

My Marriage

It all started with oranges

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The following story is a modified excerpt of the original prepared for a wedding exhibit at the Basilian Fathers Museum in Mundare, Alberta, in 2001.

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Josephine Fill married Nicholas Lesoway at Sts. Peter and Paul Church in Mundare on Sunday, August 26, 1945. A wedding reception and dance followed at the Lesoway home place. Two days later, the festivities continued at the Fill farm, where a second wedding feast was followed by a dance at Podola Hall.

The hugely popular Sadownyk orchestra played at both wedding dances and at the mixed shower held at Podola Hall the week before. Guests at the shower contributed \$2 per couple and presented Nick and Josephine with a mirrored wardrobe and a set of enamelled pots and pans, pie plates, a water pail, a kettle and a dipper.



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How We Met

I met my husband at an Orange Dance at Hilliard Hall one Saturday night in February of 1942. At an Orange Dance, boys bought oranges and cast them as ballots for their favourite girl. I won third prize that night and came home with enough oranges to share with all the neighbours. It must have been Nick who was voting for me. He said he knew I was the girl for him the minute he set eyes on me.

Wedding Preparations

Nick and I got engaged in Edmonton on April 7, 1945, during Easter holidays. We made our wedding plans on the first Sunday in August. There were signs that the war would end soon, and in fact, the first atomic bombs were dropped on Japan the very next day, on August 6.

Nick came to make wedding plans while I was reading in the old maple tree that overhung the pumphouse on our farm. The tree had a long, gently angled bough that was big and strong enough to hold both of us comfortably.

That evening, wedding plans were set at our house. We chose a date—August 26—my birthday.

Soon after, Nick and I went to Edmonton to buy our wedding clothes. Wartime made this a challenge. Poor Nick went to every store in town before he found a suit to fit!

As for me, there were two styles of wedding dress to choose from—a satin and a chiffon. Since I was allergic to satin, that left the chiffon. I didn't really mind that one of



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my bridesmaids had the very same dress, but I was disappointed that wartime shortages meant my bridesmaids couldn't wear hats. My mother thought I was crazy. Bridesmaids in hats were unheard of back then, although very fashionable today.

On the morning of August 26, Nick and I went to morning mass at Mundare. Then Millie (nee Engel) Fane did my hair at her beauty parlour on Main Street. This was her wedding gift to me.

My auntie Bessie (nee Hewko) Topilko was waiting to help me dress when I got back home. She was my matron of honour.

Blessings

Then it was time for the blessings. My parents, Nick's parents, his aunt and uncle and my grandmother sat on chairs, each holding a round *kolach* (braided bread). Nick and I knelt before each person and bowed three times, touching our heads to the holy bread and asking for blessings. Each of our family elders blessed us with these words: "May God bless you, and I also bless you, that your lives be prosperous and happy."

Maybe that's why our marriage lasted for 50 years. Getting God's blessings in church and then our families' blessings were highlights of the day.

When our attendants arrived, we set off for church. My dad admonished the bestmen that they were not to honk their car horns after the ceremony: people who did a lot of horn-honking were quick to divorce. My dad's final words to us were "Don't let the sun set on your anger. The devil works overtime and in the morning the problem will be truly multiplied." This we remembered!



The Ceremony

Nick and I were married by Father Vladymir Shewchuk on Sunday, August 26, 1945. I had a bouquet of live red roses. After the ceremony we departed—with no horn-honking—to the Lesoway farm for the reception. Tables were set in the

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dining area of the house. Nick's mom was horrified to see such a huge bridal party, fearing there might not be room at the first setting for her only brother. I pretended I didn't notice and made sure our two flower girls had room to sit.

Our bridal party truly was large. We had six bridesmaids, six bestmen, a matron of honour and two flower girls.

The weather was gorgeous. We danced outdoors on a wooden platform built by Nick's brothers and friends. Our musicians were the hugely popular Sadownyk orchestra, which was the best of its day.



Two days later, on August 28, a second wedding feast was held at my home place. We had tables set outside so we could seat all the guests at once. My school superintendent, Mr. Gibson, gave a speech. All I recall him saying was, "I came to the Fills' and got really filled up with delicious food and drink."

Dancing followed at Podola Hall. I recall dancing with Nick and hearing a whisper from the ladies sitting along the wall: "She's a little bit old already." I thought, so what!

Popravnye—the after-wedding, gift-opening celebration—was held at my home place on Sunday, September 2. Our wedding gifts included 17 pyrex utensils, a dinner set, a cast iron frying pan, fancy china and silver serving dishes, china teacups and a coffee percolator. Nick's parents, as was the custom for parents of the groom, bought him a farm so we could set up housekeeping on our own.

I sincerely extend my best wishes and blessings upon my grandchildren for a happy, healthy, long married life that is even more wonderful than my own marriage. God bless you most abundantly. I love you all! I may not see all of you marry—but I hope God lets me peek from heaven.