

We Got Married in the Yukon!

After living together for almost eight years, in Calgary and Toronto, having been engaged for 2 ½ years and more recently having spent twelve days together travelling by canoe 450 kilometres down the South MacMillan River, Roz and I were married on Saturday, July 29, 1995 in Dawson City in the Yukon.

Beginning in the summer of 1994 I got increasingly excited at the prospect of joining our friend, Al Pace, on a canoe trip in Canada's north. Roz had no interest in experiencing this adventure. In the fall of 1994 I attended an information session put on by Al and his wife Lynn about the trip they had led the past July; Roz chose not to attend. In February of 1995 I committed to going on the trip. When I returned home after the session, clearly pumped, I told Roz there was one space left on the trip if she wanted to change her mind. By that point, she had decided she was either going to be listening to stories about the trip for the rest of her life ... or she'd be telling them. She opted for the latter and chose to join the venture.

Shortly thereafter, we began discussing how it might be cool to get married while we were in such an 'exotic' location. From the time we were engaged in February, 1993, both of us having been married before, we discussed and struggled with how we would/ should/ wanted to hold our wedding. The combination of struggle, schedules and lethargy had led us to bury the issue ... and we were both content with the burial. However, this did seem to offer an interesting and possibly romantic solution. We told no one except for the couple leading the trip [Al Pace and Lyn Ward of Canoe North Adventures], who generously agreed to help us with the arrangements through their contacts.

Now, the trip down the river is a whole other story but, suffice it to say that twelve days of paddling in glacial waters, with many white water opportunities during the first several days; eleven nights sleeping in sleeping bags on thermarest mattresses in a tent on gravel bars beside the river and experiencing eight days of rain out of twelve, is a pretty fair pre-nuptial test ... and we passed!

Around the campfire on the last night on the river, over a glass of Madeira saved for the occasion, we announced our plans for the first time to our co-adventurers and invited them to join us as our guests.

The following day at about one pm we pulled off the river at Pelly Crossing, and the most exciting journey of my adult life was over. A new one was about to begin!

After filling our rental van with every imaginable sort of junk food [evoking memories of summer camp experiences from my foggy past] we set out for Dawson around 2:00 – a drive of three hours – this author at the wheel. It was critical we get there before 5:00 so that we could register for our marriage license the required 24 hours before the wedding, which was scheduled for 5:00 pm the following day. It was a wild drive with the clock ticking and the two-lane highway under serious reconstruction. At times we were travelling on the wrong side of the road due to a graded berm down the middle of the road; fortunately, we didn't meet any of the tanker trucks that we did pass with some frequency at other times. We also exceeded the posted speed limit by several tens of kilometres per hour. When we had an opportunity to see it, the country vistas were awesome – huge sprawling spruce-filled valleys spaced between mountains and stretching to the horizon – on a distance-scale surpassing anything I had ever seen.

At 4:45 we pulled into Dawson – all dirt roads and wooden sidewalks – and asked for directions to the liquor store – yes, the liquor store – because that's also the location of the registry office. Roz and I ran into the office with the various identification papers we required. My breathless attempt at an authoritarian pronouncement that we were here to pick up our marriage licence was met with an expressionless, bureaucratic response that we wouldn't be able to do that!

“But, we're planning on being married tomorrow here in Dawson” I gamely tried to articulate around heart that was now lodged – pumping furiously – in my throat. Gail, who was soon to become ‘our good friend Gail’, explained very calmly that we could submit our application then but that we'd have to return the next day to pick up the licence. Having completed the paperwork, Gail then proceeded to arrange a manicure for Roz and a massage for me while also

informing us that she was hosting a dinner party the next evening and that Lisa, our justice of the peace, was one of her guests!

On the last day of the canoe trip, Roz's feet had begun to swell and red spots were forming. As we arrived at our room in the White Ram bed and breakfast, she was in considerable pain. Our hostess, another Gail, immediately called the medical clinic which had closed and arranged for us to get in to be examined. Roz had poison oak! She got treated by a truly wonderful care-giving nurse.

From the clinic we walked to a clothing store to get some socks to protect her feet. [this same store she returned to the next morning to purchase her wedding outfit; we had decided originally we'd only wear the set of clean clothes we didn't wear on the canoe trip.] WE then visited the Downtown Hotel to make dinner reservations for our wedding reception. Finally, before returning to the White Ram we paid a visit to the Dawson casino – Diamond Tooth Gerties – not to gamble naturally – we were doing enough of that as it was – but to meet our Justice of the Peace, Lisa, who happened to be employed there as a black-jack dealer.

The day of the wedding was one the most mellow I can recall – though it was jam-packed with activity. I went out early and took pictures of Dawson at dawn. After breakfast, Roz went for her manicure while I visited a local jeweler to enquire about getting a 'Yukon gold nugget' ring as a wedding band for Roz. We weren't going to get rings; however, here we were in the home of the Klondike Gold Rush – it seemed only fitting. When the manicure was completed, we chose a ring which would be ready by 4:00 that afternoon - a full hour before the wedding ceremony was to begin!

We visited the Yukon Native Craft store and purchased a dream catcher which seemed at this juncture to be both romantically and practically appropriate. We mentioned to the salesperson, Peggy, we were getting married that day – OK, so we told everybody we met! – and discovered when we got back to our room that she had given us a wedding gift – a book of photographs of the Yukon.

While Roz rested, I walked over to Robert Service's cabin and met Tom Byrne an Irish actor from Vancouver who had been presenting,

in character, the life story and poetry of Service in the front garden of the cabin property for the previous fifteen years. I told him of our plan to get married in there front garden and he offered the front porch as a more fitting alternative. I listened to him recite The Cremation of Sam McGrew and then headed for my massage; got showered and picked up the ring from the jeweler.

About 4:55 we all congregated outside the White Ram and with our guide Al capturing the moments on a video recorder [they were all the rage in 1995!], we set out on our jolly procession a few blocks along the dirt roads to the cabin. Roz was carrying a lovely bouquet of blue flowers with two raven feathers symbolizing peace. Our hostess Lee at the B&B had picked the flowers from the garden at Service's cabin and then added the feathers.

The sun was shining, the sky was blue and the air was clear. My hands and fingernails were still filthy from the trip in spite of vigorous scrubbing. Roz looked gorgeous. We all were somewhat giddy.

Tom Byrne directed us to what he believed was the best spot on the porch. With Lisa's arrival in her truck, the ceremony began. And a lovely ceremony it was. Lisa had given us several to choose from and we felt we had made the perfect choice for us. And all went well – that is, until it came time to put the ring on Roz' finger. Now I was feeling so mellow, and this was all unfolding as beautifully as I could have imagined – I remember feeling as if my entire being was just filled with one gigantic smile! I took the ring box out of my pocket and removed the ring, putting the box back in my pocket. As I went to slip on the ring – it fell from my fingers!!! Did I mention the porch was made of branches – irregularly-shaped branches – which is germane, because the ring bounced off one of the branches and wouldn't you know it, slipped right through a crack to the ground below. I couldn't believe this was happening – when everything was going so beautifully – so I responded with a particularly inappropriate epithet that will go unrecorded here.[although it is captured for all time on the merciless video].

We quickly realized that while three sides of the porch floor were covered over, one was not and fortunately that was the side nearest to where we were standing. Immediately, Al handed the

videorecorder to Lyn with instructions to keep the video running. He ran into the woods behind the cabin and scrounged up a stick – removed the shirt he had borrowed for the occasion from one of the female trippers – got down on his belly and managed to hook the ring on the stick [with my accurate guidance looking through the aforementioned crack in the branches] and we were back in business – after we all regained our composure and sense of reverent propriety.

When the service ended, I spoke a few words about how Roz and I shared only one regret that we would have liked to have had some of our friends and family members physically there to share the day with us. I also thanked our canoeing mates/wedding guests for joining us. Al then read an amazing poem he'd created for Roz and I related to our time on the South McMillan River. We were touched even though there were numerous exaggerations and factual departures from reality. We had planned to a group photo taken of the entire wedding entourage in period costume but the studio that did that was busy and there was a copious quantity of sparking libation chilling at the White Ram and thirst won out!

We dined that night at the Downtown Hotel. When we arrived we were treated like family by the hostess and waitress we had met the day before. We enjoyed salmon and numerous hors d'oeuvres, much wine and a complimentary bottle of champagne from the hotel. After dinner, we drove to the Dome, a large hill southeast of Dawson, serenaded on car audiotape by Elton John singing, Can You Feel the Love Tonight. Given this was the land of the midnight sun, at 11:00 pm we had a breathtaking view of the Yukon and Klondike river valleys in the dusk-like light. We subsequently returned to town to close the evening with a run of gambling at Diamond Tooth Gertie's. Well, that's the story of how we got married in the Yukon. Who would have guessed then, that all these year later, I'd become a Life-Cycle Celebrant, and in many cases be creating stories for couples about the journey of their relationships.

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2017