

## **From the memoirs of Jean Cooke**

### **HOW I MET MY HUSBAND**

In 1959, I had a small ground floor bachelor apartment on Eglinton Street in Toronto. I owned a Volkswagen (punch buggy) that I kept in the underground parking lot. In mid-June on a Wednesday evening around 11:30 p.m. my buzzer went and the girl upstairs wanted to know how to open the garage door. She had just bought a car. I told her how and could I bum a cigarette? 'Sure, come on up to my place.' It was a hot evening and I had pink baby doll pajamas on. I opened my door, saw no one around, ran down the hall, jumped on the elevator to the fourth floor, ran down the hall to her place and banged on her door to get in before anyone saw me. She opened it and there on the couch sat two boys. She quickly got something to wrap around me and invited me to join them for coffee. Derek and Tim were Cambridge students who had just flown into N.Y on a chartered flight from London, England, then caught a bus to Toronto and were staying at the YMCA. They were looking so far unsuccessfully for summer jobs. The Y used to have dances regularly and they had gone hoping to meet a nice Canadian girl but had met my friend who was from Ireland and working for an airline. She invited them back to her place for a drink. The boys were planning to work for a month in Toronto and then tour North America for the rest of the summer. Because people in the U.K. and Europe had been very nice to me I thought I would reciprocate. I told them I was going home to London, Ont. for the weekend and if they would like to join me we could go via Niagara Falls. I gave them my number and if they were interested call me. I phoned my Mom and said I may or may not be bringing two boys home.

Saturday came and so did they. When we reached Niagara Falls, Derek said he had to change a traveler's cheque. When we entered what looked like a financial building the man said looking at Derek and me "Are you two here to be married? And is this gentleman your best man?" "No. I have only known them a few hours" says I. It turned out it was one of many registry offices. That was the beginning.

The following weekend they wanted to go to Montreal to visit a friend and I agreed to take them. The 401 had not been built and it took a long time to get there. We started Friday night and stopped at some cabins for the night (motels were very rare). The man at the office said he only had one left and if Derek and I would like the double bed our friend could take the other. I said "no way"; the boys shared the double bed. These incidences were becoming a standing joke.

Derek and Tim had just found a job painting Hydro Towers. The boys needed a car to get to work painting the high pylons around Toronto so borrowed mine as I always took the subway. I was very trusting! The three of us went sight-seeing, swimming, went to movies, spent a weekend with my parents on their boat, the Debbie, on the Trent canal and generally kept busy most evenings that month. Just before they were to leave for their tour out West and beyond, I said we must visit the Toronto Ex that week-end. Off we went and did the rides and shows. As we were about to leave, we passed the jewelers' booths. Derek said he wanted to look at watches. The three

of us walked over to a booth and immediately the man looked at Derek and I and asked if we were looking for an engagement ring. Tim rolled his eyes and said, "Here we go again." I pointed out a ring, laughed and jokingly said, "I love that ring." And Derek, who knew nothing about diamonds said, "I like that diamond." "Fine", said the man. "If you come around to our store on Monday, I will have that diamond set in that ring."

Monday evening Derek called and asked if I would like to go out for coffee. When he drove up in my car, I asked, "Where's Tim?" "Oh, he's not coming tonight." We ordered our coffee at a local cafe and while drinking it, Derek pulled out a box and said, "I went and picked up the ring. Will you marry me?" I just stared at him and at the ring completely shocked. I thought he was nuts. And before I knew it, I said "Sure."

I phoned my parents and told them I was engaged. Mom immediately asked, who to? I told her, to Derek, one of the English boys. She asked if he was the short one or tall one. I said the shorter one. She said "I think we should have a talk dear."

Mom and Dad came to Toronto and we decided we should get married in the U.K. as Derek's parents probably couldn't come to Canada. Mom and Dad were O.K. with this as Derek wanted to come back to Canada to live and work. He had fallen in love with the country as well as me.

Tim took off on his own to B.C. and other parts and Derek got a job delivering drugs for a local drug store using my car. He phoned the Canadian students who had chartered the airplane and found there was an extra seat available. I was off to England at the end of August with a guy I had met only a few months before. (*Two Canadian students at Cambridge chartered the plane from KLM and sold tickets to other students to spend the long vacation in America. That way, they got a free trip home for the summer and back to the UK.*)

When we boarded the plane at Idlewild (JFK) we ran into all the others on the trip. I noticed they were all boys. One stood up and raised big horns and said look what I got in Texas. Another put on a big sombrero and said look what I got in Mexico. Derek lifted my arm and said, look what I got in Canada. ***I was just a souvenir!***

Arriving in London, England, Derek phoned his parents in Wolverhampton and asked them to pick us up. No way. It may not have been that far in distance, but the roads were twisty and back then no major throughways. Fifty miles would take hours and so we were told to take the train. So began my life in England.

Fast forward five years. It was my turn to get Derek back when he and our three children immigrated to Canada. We came by ship. The St. Lawrence dock workers were on strike so they brought the Immigration officers on board. They separated the immigrants (90% of the passengers) from returning Canadians. For two days Derek was saddled with the children while I lounged in the pool and waved to him. When it was my turn to report and I was asked "***Do you have anything to declare?***" I said, "***Yes, one husband and three children but they aren't worth a cent!***"