

1953

HONEYMOON DESTINATION: NIAGARA FALLS

By Isobel and Jim Doull,
7632 Blossom Park Place,
Saanichton, B.C.,
VOS 1M0.

A spring wedding followed by a honeymoon at Niagara Falls are two ingredients for a long and happy marriage. We speak from experience. An experience we almost didn't have.

We were married in Winnipeg on May 23, 1953. That will be forty years ago this year. The wedding was smooth. The reception was what it should have been. We spent our first night at the classy Fort Gary Hotel, naively convinced no one knew where we had gone. Our car had been hidden in the parking lot behind the hotel a day before the wedding. But when we went to it the morning after, we could see it had been found. It was a black 1942 Ford, clean and shiny when it was parked, but that morning it was covered with big white signs, reading "Just Married", "Banff or Bust" and "Rockies here we come"!

Someone had found the car, but their minds were taking us in the wrong direction.

The signs were easy to remove. The flat tire was something else. The car was old and the tires were bald. However, no hole was found in the tire when we took it in for repairs. The sign makers had let the

air out.

The wheel was not hard to change. The search for a service station to repair it on a Sunday morning was something else. We drove around and around, gradually working our way to the south end of the city where we planned to start our journey. There we found a station with a Chinese restaurant across the street. Both were open. The restaurant served us a Canadian breakfast, while we waited for the tire to be repaired. An hour later we were on our way.

Fifty kilometers down the highway the motor overheated. It was becoming a warm day and the radiator had a problem. We had a problem. We limped into Morris, Manitoba, disturbed by our bad luck, but still determined to push on to Niagara Falls. We had lunch while a couple of friendly mechanics flushed out our radiator, added a cleaner to the water they poured in and sent us on our way with broad grins creasing their greasy faces. Maybe the little trail of confetti that followed us out of the car made them suspicious.

What to do? We couldn't travel over 80 kilometers per hour or the engine would get too warm. We also realised if it didn't get hot, a tire would probably overheat and explode. It was all right though, we had three weeks. We made it to Crookston, Minnesota that night, some 260 kilometers from Winnipeg and a long

way from a honeymoon at Niagara Falls. It looked like an impossible dream.

The next day was cooler. The car purred along at 80 kilometers an hour. We decided to forgo the main highway and take the less-travelled road along the southern shore of Lake Superior, across the Strait of Mackinac at the top of Lake Michigan, then along the shore line of Lake Huron to Port Huron, back into Canada and the northern side of Lake Erie. They were Great Lakes, great, big lakes. It was slow, but much prettier travelling beside the water. And much cooler. All the better for our engine.

Six days after we changed the flat tire in Winnipeg, we arrived in the city of Niagara Falls. It was raining. The road took us right to the Falls. Oblivious to the rain, we parked the car and ran across the sidewalk to look at the Falls. Breathtaking! Magnificent! We'll never forget it!

We stayed at The Rainbow Motel, overlooking the Rainbow Bridge, the Niagara River and Niagara Falls. A beautiful honeymoon setting. Who could ask for anything more?

And the locals could spot the newlyweds. We thought we looked like any other old married couple in their early twenties until a waitress came right out with it. "How are the newlyweds today?" she asked before she took our order. We wondered how she knew we were just married. "You are both wearing new

shoes," she said. "Only honeymooners can afford to do that."

Rainbow Bridge was pretty for a bridge, the river was grand, the trip on the riverboat "The Maid of The Mist" was thrilling and a ride along the river road on the horse drawn surrey was romantic. But the biggest thrill was standing under the Falls after taking the elevator down from the roadside and donning the heavy rain gear provided. The Falls roared so loudly you could hardly hear each other speak, tons of water tumbled past only a few feet away and the spray poured off the rubber suits. A wonderful experience.

We stayed seven days. We had planned to remain longer, but didn't know how the old Ford would react to the trip home. We left Niagara Falls, travelling slowly back to Winnipeg on the same route that had brought us safely there. The car behaved itself all the way, naturally.

We arrived home two days earlier than anyone expected us. They were concerned that the honeymoon had not gone well, but were soon convinced it had, as we told them about awesome Niagara Falls.

We've been back a few times since then. It's a thrill each time. It's been forty years since we first set eyes on that beautiful, roaring river. Maybe this is the year we should go back again.

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