

Niagara Falls, Ontario, the world's honeymoon capital, has attracted newlyweds for more than two centuries. In 1803, even Napoleon Bonaparte's younger brother, Jerome, stayed there with his bride. Some say the place became a honeymoon mecca because of the sexual powers of the negative ions generated by the Falls. Others say the sheer majesty of the natural wonder was enough to create the romantic magnetism. Whatever the reason, millions of people from near and far retain happy memories of their honeymoon in Niagara Falls. In 1992, newspaper readers throughout North America were invited through a local initiative chaired by John Van Kooten to participate in a Golden Honeymoon Memories contest. The winning essay is reprinted below.

By **Bill Ryan**

It was a beautiful sunny day in Winnipeg when I tied the knot on Saturday, May 4, 1957.

The wedding was small, celebrated by relatively few friends. Dinner was catered at my new in-laws' home, with the reception being held in their unfinished basement among preserves and clotheslines. It was fun with serious tippling, dancing and toasting the bride and groom the evening. Elly's kid brother entertained us with his accordion virtuosity. "Lady of Spain" was his favorite.

We had to leave the reception early, as our train was to depart Union Station at 8:30 p.m. Elly changed her suitcase and kissed all of her weeping relatives and friends goodbye. I had to run the gauntlet of well-wishers too. They all had to shake my hand and hug my back, as we tried to break loose. El's father grabbed me by the shoulders and stuffed a new \$100 bill into my suit pocket and said: "Take good care of my little girl and have a great time." I said I would and thanked him for everything. The extra hundred bucks would give us a nice little fund for our trip. Our best man, Billy, had his '52 Chevy up and ready to go, as we dashed to the safety of the train seat. A couple of cars followed, honking their horns as we sped towards the CN station.

We were married on a shoestring and I was little more than a telegrapher and train dispatcher, I suppose, as having worked for the CNR over the past few years as a telegrapher and train dispatcher, I received a free pass for our honeymoon to Niagara Falls. I was only entitled to an upper berth in those days. Our chief ticket clerk, having a kind heart, had made an arrangement so we would travel in style by providing a drawing room for our round trip. Boy, what luxury! First class all the way. The drawing room contained a chesterfield-bed, a table and chairs, and a much-needed private bathroom. A ticket for shy, young newlyweds!

We boarded the train and headed for the four-hour trip followed by our laughing and boisterous entourage. Unknown to us, a trail of confetti was dropping from the ceiling, making everyone aware we were just being conducted to our train, the Super Chief. The conductor informed us that our train, the Super Chief, would be delayed several hours because of a derailed car at Malachi, just down the line. Upon hearing this



— Bill and Elly Ryan during their honeymoon in Niagara Falls in 1957.

GOLDEN HONEYMOON MEMORIES



— Bill and Elly Ryan today.

distant roar of the Falls, and see the mist rising over the treetops.

Eager to view the great chasm, we ran hand-in-hand through beautiful Queen Victoria Park. Cherry blossoms were in full bloom and their fragrance was sweet and overpowering. As we approached the railing, the mist washed over our faces and the roar was deafening. We stood arm-in-arm in wonderment of the Falls, admiring its grandeur and its power, as the earth trembled from the force of the cascading water. I could not help but think of the daredevils who had tried to conquer its precipice through the boiling cauldron below. One could almost hear the vows of lovers past who had witnessed this awe – inspiring sight. We were transfixed – one might say hypnotized – by the mighty Falls. It was a long time before we could tear ourselves away to explore the other wonders of this honeymooners' haven.

After purchasing souvenirs and postcards, we reserved a table at the Sheraton Brock Hotel and dressed for dinner. The view from the dining room was exhilarating. While we ate and sipped our wine, we planned our next day's adventure. That evening we danced the night away with

our fellow honeymooners. A special moment was shared as we took one last look at the Falls before retiring. Great coloured spotlights lit the Falls, enhancing the awesome spectacle. We would remember this day all of our lives.

We arose early the next day, showered and dressed in a hurry, gulped down some orange juice and headed out, eager to explore the many exciting sights around the escarpment. Queen Victoria Park, resplendent in her blossomed veil, the Burling Spring, where we peered down through darkness at the flame and wished silent hope for our future together. Then on to Table Rock House where we donned rainsuits and ventured down to the base of Observation Plaza, under the Falls. We laughed at how we looked, drenched in the showers of spray from the Horseshoe Falls. This was the best vantage point for a magnificent and unobstructed view beneath the frothy basin.

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In our excitement, we had forgotten to eat, so we decided to brunch at the Park Restaurant. A chance to dry off and clean our Pentax, which was clouded with condensation from our picture-taking under the Falls. Our ravenous appetites satisfied, we headed off to Clifton Gate House, Whirlpool House and finally the famous Niagara Spanish Cable Car. We lined up with other sightseeing honeymooners and gingerly stepped onto the swaying trolley. The cable car moved slowly out over the edge of the gorge. Everyone seemed a bit hesitant as the car moved further out over the churning water. Suddenly, the car lurched, shuddered and stopped. Young brides screamed in fright – the rest of us held on for dear life. The car swung slightly on its cable in the wind and, after a short pause, it reversed and trolleyed back to terra firma. That was all the excitement we needed that day.

The flowers were gorgeous at the famous Hydro Floral Clock; more picture-taking, then lunch at the Queenston Heights Restaurant. A visit back in history was next on

our agenda, as we climbed the narrow staircase to the top of the Brock Monument. Whew! That was quite a climb, but the view of the park far below us was well worth it. It was late afternoon when we stopped at the Museum of Indians and Daredevils. The legend of the Maid of the Mist, the escapades of Mrs. Taylor, Blondin, the Hill brothers, among others, and their crude daredevil equipment kept us engrossed for hours in total fascination.

The next day, after a romp through the park for an early morning look at the Horseshoe Falls, we decided to venture to the American side. Through Customs and crossing Rainbow Bridge to Prospect Park, we had an outstanding view of the American Falls. We toured Whirlpool Park, Devil's Hole, Lewiston and Old Fort Niagara before having a picnic lunch at Youngstown. On our return, the trip through Goat Island to Buffalo was scenic and leisurely.

It was late afternoon when we arrived at the famous Chez Ami Restaurant. We were early for dinner and found ourselves to be the only diners there. We were a bit embarrassed, as an army of waiters catered to our every wish. As the orchestra played Shuffle Off to Buffalo, we danced until we were exhausted, then headed back to Niagara Falls and the Clifton Motel.

Time was running out, so the next morning, after a leisurely breakfast, we took one last stroll amid the park's fragrant blossoms. Walking slowly, embracing each other, we strolled to Table Rock for a last, long and lingering look at this great wonder. We were still entranced by this magnificent sight and tried to store its total grandeur in our memory for our long trip home.

The only regret we had is that we didn't have enough time to see everything and especially to ride on The Maid of the Mist. Maybe someday . . .

If marriages are blessed in heaven, then honeymooners must be blessed by their stay in Niagara Falls. I know we were blessed, as we have two great children and three wonderful grandchildren as proof.

Bill Ryan is a resident of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.