

People

Pen pal relationship sets stage for marriage

By BRUCE STAPLEY
Correspondent

Ted Barry will cross the pond to get married next spring, culminating a series of events which began when his late wife struck up a 40-year pen pal relationship with his current fiance in Grade 5.

And for the 65-year-old Stouffville area farmer and his intended, Janette Steele of Scotland, the union is proof that life can deliver unexpected blessings in the wake of tragedy.

Barry, who has worked his 75-acre cauliflower/cabbage farm for 42 years, lost Marion, his wife of 31 years, to cancer in 1990. Steele's husband and 21-year-old son had both died within months of each other in 1984.

Steele and Marion Barry had met for the first time ever when Steele paid her long time pen pal a visit in 1985 while still recovering from the grief of her double loss.

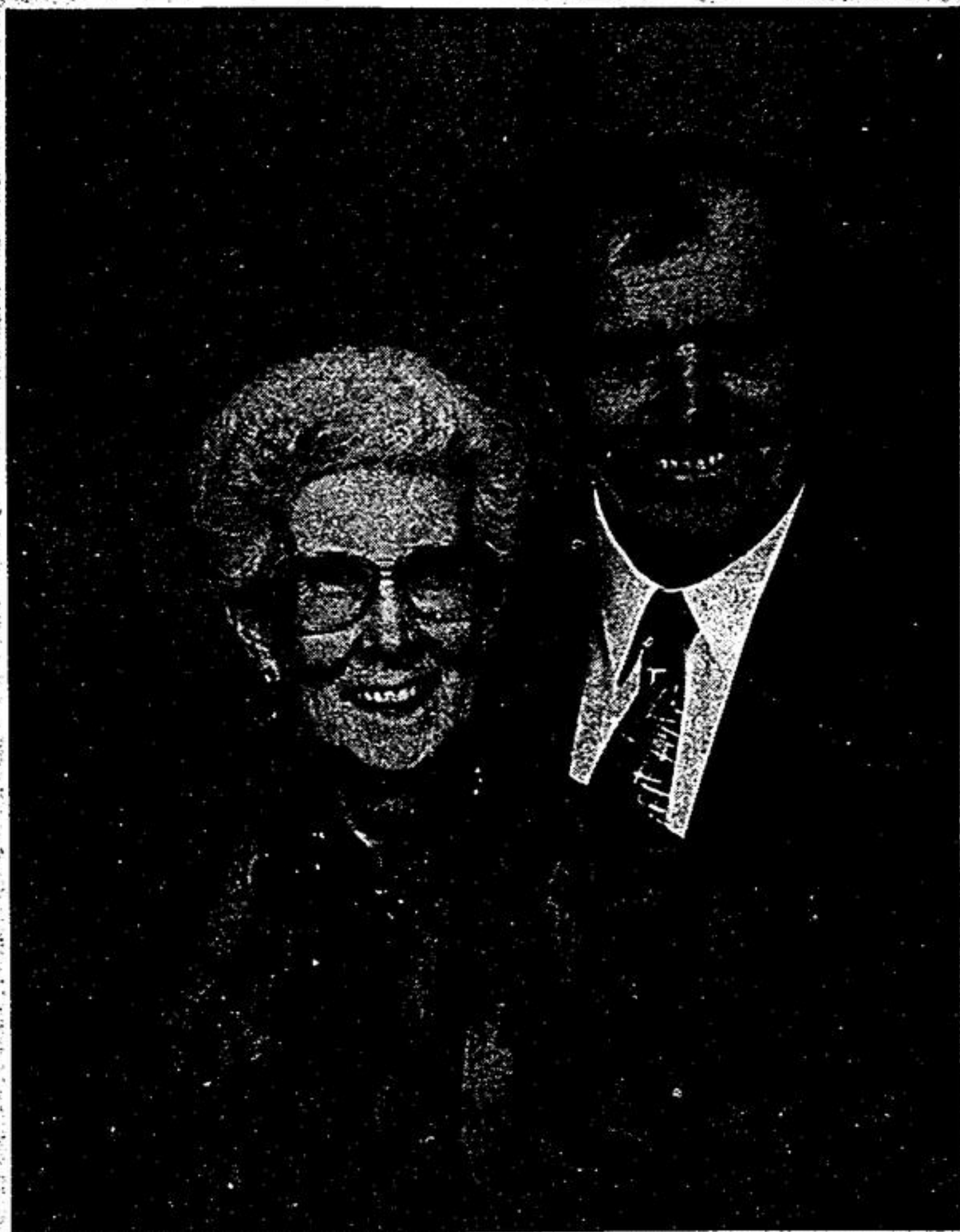
The two had started writing each other as part of a class pen pal project when Marion was a student at Sandford Public School, near Uxbridge, and Steele was attending a school in Rutherglen, Scotland.

The year after Marion's death, Steele contacted Barry before leaving for a holiday with her daughter and son-in-law in Florida.

"She said she was coming to America and that maybe we could get together for coffee," Barry recalls with a chuckle. It turned out, however, that Barry's own daughter and son-in-law were planning a Florida vacation at the same time. Barry accompanied them and met with Steele.

The following summer, Steele stopped off to visit Barry on a one-day stopover in Toronto on her way to Vancouver, then returned for five days on her way back.

The two began to contact each other regularly by phone and Barry made the first of four trips to Scotland in the spring of 1992.



Janette Steele of Scotland, and Stouffville's Ted Barry will be married in Scotland next spring. The couple got to know each other as a result of Barry's late wife Marion's 40-year pen pal relationship with Steele.

Steele came and stayed for a month that summer and after Barry's second trip to Scotland that fall, the couple accompanied a Stouffville United Church group which was taking a two-week tour of Texas early in 1993.

Last year, Barry surprised Steele when he showed up at the door with a bouquet of flowers for her 60th birthday party.

"I'm not really a romantic type of person, but that just about knocked her off her feet," recalled Barry with a smile.

The two have continued to exchange visits on a regular basis, with the get togethers increasing in length each time.

Steele retired in 1992, while Barry continues to work on a scaled down basis on his 75-acre cauliflower/cabbage farm.

Barry is hoping to be accompanied by his three children, their spouses and his seven grandchildren when he and Steele get married near Glasgow next spring.

The site of the honeymoon hasn't been decided, but the couple might go to Ireland, where Barry's father was born.

Then it will be back to Stouffville as the newlyweds take up residence at the Barry farm. They will return to Scotland for three months each year to visit

Steele's daughter and her family. "She's giving up a heck of a lot to come here," Barry said.

Barry said his family has given its approval of his marrying Steele.

"They're all quite delighted because they know Janette. The grandkids all want to talk to her on the phone when I call her. My two-year-old granddaughter Kelsey once said to her on the phone 'Why don't you marry Grandpa? Then you can be our grandma.'"

As for his phone bills, Barry said he'd rather not think about it. "Let's just keep that quiet," he smiled.

Barry said he was overwhelmed by the support he received from family members, the congregation at Stouffville United Church and the community after Marion's death.

"When I lost Marion I was devastated. But the great support everybody gave me kept me going. I attend church regularly and Janette says she already knows more people at my church than she ever did in her own church in Scotland."

Barry's convinced his late wife would smile upon the relationship between her husband and her old pen pal.

"She'd be delighted," he said.

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