

Molly's Silver Wedding Anniversary by Molly Shaper

In 1949, Molly and Jack Shaper had been married for 25 years. Molly came to SA from Poland in 1901 with her mother and three sisters (she was the second eldest at age 4) Her father had come the year before to join his brother. Six months after their arrival, her father died in a bicycle accident leaving her mother Sarah with four young girls and pregnant with the 5th daughter. Her brother-in-law took their money and left, not wanting to take responsibility for them. Family in the UK offered to pay for her to return to Poland, but she refused.

Sarah taught herself to speak and write English and sold eggs from a basket and eventually opened a shop and brought up 5 daughters, each one independent and talented. I remember four of them...formidable great aunts. None of them returned to Poland. My grandmother went on this journey in 1950, finding and visiting relatives who had survived the Holocaust in UK, Belgium and France. Introduction by Molly's grand-daughter ,Hilary Cohen Meyer.

This was written by Molly in her journal:

"Well", said my mother (of Blessed memory) "Now is the time for a party. Your daughter Joan is married. Your son (Gerry) has returned from a war in Israel and Harold is growing up nicely, and I AM still here. What better excuse could you have for a party?"

"Well Mama" I said, "the point is I am not sure. I am only married 25 years and I don't know yet if I want a celebration or a separation. I'll think it over and then I'll tell you."

And then these thoughts came into my mind. If I make a party, I will get a lot of unnecessary presents, more things to look after and dust, and the only one who deserves a medal is me, so if I go for a honeymoon again, I'd like to go alone.

My husband said: “Sweetheart, what would you like for a silver wedding present”. I said “I would like a divorce, just a plain divorce”

This shocked him. “You can’t be serious” he said. “You must be joking!”

Crazy to think of anything so very ridiculous. After all, we were so happy. Well for me, it was enough.

He said “Give me an alternative” so I said “Well then, a separation for at least five years.”

“Oh no, I will let you go anywhere you like for six months. Where would you like to go?”

The only place I could think of was “The other end of the world”. I was not unhappy, but as happy as most married people are, but I had never had a break from the struggle, so I did some good thinking. What would I miss most or what was the most important thing in my home, as I would have to leave a coloured girl in charge (she had already been with me for years.) I looked at my silver tea set on the sideboard and I thought “Not even that”. What was the most important thing I valued? The roof. And that was already paid for. That was what meant the most to me and no one could take that away. It will still be here when I get back. So I decided to go to England. And he agreed.

“On one condition” First he must see the relatives I am going to and he invited them to come to us for three months. And they came. Then he looked for more obstacles. “You cannot go alone”. So, a friend Mrs Lazar was sitting in my dining room. I said “I booked for you too Mrs Lazar. Why should you leave your hard-earned money to your nieces overseas, rather go for a holiday yourself” So she was surprised and believed me. I went the next day and booked. The fare was only 66 pounds sterling return.

Further Obstacles – where did one get 66 pounds from? Jack said “That’s fine but I can’t give you any money”. That to me was nothing. Who can’t make some money? So he gave me two years to put away 500 pounds. He said he would help me which he did. I ran a children’s summer Guest House, he bought all he could and didn’t charge me and I saved all I could and so I managed to get it all together.

I took my mother's address book and visited all the relatives she had written to for fifty years, It was a wonderful break.

At the end of six months, I was glad to get back to the same old man. I'd been to the other side of the world and after seeing other people's troubles, I was glad to get back my own bag of bricks.

The tea service was gone. The roof was still there. But what I wanted most was MY JACK. He was the most important and precious thing in my life that really mattered. I only needed an interval but I was so glad to come back to my same old man.

It sometimes pays to look at somebody else's marriage to see just how good your own is. I realised that marriage is like school. One has to have a holiday from time to time.

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