

1974

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Little did anyone realize how important our family get-together would be during the Christmas festivities of 1971. My immediate family is from Ottawa, Ontario and we had planned to visit other family members in Hamilton.

On Christmas Eve we were at my Cousin Barb's house where she had secretly invited one of her girlfriends over so we could "bump" into each other. When Mary and I met, it was Love at first sight. Mary is a dark haired, doe-eyed beauty and I knew that she was the woman of my dreams. The only minor impediment to our plans of seeing each other daily was the fact that we lived some 300 miles apart. She was a college student and I was working in Ottawa while my application to join the R.C.M.P. was being processed. Daily visits were out of the question, but we did manage to get together on

numerous weekends and we certainly contributed greatly to Ma Bell's long distance profit picture that year!

In August that year I was accepted into the R.C.M.P. and was sent off to Regina, Saskatchewan for basic training. During the next 6 months we were only able to get together at Thanksgiving and Christmas. Distance, as they say, makes the heart grow fonder and by now I knew that Mary was the woman with whom I wanted to spend the rest of my life.

On Christmas Eve, exactly 1 year to the day after we first met, I "popped the question" to her in a very emotional moment. Mary and I had driven down to Niagara Falls for the day. Even though it was in the dead of winter, Niagara Falls will always be a place for Lovers to go. Walking along the Promenade, hand in hand, arm in arm, with the omnipresent roar of the Falls in the background and the mist billowing up from the river-bottom below, it was as if we were the only people in the world that day.

In those days in the R.C.M.P., one had to wait at least 2 years from date of engagement into the Force before you could get married. I joined on August 8th., 1972, and so we set our wedding plans for the August 10th., 1974 which was the first Saturday after 2 years was up. By now Mary had joined me in Fort McMurray, northern Alberta, and we busily and excitedly made long-distance wedding plans for

Hamilton. We had planned to drive back to Ontario, get married, and spend a week or so in Niagara Falls. We had really planned a fabulous wedding and subsequent honeymoon. We knew that it would be a once in a lifetime experience and we wanted to do it right.

Then the bombshell came!!!

As the end of July grew near and the day was rapidly approaching when we would be leaving to drive back to Hamilton for the wedding, the Staff Sargent in charge of the detachment called me into his office. He told me that due to unforeseen personell shortages at the office, that he could not afford to let me go away on Leave and that we would therefore have to cancel our wedding plans!!! He and I discussed this catastrophe quite vociferously over the next couple of days and we both took it to higher authorities, but the bottom line was that they couldn't do without me. We all know that it's nice to be wanted and appreciated, but this was not what I had in mind when I first heard the saying! The Staff Sargent looked at my schedule and figured he could afford to let me go to Hamilton for my regularly scheduled 5 day long weekend the following week, August 17th! That was very kind of him, but

did nothing to undo what had already been done, to say nothing about soothing the anger and feeling of incredulity that Mary and I both felt. The bottom line was that we could get married that Saturday, August 17th, or wait until some other obscure date in the future.

Well we quickly decided that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, so August 17th was a lot better than Who knows when?

Of course by now we hurriedly had to change our plans and let everyone involved know what the status was.

It's no wonder that wedding plans are normally made so far in advance. Have you ever tried to plan a big wedding on 2 weeks notice? Well I couldn't get away of course, so that meant that Mary had to suddenly book a flight at full fare, no special summer time discount rates, and fly home to Ontario. Once there, there was the extreme difficulty and unenviable task of single-handedly having to reorganise the Church, Minister, reception hall, caterers, etc etc etc ad infinitum. This of course is during the busy summer time wedding season when all of these people and places have already long since been booked.

While she was very capably going about these chores, I was still plugging away at work, so happy to be there of course! Like Mary, I too had to book a full fare flight to Hamilton, but unfortunately all the flights from Fort McMurray to Edmonton were already booked and I would then have to drive to Edmonton first in order to catch a flight. As Thursday which was my departure date, slowly dragged closer, I was

wondering what, if anything, could also go wrong.

The old saying "If it wasn't for bad luck I'd have no luck at all" was quickly shouted out to me in a big way once again. I was playing in one of the senior men's fastball leagues at that time and we had a game scheduled for one evening after work. Of course I wasn't supposed to be playing that night because I was supposed to be away on my honeymoon having just gotten married. However because of the aforementioned change in plans I was still in town and definitely in the mood to have a good aggressive game of ball, and hopefully hit a few things hard to get rid of a bit of frustration. Sure enough I did hit a few things hard, including the other team's catcher when I was sliding into home plate. When the dust had finally settled, I was lying there with a badly broken ankle!!! I simply couldn't believe my luck, or lack thereof. They carted me off to the hospital where they quickly and accurately confirmed what I already knew. My right ankle was indeed broken and I would need a cast for at least the next 2 months. They put me in a full length leg cast and sent me on my way the next day. This of course is now only a couple of days before my already once postponed wedding and my beautiful bride-to-be

is thousands of miles away working herself almost to exhaustion in the what should be the joyous task of arranging the most happy day of our lives. Wow! How do you now phone her and tell this latest tidbit of news. Delicately I can assure you, but I don't think I had got much more than an amorous greeting spoken before she knew that something was dreadfully wrong. More than one tear was shed during that conversation!

Here we were, having planned things down to the last minute and they had virtually blown up all around us again. Of course I had planned to wear my Red Serge or dress uniform when I proudly walked down the aisle on our wonderful day, but I can assure you my dress pants cannot fit over a full length leg cast, and I couldn't walk anyway with that cast on. But the show, or wedding that is, must go on!

Of course I still couldn't get a flight from Fort McMurray to Edmonton, so somehow I would have to drive myself. No small task when the 2 are 5 hours apart. Somehow I loaded myself into my car, put my right leg over the console, and drove left footed all the way to Edmonton. You can't imagine how relieved I was to finally see Fort McMurray disappearing from view in my mirrors. Not that there was anything wrong with the town of course, but just that I had much more important thoughts at hand.

The drive was uneventful and I safely arrived at the airport. While the stewardesses were giving me pre-boarding assistance they all had a good chuckle about the fact my bride had to break my leg in order to go through

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with the wedding.

The next day, Friday, was the day before the wedding and should have been taken up with meeting family and friends but alas there wasn't time for that. Fortunately a good family friend in Hamilton is also a noted surgeon. He examined me and announced that he could put a temporary walking cast on my ankle that would be sufficient for the wedding and until we returned to Alberta. Once that was done my elderly Grandmother quickly redesigned my dress pants so that they would accommodate my new cast and the wedding was set.

One of the few plans that Mary was not able to re-organize was a Hotel in Niagara Falls for the night of our wedding. There simply wasn't a room in town, and she had no alternative but to book us into the Royal York in Toronto for that first night.

When we arrived, there was a tremendous crowd of people milling about and it was impossible to find a bellhop. So there we were in our finest, struggling along in my walking cast trying to carry our luggage through the throngs of people. As we waited in line to check in, murmurs filtered down the line that they were full and there were simply no



rooms left. Mary of course was concerned but I bravely and assuredly comforted her, letting her know that the Royal York would never make such an oversight to not honour our reservations. When we finally got to the front of the queue, sure enough we were informed that a grievous mistake had in fact occurred and that they were overbooked, but that they could get into "the sitting room of a suite" and that given any luck, they should be able to provide us with a rollaway cot within an hour. Not believing my ears, somewhat tongue-in-cheek I casually mentioned to the receptionist that I hadn't really planned to spend the first night of my honeymoon on a rollaway cot! This immediately brought a roar of laughter from everyone within earshot. The receptionist grinned and then disappeared around the corner. Within minutes, she reappeared and handed us the key to a room which had suddenly become available. As Mary and I slowly hobbled through the lobby, there was a thunderous spontaneous applause from those who now knew what the story was.

The next day we went to Niagara Falls but all the brand name Hotels were still booked solid. I couldn't walk very far because of the cast, and we had previously been told to keep the cast dry. That of course meant that we couldn't spend any real amount of time admiring the Falls because of the copious amounts of spray that constantly swirl about the area. The closer one gets to the Falls, the thicker the spray is of course. We therefore drove around and saw what we could of the sights and sounds that Niagara Falls has to

offer. The only accommodation that we could find was an older but very pleasant Motel off in the Hinterlands. It was advertising vacancy, so we went to investigate. When we asked what their rates were, we were told "\$48.00 gets you a room with a black and white T.V., \$58.00 gets you a room with a colour T.V., and \$68.00 get you a room with a water bed and a colour T.V." We said that the \$48.00 room would be fine because we weren't going to be watching much T.V. anyway!! The Motel was lovely, but we were so far removed from the Falls that we couldn't even see the spray!! We stayed there Sunday night and Monday night, and then unfortunately had to return to Alberta on the Tuesday.

One might easily ask, "Was it all worth it?"

The answer is an unequivocal and resounding "YES". As we are approaching our 19th anniversary, we are happier now than anyone could imagine. We often look back at what we went through, cringe a bit, then smile at each other and say "I love You."

John Beckett  
+ Mary Beckett