

PRELUDE

In 1951 the University of Alberta in Edmonton opened its first central library, the Rutherford Library. Up until that time the University's library holdings were scattered around the campus in a haphazard fashion. The Arts building contained a collection designed to serve the Faculty of Arts professors and students which could be accessed from a large study hall on the main floor. Some books had gone directly onto the shelves of one member of the campus faculty or another and there they had remained for years at a time.

The construction of the Rutherford Library was a result of Alberta's new found prosperity resultant from the discovery of oil in the late 1940s. It was constructed from Tyndall stone imported from Manitoba and enhanced with marble imported from Italy. Bronze doors could be closed on the stairways to prevent possible fires from spreading. The lower level included a smoking room with knotty pine panelling and tables constructed from the same material. The second floor reference reading room had a huge cast iron chandelier hanging from the ceiling and a local artist was hired to create a collage of scenes representing the settlement of the province. This painting graced the inside wall above the wide doorway. The circulation area featured leather sofas and small tables where students could relax, read and visit.

Krishan and I met in May of 1951 in the stacks of this beautiful building. I had been hired as a student assistant for the summer. Krishan's summer job was at the CHFA [French Radio Station] transmitter. An engineering student, his work entailed turning the transmitter on at six a.m., monitoring the controls during the day and turning it off at midnight. He would work one eighteen hour shift and have the next two days off. For his alternate two days he was hired by the library to aid in the mammoth task of moving the books from diverse corners of the campus into the new library and placing them on the shelves. There were four people assigned to the Rutherford Library to receive and unload the boxes, myself, Krishan and two others. As we were a small team working together, we soon became friends.

Many years later when our daughter was on Student Council she conducted orientation tours of the campus for new students. When she took groups to the Rutherford Library she would show them the elevator in the stacks and inform her charges that "This is where my parents met".

Krishan was quite possibly the first student from India to be enrolled at the University of Alberta. The vice president of the student council was a Black woman, Vi King, from Amber Valley. Many Edmontonians were uncomfortable with ethnic diversity when colour was involved. Vi, for example, despite her position at the University, was not permitted to enter the front door of the MacDonald hotel. When student functions were held there, she was hustled in through the kitchen door.

The January after Krishan and I met, the Dean of Women received a phone call from a very concerned resident of Windsor Park. It seems that a "white" student had walked past this person's home holding hands with a "Black" student. The University was enjoined to put a stop to this appalling behaviour.

As a result, the Provost had a talk with Krishan explaining that this kind of behaviour was unacceptable. Krishan was furious and told the Provost that he had no business interfering with his personal life,

resulting in the shocked Provost replying that he should get off his high horse. My talk with the Dean of Women was much more gentle. She fed me tea and explained that she had known my parents for a long time and that the University had a duty to act in loco parentis. Perhaps, she said, we should cool it for a while.

We had not thought we were doing anything unusual, but we became the recipients of much well meant advice aimed at ensuring that we did not become a couple. We paid little attention to any of it and by spring we were engaged.

Neither Krishan's parents or mine were in favour of our proposed marriage. My parents asked the Arch Bishop of the Anglican Church in Canada [he had been the Bishop of Edmonton] to visit Krishan's parents while attending the World Council of Churches in 1953. He did. My to-be in-laws met him with presents of dry fruit and nuts and during their conversation the three agreed that the marriage would not take place. Krishan's mother, however gave the Archbishop gifts for me to take back to Krishan in Canada, just in case we decided not to separate.

My parents, on the advice of their minister, did everything they could think of to convince me that I should not marry an Indian. He told them that they must oppose the wedding up until it took place, after that it was their duty to be supportive. My father said that the marriage could not work and would end within two years at the longest. My brother was asked to talk to me but he refused. I discovered that, although I was an Anglican, we could not marry in the Anglican Church as Anglican marriage had to be between two Christians [a policy that was changed a few years later].

We asked my brother-in-law, a United Church minister, to perform the ceremony but he refused on the grounds that he did not want to upset my parents.

We were married in May of 1954 in St. Steven's Chapel on the University Campus by Rev. Vipond from Garneau United Church. My parents came to the wedding and even brought a wedding cake and sandwiches for the reception. At least one of our guests was a lady who had earlier stated that if the marriage took place she would never again speak to anyone in the family.

