

1992

LISA AND CARM'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE

We always imagined that June 20, 1992 would be a bright summer day, heavy with the scent of blossoming lilacs, and that our long awaited and much planned-out wedding would go off without a hitch. Two and a half years of steady, careful (and often head-butting) planning would positively, we thought, eliminate the habitual "Murphy's Law" flukes that accompany every blissful occasion. When the day finally arrived we were ready to either kiss each other or kill each other. Some fairy tale.

As luck would have it, the day turned out to be the coldest June 20th on record. Not only that, a drizzle that lasted the entire weekend began that afternoon. Thankfully the ceremony and reception went off without any major catastrophes, aside from the beloved groom being scarce throughout the night as he was continually trying to contact our hotel to confirm our reservations. He is, after all, one of those "worst case scenario" pessimists and had the awful feeling that something would go wrong with the booking.

You see, it all started early in the spring when we decided to spend our honeymoon in Niagara Falls, Ontario. The city has always held a special place in our hearts -- I was born there, my relatives still live there, and it was there on August 4, 1990, in beautiful Victoria Park that my husband proposed to me (as I had always dreamed). So even though we were unable to have our wedding in the Falls, we planned to spend our most memorable night in our favourite place.

Our next step was to decide at which hotel we would stay. Being familiar with the area, I suggested the Skyline Foxhead since we could be guaranteed a view of the Falls and the park we loved. What would be more romantic, right? So in April we sealed our fate and secured our room. My husband was leery about reserving over the phone as he was unsure whether or not he was understood by the woman taking the reservation. She seemed confused as to why we would be arriving at 3:00am on Sunday the 21st of June. We explained we would be coming from Hamilton immediately after our reception. After much discussion, she assured us that our room would be ready for us upon our arrival. A few weeks later we received the confirmation of our Honeymoon Weekend in the mail. Everything was set. Or so we thought.

Three months later the big day had arrived. Despite the weather, we had a beautiful ceremony and all our loved ones came out to join us in celebrating at the church and afterward. Some time after midnight, as our action-packed evening drew to a close, the last cheek was kissed, and the last guest left for the comfort of their bed, we realized that the fast-paced merry-go-round ride that was our wedding day had finally come to an end. We went through the hall and collected our belongings. I changed from my wedding dress into shorts for the one hour drive ahead of us. Carm decided to remain in his tuxedo. Close family and friends ushered us to our car that was fully decorated so anyone could tell at a glance we were JUST MARRIED! Carm was still expressing some concern at this point but our families reassured us that it was just wedding jitters, so we felt somewhat soothed.

We set out from Hamilton around 2:00am toward Niagara Falls and our new life together. Finally alone, as husband and wife, we shared our memories of the evening with each other. Laughing, we finally began to wind down from all the excitement of the day. As we neared Smithville travelling along Hwy 20, we came upon a deer in the middle

of the road. It was one of the most breathtaking scenes we've ever experienced. Staring at us from the opposite lane, the deer remained motionless as we slowed down and passed it. We held hands, believing it to be a positive sign of what was to come. NOT!

We finally arrived at our hotel shortly before 3:30am. We were exhausted and looking forward to spending our first night together. As we pulled into the valet parking a man approached us from the hotel. He introduced himself as the hotel manager and asked if he could be of some assistance. He appeared confused as we told him we had reservations so we produced our confirmation paper. He explained that there must be a mistake as the hotel was booked solid for the night. He asked us to accompany him to the front desk in order to resolve the situation. OH NO, HERE WE GO!!

Once inside, he checked with the hotel computer and, low and behold, our reservation had been cancelled. He told us that because we had not checked in on time and had not called in to explain our delay, that they had given our room away. At first we thought this was some kind of cruel joke concocted by our wedding party but we soon found out that this was no laughing matter. He politely informed us that we would have to find other accommodations for the night. At this point, the one nerve that my husband had left burst as he began to voice his obvious displeasure. He expressed his disbelief that such a reputable hotel would be capable of such a mix-up, and would even suggest that we go "cruising around" the Falls at 4:00am in the morning on our wedding night looking for a place to sleep. Seeing that we were both distraught and half asleep, he must have taken pity on us. The manager called the Skyline Brock (its sister hotel) and inquired about a room. What luck, they had a room! One room. The manager directed us over, assuring us that he would have a room for us the following night.

Our troubles were over, we thought, as we drove over. We parked out front and went to the front desk. The clerk handed us the key and, obviously apprized of our situation, told us how lucky we were to get the last room. Not much for words at this point we smiled and went back to park the car. Little did we know what lay ahead for us.

Laden with our bags, and a gift from our best friends (with express orders not to be opened until we were in our room), we made our way to our room. Carm proceeded to open the door and appeared to be having some difficulty. Believing him to be semi-conscious at this point (after all it was almost 4:00am!), I took the key and tried my luck with the lock. No good. We tried a few more times before giving up and returning to the front desk with our things. The clerk sent us back up in the elevator with a chambermaid who explained that because the building was old the doors would occasionally stick. No problem right? Wrong. Neither her key (nor her hip) proved to be any better than ours. Alas, even the mighty chambermaid had struck out!

Things seemed to be going from bad to worse. The cheerful chambermaid left us stranded in the hallway, promising to return shortly. Alone in the corridor, about the only thing that looked good at this point was a tiny 2 foot bench positioned just outside our door. A love seat made for one. It was here that we flung our weary bodies as we waited for the chambermaid to get some help. The strategically placed bench gave us a great view of the door of our room. The wood was rich and elegant but we would have chopped it up for firewood to get through to the bed.

After what seemed like an eternity (but was actually only 20 minutes) the elevator doors slid open to reveal -- the manager from

the first hotel! With his arms spread wide in a helpless gesture he apologized profusely upon recognizing us from the first hotel. He withdrew a keychain from his pocket and showed raw confidence as he stated these were the master keys. We brightened up a little at the thought of actually getting to see the inside of the hotel room. He stepped up to the door and inserted the master key, all the while describing the antique decor of the interior. He jiggled the key around a bit and gently leaned his body into the door. Maybe there was a knack to getting this special door open. We soon realized that if there was, the manager was unfamiliar with the technique. As his attempts became more vigorous, the whole picture suddenly became comical and we began to giggle in spite of ourselves. He, too, finally admitted defeat but vowed to find someone who would get the door open for us. Sure. As he and the chambermaid left in the elevator he told us to stay right where we were. Where the heck were we going? It was only 4:30am!

We would have been quite a sight to other hotel patrons sitting on that bench; me in shorts on the coldest day of the summer, and Carm in a tuxedo with a long dead flower losing petals every time he moved. We glared at the unrelenting door with unconcealed hatred while prattling on about the course of events that brought us to this two-bit footstool of a bench.

After blowing steam, we tried to catch a few winks as we leaned against each other. It wasn't hard considering we'd been up for almost 23 hours now. Half an hour and one bald stem later the noise of the elevator doors roused us from a horrible nightmare in which we were stuck out on the streets of Niagara Falls on our honeymoon night...oh, so it really isn't a dream. We were still in the hallway, facing the manager, the chambermaid, and WOW a ghostbuster! Oh, sorry a locksmith. Where the heck did they find a locksmith at (looking at my watch) AAAGGGHHH 5:10 in the morning? I didn't know they worked 24 hours! WE'RE SAVED!!!! I almost felt like getting up to dance but Carm's glazed-over look told me I'd be without a partner so I instead hid my eagerness to plow through them all and dive into bed.

The locksmith set down his equipment and went about the tedious process of examining the lock to determine which tool to use. As his first few attempts failed, our bleary-eyed but hopeful expressions sagged into worn-out, irritated scowls. If looks could kill that door would have been 500 packs of toothpicks. He pulled out what appeared to be his "heavy duty" equipment as we sat there salivating like Pavlov's dogs in anticipation of an open door. Is it too much to expect that a locksmith is capable of picking a lock? Obviously it is because after 10 minutes of wrestling with the doorknob, the locksmith informed us all that the lock was somehow jammed. Where's a thief when you need one? The only way we would be getting in that room tonight (this morning?) would be by taking the door off its hinges.

The gracious manager, who was by now almost (but not quite) as tired as we were, took us aside and presented us with our only option: He would put us up at one of their motels for the night. Carm rhetorically asked whether this motel had a "view of the Falls". All I cared about at this point was whether or not it had a bed. He then told us to return the next day to our original hotel.

We packed the car up (again) and drove up to the Maple Leaf Village Motel. Upon our arrival at the front desk the night clerk addressed us as "Mr. & Mrs. Runco". Carm and I were so zonked that we started to look around for his parents. It took us a few moments to realize they meant us. Apologetically, he gave us the key to our

"honeymoon suite". We prayed aloud as we put the key into the lock and, yes Virginia there is a Santa Claus, IT WORKED!!!! It was 5:30am when we finally drifted off.

As quickly as we fell asleep it was time to get up and check out. We braved the cold and rain and returned to the Foxhead at about 10:30am on Sunday morning. After waiting over half an hour for valet parking, we checked in. They were expecting us because our key was in a labelled envelope. We made our way to our room and were both relieved and taken aback by the beautiful view of the Falls and our Park. Big sigh. But no rest for the weary -- we were starving so we grabbed an elevator and went right up to the buffet lounge.

We were greeted by a waitress who showed us to our window seats overlooking the Falls and Victoria Park. The place was empty but the waitress asked us to get our food quickly as there was a convention due shortly. We took her advice and piled our plates high. No sooner had we returned to our table when a mob of 200 or more hungry people stampeded through the doors and swarmed the buffet table. They didn't leave a crumb. Nevertheless, we enjoyed the meal.

As we had not anticipated the near-Arctic weather of the weekend, we had only brought shorts with us so we decided to do some shopping in Maple Leaf Village for some warmer clothing. We spent most of the afternoon browsing in the shops but because of the weather we decided to spend the evening in our room. We had seen an advertisement in our room for pay-per-view movies so we stocked up with some snacks and headed back to our hotel.

We snuggled up on the bed to watch a murder mystery (Final Analysis with Richard Gere and Kim Basinger). About an hour into the movie and just as the murder was about to happen, the picture on our TV blanked out. We stared at the screen in disbelief. Carm turned to me and said, "Let's go home". We could not believe our bad luck. Maintenance came up to try and fix the TV but he was (take a guess) unsuccessful. We agreed to cut our losses and call it a night. It was 9:00pm on a honeymoon weekend and we were asleep before most 12 year olds. What party animals, eh?

The next morning, as we were packing up, Carm noticed a price list on the back of the door. The rate per night was \$100 more than what we were quoted when we booked. With some concern, we finally went down to check out. We gave the clerk our room number and he brought it up on the computer. He then presented us with a bill. \$42.00. Was this some kind of joke? He checked with the manager and returned, explaining that the hotel had generously paid for our weekend. We only paid for brunch, valet parking, and a movie that we never saw. Once we pointed out the movie mishap, he took that off the bill as well. That left us with a grand total of about \$30.00 for the entire fun-filled weekend!

We thought that the hardest part of starting a new life together would be the wedding day. Au contraire! The hardest part, it seems, is dealing with the unexpected. Reliving the entire ordeal as we write this essay, we remember it with a smile. Despite the chaotic events of that weekend, we still had a wonderful time. Everyone went out of their way to make our stay as comfortable as they could. We still believe that Niagara Falls is the greatest place in the world for honeymooners. They say that you never forget your honeymoon. We couldn't even if we tried.