

# Love Canadian style: three times

By NANCY HOSKIN

Valentine's Day, for many of us, brings thoughts of love, romance and becomes a time to reminisce about how we might have found our special friend or mate.

## 58 Years and Counting

James and Mary McKee are in love with each other as much today, as when they exchanged vows nearly 58 years ago. Not many couples can boast of being married to the same spouse for so long and claim that an equal partnership has made for a long and happy union.

Mr. and Mrs. McKee, both 81, reside at Union Villa, having moved to Unionville in 1945, when Mr. McKee found it hard to sell land he had subdivided for \$300 an acre.

Their romance began in northern Ireland, where the couple grew up, having attended public school together. Mary moved to Canada by herself at 22, as the couple had planned, waiting for Mr. McKee to join her when his ailing mother recovered.

## They wrote weekly

The couple wrote back and forth each week, never doubting that someday they would marry, and nearly two years later Mr. McKee came to Canada with strict instructions from his father to "take care of that girl, she is very special."

He continues to follow his father's advice, caring for "my Mary."

The McKee's are proud that their relationship continues to be a partnership.

"Mary worked as hard as me, if not harder, her whole life," Mr. McKee said. "Every dollar I earned was shared. We were a team, a business. Anything of any importance was discussed until we came to some kind of agreement."

In addition to a strong partnership, the McKee's suggest that cooperation and communication are extremely important.

"We're both happy. We have kept our sense of humor over the years and hope to be married for several years to come," beamed Mrs. McKee.

## Barriers overcome

Personal columns appear in most large newspapers. Who submits these ads looking for friendship, and who answers them? Meet Dave Paget and Joan Miller: they met last February through a companions advertisement in a Toronto daily newspaper, and are bound for the altar this summer.

Joan's ad read: "Female, 28, disabled, outgoing, wishes to meet male for friendship, BYG REJE". Who is, or what is "Big Reggie", as some thought the code read? Joan's phone number, of course. If anyone was clever enough to figure it out she was anxious to talk to them.

Response to the ad was overwhelming. In one day Joan received over 20 calls, but many were crude and rude, as she remembers, and she wondered if she had done the right thing.

## Readers curious

Some thought her code was



Love was hidden in the back pages of a Toronto newspaper for Markham's Joan Miller. She met husband-to-be Dave Paget through the companions section. Love isn't hiding from either anymore — they'll be married this summer in Markham.

— Bill Lanning

cute, others wanted to know what her handicap was and some, like Dave, just wanted to meet a friend.

Dave had answered such ads for four months, hoping to find that special person among the classifieds. After three weeks of dialing Joan's number, becoming more determined each day, he managed to get through.

The couple spoke several times before meeting — discussing each others interests, Joan's disability, their hopes.

Joan has been institutionalized since birth and has made Markham's Participation House her home for the past eight years.

Dave and Joan met two days after introductions were made over the phone. He arrived, via public transportation from the west Toronto, carrying a bouquet of roses.

He was taken aback by the fact that Joan spends most of her day on her "banana cart" — a stretcher-like electric cart that is Joan's sole mode of transportation.

## Sexy voice

"Dave had such a charming voice when we talked on the phone," said Joan. "I knew I wanted to meet him."

"She told me it was sexy," Dave retorted.

"He was pretty shy when we first met, the conversation was slow," Joan explained. "I didn't think I'd see him again, but he gave me his phone number and because I'm not shy, I called him the next day, hoping that he might want to get together again, and he did."

Ever since their first meeting a year ago the two have spent their free time together. Dave visits Joan each evening after work — living and working in Rexdale, it takes him two hours to get to Participation House — and on weekends.

Joan and Dave haunt the Duchess of Markham on Friday evenings and enjoy watching Joan's favorite star Hulk Hogan in action when he comes to Toronto for Wrestlemania.

## Quiet weekends

The couple have spent several quiet weekends downtown and enjoy trying different restaurants — if they can accommodate her "banana cart."

"I never thought I would marry, but have always dreamed about it," explained Joan.

Neither set of parents really approves of this union, but in no way does their attitude put a damper on the spirits of this determined couple.

Dave and Joan will be married July 11, 1987 at St. Andrew's United Church in Markham where her "adopted" family, Jo and Geoff Beard of Markham, will give the bride away.

Joan met the Beards when she was singing at The Country Loft, which has long since disappeared, but stood on Hwy 48, just south of Hwy 7. The couple will settle in the west end.

"I'm scared," admits Joan. "I've never lived outside an institutional setting before."

She looks forward to "being her own boss", and with assistance while Dave is at work, looks forward to the challenges of living in the "real world."

"Dave has taught me so much. We've discussed our future together and know that there will be pitfalls, but we're ready," Joan smiled.

## Long Distance Romance

On the eve of his 20th birthday in 1979, Markham's John Schmidt met the lady he knew he would marry.

He never considered the thousands of miles separating them, or the fact that his future wife lived behind the Iron Curtain.

John met Annerose while touring East Germany with the United Church of Canada. As she listened attentively to a presentation about Canada, John spent his evening gazing at her from the other side of the room.

"I never believed in love at first sight, until I saw Annerose," John said.

After the discussion ended,

John introduced himself and invited Annerose to join him at the minister's house for tea, not knowing she was a longtime friend of the minister and his family.

The couple chatted until the wee hours of the morning and exchanged addresses and phone numbers before parting.

## Exchanging letters

"I returned to my hotel and decided to play it safe with my father, who hadn't been with me that evening," said John. "I told him I found the girl he'd want me to marry. I was waiting for a response, but didn't really get one."

For two years they corresponded by mail. John sent long letters illustrated with watercolors of butterflies and flowers, and on special occasions the couple spoke on the phone.

"You find out a lot about one another by writing, because you are more honest with each other. There are no distractions," Annerose explained. "I liked John's characteristics and interests. We were very similar in so many ways."

After a year and a half of bad telephone connections and writing one another, the couple were engaged.

"I had asked John where he had planned to spend his summer vacation, and he said, 'will you marry me?'"

John moved to Tuebingen, West Germany in June, 1981, having earned a scholarship.

## They finally met

"It was a strange situation when we met again," explained Annerose. "We were engaged to be married, but had only seen each other for one evening, two years ago."

For over a year the Schmidt's

romance blossomed, with John entering East Berlin each month to visit — a 16-hour overnight train ride.

Their engagement remained a secret, aside from telling their parents. Annerose, finishing her Master's Degree in Horticulture, didn't want to jeopardize her education by announcing her intent to marry John.

Any mention of marriage to a resident of another country may have put an end to her earning a degree, which in East Germany is paid for by the government. And John risked the loss of his visa.

## Making it public

In February, 1982, upon completion of her studies, John and Annerose made their engagement public and proceeded to obtain applications for marriage and immigration.

"It was a stressful time, as we didn't know if or when permission would be granted," said Annerose.

The Schmidt's application for immigration was delayed because of political unrest in Poland. The Canadian Embassy was in Warsaw, and the border remained closed for most of 1982. The Schmidt's applications wasn't a priority.

John, having moved back to Canada after his scholarship ended, received word from Annerose in October, 1982, that their application was processed.

A civic wedding ceremony took place in December of that year, with both families present, followed by the Canadian government granting Annerose permission to immigrate to Canada, where a church wedding took place.

The Schmidt's live in Markham with their eight-month-old baby, Miranda, and recently celebrated their fourth anniversary.



For Markham's Annerose and John Schmidt of Markham (with baby Miranda), love blossomed long distance. The couple met while John was in East Germany and became engaged after seeing each other only once. They recently celebrated their fourth anniversary.

— Bill Lanning