the news was not good and I had to tell her that I had discovered when I returned to camp that in five days I would be leaving for Advanced Training in Sussex, N.B., and in two months would be going overseas.

Five days! We dated, we talked, we took long walks -- we got to know each other and we fell in love and we both knew that each was for the other.....so on the night before I left for Sussex we became engaged, with the promise that as soon as the war was over, we would be married.

Letter writing again, and during the next month we decided we didn't want to wait and that we would get married before I went overseas; and thus started a busy month for my prospective bride as she had to arrange all the wedding details on her own, and relay the progress to me by mail. For my part, I applied for a Leave of Absence and was granted six days, two of which would be spent travelling to and from Sussex and Hamilton. I cashed in all the War Bonds I had purchased to date and arranged our four-day honeymoon at the Foxhead Hotel in Niagara Falls.

We were married in a little church in Hamilton at 2:00 p.m. on September 11, 1944. That evening, following a reception at the home of her parents, we caught the bus for Niagara Falls to start our four-day life together. Because I was going overseas; because it was wartime; because of the myriad of uncertainties; we did not know how long we would be separated or even if I would ever get back, or if we would ever enjoy a normal life together.

We awakened the next morning to the awesome thunder of the Falls and soon we were walking along the pathways observing their majestic beauty. During those four days, we knew that the Falls had been created only for us -- because there was only us.....had all the people suddenly disappeared, or if all the people on Earth were suddenly around us, we wouldn't have known.....the sun shone only for us; the flowers spread their perfume only for us and the birds sang only for us. We were alone -- we knew only each other -- we wanted to crawl into each other's skin and stay there forever - - but we had only four days!

We avoided the crowds and ate at a tiny cafe about three blocks from the Hotel. I remember on the final night of our honeymoon, we decided to have a fine dinner at a more elite restaurant. We ordered our "special" meal, and when it was served, the jukebox started playing "I'll Be Seeing You". We both choked up completely and neither of us could eat, so we left the money for the meal and quietly left. The next morning we parted -- for how long we couldn't even

guess. That time apart seemed years longer than it actually was, as, once again, we had only letters to relay and protect our love.

I returned to Hamilton from overseas in 1946 and we spent the next three years there while I apprenticed at The Hamilton Spectator. The West beckoned, so in 1949 we packed up and went to Calgary, Alberta, and then, following a couple of more moves, we took up permanent residence in Invermere, B.C. We seldom mention our honeymoon at Niagara Falls, but in our hearts, we both know that it was during those four days spent there that we bonded, a bonding that has survived the ups and downs and the joys and sorrows of a half-century of married life.

I suppose all good love stories should have an ending, but ours will never end..... Next year, 1994, on September 11, in company with our four children and their spouses, and, at this date, four grandchildren, we will celebrate our Golden Wedding Anniversary.