

Chapter 65

Summer 1963 Marriage



Term Three of Session 1962-63 at the High School of Stirling ended on the last Friday in June with a Staff Meeting during which I was delighted to receive a handsome cheque as a wedding present from my colleagues along with their best wishes for a happy and 'productive' married life. Then it was all 'go' with the required preparations for the big day on the 11th of July ... keeping an eye on the development of our intended home in 29 Springwood Avenue, Torbrex, adjoining the school playing-field finalising details of our intended honeymoon – first night in Prestwick, next day, train, boat, train again to Belfast, then the third day, bus to Newcastle, County Down for a fortnight ... arranging my 'stag night' at the 'Red Lion' in Buchlyvie ... attending the 'show of presents' in Olive's home in Glasgow meeting again with the Rev. Ferguson, the minister ... collecting banns and marriage documentation ... and lastly Struan and I picking up our hired morning dress suits from R & R Henderson (Outfitters) in Stirling.

The 'stag' night in best man, Struan McCallum's home village, though in no way riotous, was often hilarious – especially when the four of us who did not return to either Stirling or Glasgow that night squeezed down all together, slightly under the influence, in **one** double-bed in the only spare room in the McCallum 'Shirgarton' home. What I do remember clearly though, was being roused about dawn by Ron Marshall's expostulation, "Ach! Where ur we? We cannae be in the city, fur thon birds oot there urnae coughin." *[Actually Ron's written English was always impeccable, and his fluent style as a sports' journalist, broadcaster and TV producer made him one of the most progressive, but relatively unsung, media men in Scotland during the latter part of the twentieth century]*

It was a 5p.m. wedding on the 11th of July, 1963 in North Kelvinside Church of Scotland on Queen Margaret Drive, Glasgow, and about a hundred or so family and friends gathered there to honour our union.



Struan and John in 1960

**11th July, 1963 and escorted by Dad Robbie,
Olive 'flies the nest'**



I found most of the wedding service not too nerve-racking – indeed, as ever, I really enjoyed the hymn singing - but when it came to the vows, I suddenly realised the immensity and seriousness of what I had got myself into, and started to shake like a leaf. Although Olive gripped my left hand more tightly, I was certain that my quivering legs would be amusing those close enough to see my nervous condition. Anyway, somehow or other, I didn't drop the ring when Struan handed it to me to slide it onto the third finger of my bride's left hand ... so all was well. Thereafter, and what a relief - we two, the minister and our parents, retired briefly to the vestry to sign the necessary certificates, while another close friend from SSPE, Tom Robertson sang our chosen song to the congregation.

The evening reception, meal and speechifying in Belmont House on Great Western Road near Kelvin Bridge went well ... a joyful occasion ... until, as Olive and I tried to slip away about nine-thirty, I was waylaid by the men who hoped to strip me to my 'undies' and throw me into Struan's car beside my bride. But I fought back ... and this surprised the lads so much that I managed to escape, arms and elbows flailing .. and I believe, from the blood that I found later on my shirt, that some nose must have suffered for being part of that 'friendly' mob! Struan deposited us in due course at Queen's Hotel, Prestwick ... probably glad it was all over ... but he had been everything to us that a 'best man' should be ... and we were very grateful for his care.

Next morning we set off on foot to the railway station about a hundred yards away to catch the morning boat-train to Stranraer. Thence we crossed the North Channel to Larne without incident and took the Ulster boat train to Belfast ... which was where the fun began!

We hailed a taxi to take us across town to be greeted with, "Well bejaabers, do ye not know what day it is the day? To be sure an it's the 12th o July and the 'Orange Walk'. Nobody dare cross its path. But ah'll get ye there 'cause ah know the back streets ... it'll be no bather tae me." And he was as good as his word ... mostly we went down one-way streets the wrong way ... but the police were fully occupied elsewhere supervising the orange bedecked marchers and flute bands.

On arrival at our guesthouse, with the sounds of bands not far off, we saw that other residents were taking afternoon tea in the dining room that looked out over the street. As nonchalantly as possible for newly-weds, we climbed the stairs to our allocated room ... which just happened to be at the front and right above the dining room. By this time the bands were deafening. So, quite naturally we wanted to view the parade. Unfortunately, in order to be able to see out the window, we had to climb over the double bed that almost filled our tiny room. Alas, in our haste crossing it, the frame with its attached springs slid off its supporting bars and the whole caboodle crashed to the floor!

What did the tea-drinkers down below think that the young arrivals were up to so soon? Lots of smiles to us at breakfast next morning gave strong hints towards the answer to that!