

## CHAPTER EIGHT -- SHIRLEY

In January 1957, Shirley and I became engaged. Due to the uncertainties of dates and my future schedule, it was impossible to set a firm date for the wedding -- except that it would be some time in the autumn.

Shirley's father and mother were delightful people. Different in so many ways, but nevertheless a good match. Bert Norris, who was born in Liverpool on the 31st July 1902, was a very gentle, shy man. He was a man who loved music -- from classical to popular, and whenever he sat down at a piano, he created magic with his fingers.

During the thirties he was a professional musician, travelling and playing with different bands, all over Britain. Unfortunately, his war service interrupted that. When he came out of the army after the war, only the big bands had survived, so that was the end of his music career. It was such a pity, as he had this great talent.

He was in his own world when his fingers touched the keyboard. At this time he was working for the Cunard Line.

Shirley's mother San (whose real name was Frances), was born in Liverpool on the 27th June 1904. She was the driving force in the family. That expression should not be seen as derogatory in any way. She had the sole responsibility of bringing Shirley up during the war years. She was a lady of great principle, who lived by what she thought was right, and she would stick to those principles through thick and thin. I think because of the impression she gave to those who didn't know her well, she could be seen as being slightly stern and unbending, which was far from the truth. In truth, she was really quite a shy person. She brought Shirley up with the same set of values that she had, which is the highest compliment that I can pay her.

I always had a good and warm relationship with both of Shirley's parents, but for some reason or another, I never felt comfortable about calling them, "Mum and Dad." I don't know why.

The other dominant force in Shirley's family was her grandmother, or Nanny, as she was called. When you met Nanny, you knew exactly where Shirley's mother got her no-nonsense approach from. She was as tough as nails on the outside, with a heart of gold on the inside, filled with compassion for others. It's just that she didn't want that side to be exposed too much, lest she be thought of as soft.

On the 4th of February 1957, I joined the Governor as Second Officer. Herbert Jones was still there as Master, as were several other people that I knew from my previous time with the ship. I

remained with that ship for another fourteen months. They were happy days.

Most of our time was spent on the East African run. I now had quite a few friends in Mombasa. One in particular, Dick Norton, had come out to East Africa some years before. Like many people who came out to the colonies in those days, they came out for different reasons. Some had been in trouble with the law. Some had been the black sheep in a wealthy family. Others just wanted to live a pleasant life in the tropics. I never did find out why Dick was there. He was obviously well educated and very articulate, and money did not appear to be a problem. He and his wife would occasionally invite me to their cottage at a place called Malindi. Their cottage, which was really a very spacious beach house, overlooked the Indian Ocean. It was called Kikambala, which in Swahili means crooked. This was because not one wall was at right angles to the next.

I think the most vivid memory that I have of those trips to the cottage, was waiting for the rope-powered ferries that would take us across the numerous creeks. At night, I would sit in the back seat of the car, with my eyes closed, and the windows open to let in some of the cool ocean air, and with no other noise around, just listen to the sounds of the jungle. Dick could identify many of the sounds, but to me it was so totally different from anything that I had ever experienced. I can't describe the feeling. All this just added to my total enjoyment of East Africa.

Shirley and I finally settled on a date for the wedding. It was originally going to be on the 12th of October, which coincidentally would have been my eighth anniversary of going to sea. However, because there was some doubt whether the ship could get home in time, we settled on the 19th of October.

My cousin Olaf, the same one who had deserted me to the arms of the law all those Halloweens ago, was my best man. Shirley's cousin Freda, who lived in Southampton, was her bridesmaid. We were married in St. Andrew's Church, at the corner of Queens Drive and Muirhead Avenue. I must admit I enjoyed the day tremendously. It was a beautiful day, which complemented a beautiful bride.

Apparently, Shirley's Nanny was sitting with her hat on, waiting to go to the wedding about three hours before it was due to take place. This was the only wedding that she ever attended of any of her grandchildren.

Our honeymoon was spent in Barcelona. The weather was good and we did the normal tourist things, even if I couldn't get eggs and bacon for breakfast in the hotel where we were staying! However, you could get octopus, which Shirley thoroughly enjoyed! All too soon we had to come back to reality, which in my case meant going back to sea, and in Shirley's case, back to managing the office at

a firm which sold and repaired cash registers.

Although Harrison's did not allow wives to go to sea with their husbands in those days, they did allow them to stay on board in ports away from Liverpool. Quite often, Herbert Jones's wife would drive Shirley and the Chief Engineer's wife from Liverpool to wherever the ship might be. It might be Glasgow or Avonmouth, or another such place.

Although the visits were only for three or four days normally, we enjoyed those moments, as it increased the amount of time we could spend together while the ship was in the UK. The final event of any of those visits was to watch Herbert Jones start the car for his wife -- because obviously he was the only person who could do it properly! I wonder how she managed when he was away at sea for three or four months?

When we were first married we lived with Shirley's parents at 78 Ferguson Road, in West Derby. After a few months we moved to our own flat. We couldn't afford much -- and that's what we got -- not much. I remember brushing the carpet in the sitting room with a stiff brush because we could see it was very dirty. As I brushed, we discovered the carpet had a pattern. That's how dirty it was.

We were allowed to have one bath a week, as we shared a bathroom with the other tenants, which was not uncommon in those days. When it was your turn, you had to get the key from the landlord. Once, he allowed Shirley to have a bath halfway through the week. However, that meant she had to forgo her regular bath day. I think the final straw was when Shirley put her heel through the floor. We gave our notice, and found a very attractive flat in Southport.

We enjoyed Southport, although it was a bit far from Liverpool, which meant we had to take the train to get into town. While we were there, Shirley became ill and had to spend a few weeks in hospital. When she first became ill, before she was admitted to hospital, I didn't think it was as serious as it was. I just thought she wanted a rest from work. Shirley took great exception to my views, and even to this day, she is still upset about it. If I had only thought, I should have known that she wouldn't do that. She was her mother's daughter, and that was not the sort of thing she would do.

Shirley now worked for an agency, which allowed her the opportunity of working when I was at sea, and taking time off when I was at home. Occasionally we would spend part of our leave in Belfast with my mother. Shirley enjoyed Belfast. We also went up to Catterick in Yorkshire, to stay with Thelma and Ernie, where he was now stationed. It was close to his home of Richmond. Visiting Ernie and Thelma was always fun. They now had a new daughter, Valda,

who had been born on the twenty-fifth of November 1956.

In April 1958 I was transferred to the mv. Herdsman. Her Master was a very fussy little man called Thompson. Luckily, I only had to make two trips with him, before a new Master was appointed -- a Captain John Sharman, Royal Naval Reserve. We also got a new Chief Officer, Bob Harvey. I really enjoyed my time with Captain Sharman and Bob Harvey. So did Shirley. We became very good friends with Bob and his wife Sellis -- a friendship that still exists with Sellis, as unfortunately Bob passed away some years ago now.

Normally, the Chief Steward was the "doctor" on board, unless a qualified doctor was carried. I have no idea what qualifications the Chief Steward had to perform these duties, but in most ships he did. In the Herdsman, the Chief Steward was squeamish about blood and injections, and asked me if I would help him if he ever needed my assistance. On departure from Port Sudan one trip, one of the stokers developed gonorrhoea, after being with a Fuzzy-Wuzzy debutante.

The Chief Steward asked me if I would give the man the standard injections of penicillin, as prescribed by the doctor before we left Port Sudan. I had never given an injection before, but it looked simple enough, so I told this hulking brute of a man to drop his pants as I prepared the injection. Putting the needle in was not difficult, but I didn't know that after pushing in the plunger, one was supposed to keep one's thumb on it, to avoid any back pressure as the needle was being withdrawn. As a result, as soon as I lifted my thumb off the plunger everything I had put into this man's backside was now back in the syringe.

I was now in a dilemma. Should I press the plunger again, or should I withdraw the needle and tell the man to come back tomorrow. Looking at this man's size, I took the latter course of action for two reasons. Firstly, I was sitting beside the Chief Steward's washbasin, so I quickly removed the syringe, and squirted the contents into the washbasin. Also, if I had made a second attempt to inject the man, he may have thought that I didn't know what I was doing -- and I didn't want a seven-foot stoker angry at me. The next few days of treatment went fine. I just added another day's treatment for the first treatment that went wrong. He never found out!

Some members of our West Indian crew had formed a steel band, and they were excellent. That was in the days when steel bands were never heard of outside the West Indies. They would practise for hours -- and when Shirley was on board in the UK, they would play for us. One of our favourites was, "Yellow Bird." Whenever I hear that song today, my mind goes right back to those days on the Herdsman.

For the first two Christmases after we were married I sailed on the 24th of December one year and the 23rd the next year. Sailing

within a day or two of Christmas was very hard, especially as we would be apart for three or four months. That was one time of the year when I wanted to be home -- but that was life in the Merchant Navy. In the world of commerce, ships were only making money for their owners if they were underway -- not sitting in harbour.

On the long passage down to South Africa, Captain Sharman and I would have many long and interesting discussions about the Royal Navy. He was interested in what my father had done, and I was very interested in his exploits during the war. I had never lost my interest in the Royal Navy, and the more I spoke to Captain Sharman the more focused it was becoming.

I left the Herdsman in March 1959 to come ashore to study, and sit for my Master's Certificate, Foreign Going. -- the top rung of the ladder as far as a Merchant Navy officer was concerned. This would allow me to sail as Master on any British merchant ship, regardless of tonnage or geographic boundaries.

After Shirley's illness we gave up the flat in Southport, and moved back in with Shirley's parents. This time I found the workload a lot harder than my previous tickets. I spent every night studying in the dining room until about ten, when I would come into the sitting room, and have a cup of tea, before going to bed. I did that solidly for three months, with very few breaks. However, in a perverse way I enjoyed it. Subjects that I had not liked in school, such as trigonometry and physics, were now interesting and challenging. Quite often, I would enlist Shirley's help when I wanted her to listen to me reciting the Rules of the Road -- nautical, that is. I know that she can still remember such phrases as, "a green light without a red light, or a red light without a green light is seen anywhere but ahead, etc., etc."

I wrote and passed my writtens and signals, but failed my orals. Shirley just couldn't believe I'd missed my orals. She was astounded. She had so much faith in me. But like many others who had failed part of their exams, I was just human. However, it didn't take long to rectify the problem, and on 29th July 1959 I had it -- my brand new Master's Certificate.

A few weeks after I got my ticket, Shirley and I decided to take a small sail boat out on the artificial lake in Southport. Shirley felt quite indignant when the man who ran the Marina asked if we knew how to sail. Luckily she didn't say anything, but she was going to tell him that her husband had a Master's Certificate, so of course he knew how to sail. She was extremely glad she didn't say anything, when ten minutes later I ran the boat up on top of the revetment.

Harrison's told me that I was going to stay ashore for a while to relieve officers who were on leave while their ships were in

Liverpool. After that I was to go to their newest ship, the Adventurer, which was being built in Sunderland. I was also delighted to hear that Captain Sharman was going to be the Master.

It was during this period that Shirley and I discussed the subject of me joining the Royal Naval Reserve. We both thought it was a good idea, and it was also something that I felt that I would like to do, so I applied. After various interviews and medical examinations in both Liverpool and at the Admiralty in London, I was told that I would be appointed as a Temporary Probationary Acting Lieutenant in the Royal Naval Reserve. When I told Captain Sharman he was delighted.