

FINDING LOVE ... AGAIN

HIGH SCHOOL SWEETHEARTS REUNITE AFTER SEVEN DECADES

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Love knows no boundaries — even during a global pandemic. At least it didn't for Frederick Paul and Florence Harvey.

The high school sweethearts first met seven decades ago in Wandsworth, N.L., when Frederick, as a young man, would flicker his porch light before going to bed every night. It was his way of saying goodnight to Florence, who lived across the bay, less than a kilometre away.

Both "downhomers" went on to marry other people and build families over five-plus decades.

Frederick, 84, lost his first wife, Helen, to multiple health challenges that ended with dementia in 2019. Florence, 81, lost her first husband, Len, to cancer in 2017. But time passed and hearts were healing.

In February, Valentine's Day, to be exact, Florence reached out by telephone to Frederick to extend her support, having heard the news of his wife's death.

This was after not communicating with each other for decades, with the exception of a pass-

ing conversation during a "Come Home Year" town reunion in Newfoundland in 1997, that Frederick and his family attended. The two began to talk by phone for several months as COVID-19 wreaked havoc on the country and eventually discussed the prospect of Florence winging it to Ontario for a visit. She would also use the visit to see her sons, one in Georgetown and the other in Ottawa.

Florence has five children — two in Ontario, one in B.C. and two at home in Newfoundland — 10 grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. Frederick is a father to two, grandfather to four, all in Ontario.

That surprise visit happened on July 5, Frederick's birthday, according to his daughter, Cathy Paul.

"He called me later that evening and said, 'I got a birthday present from Newfoundland and it talks ... here she is' and he passed the phone to Florence," she smiled in relaying the day's events. It wasn't long — three days in fact — before conversations turned to marriage.

Mindful of government pandemic guidelines, wedding plans began in earnest.

On Aug. 8, the two made it official before a small gathering of mostly family at Norval United Church: the Paul family's church since 1981.



Bobby Schmutz/Moss Imaging

Frederick Paul and Florence Harvey on their wedding day this past August.

Ironically, the wedding was also the very first in the church's newly constructed building.

"This is a very special celebration," said the church's lead minister, Paul Ivany, during his message that day. "I checked the numbers and, in my career as a minister, I have conducted more than 500 wedding ceremonies, but this ceremony without question is one of the most special that I have ever been a part of."

"It truly is a miracle that Florence and Fred are standing here before us today, but here we are."

"You both cared so well for your spouse," he continued. "But the time came that you had to say goodbye to your spouse from this

life. And I know there were tears and sorrow, sadness and pain. But you made it through."

"You were not alone. You had family and friends there with you ... and somehow, out of that pain and sadness, a small flame was rekindled." Ivany noted how unlikely a reconnection of this sort is, particularly amid a pandemic.

"Amazingly, remarkably, after all these years you've found your way back to one another. You've both been given a tremendous gift."

"It is difficult enough in this life to find love. It is even rarer to find love again."

Florence, in her vows, expressed to the groom and family her commitment to the new

union. "Fred, yes, we have come almost full circle," she said. "You were the first young man to walk me home in our teens. And it looks like you will be the last man to walk me home."

Four months have now passed and the newlyweds have just celebrated their first Christmas together in Ontario.

With the region in which they live remaining locked down to offset rising infection numbers, Florence and Frederick will have plenty of time alone to catch up on lost memories — and, of course, build new ones. While 2020 will be one to forget for many, it will be one to remember for Frederick and Florence.

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