

TWO TOGETHER

Pam Williams

Two together!
Winds blow south, or winds blow north,
Day come white, or night come black,
Home, or rivers and mountains from home,
Singing all time, minding no time,
While we two keep together.
—Walt Whitman

“Do you take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband, till death you do part?”

“I do.” Edna Davis’ voice trembled slightly as she spoke the words. She looked at the man standing next to her, the man who was about to become her husband. Edna had not felt this happy in a long time. The last ten years had been very lonely since her husband had died. Then, suddenly, thanks to the matchmaking of a good friend, Edna wasn’t alone anymore. John Porter was everything she could ever want in a man. Even though he was 85 years old, he still had the energy of a man half his age. “I wonder if I’ll be able to keep up with him?” Edna thought to herself.

“Do you take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife, till death you do part?”

John Porter squeezed Edna’s hand as he proudly replied, “I do.” “It’s taken me 85 years to find the right woman,” he thought, “but it’s sure been worth the wait.”

A few moments later, the minister pronounced them man and wife. He turned them around to face the half-filled church. “I would like to introduce you all to Mr. and Mrs. John Robert Porter. May their love serve as an example to all of us. And may they live in love and peace forever.”

As the organist played a traditional recessional, the happy couple almost seemed to skip down the long aisle, surrounded on both sides by friends and family.

The next two hours were spent accepting gifts and congratulations in the gaily decorated church basement. To all present, John and Edna seemed to be two youngsters, instead of the senior citizens that they were. Hattie MacDonald, the woman who had first introduced the happy couple, just three months before, wiped a tear away as John and Edna offered a toast to "the special person who had made it all possible."

Finally, after obeying the rules of tradition, Edna had thrown her bouquet, which her 20 year old granddaughter caught easily and John had thrown Edna's garter, which the granddaughter's boyfriend had caught ("Grandma, you had that all planned!" she had accused) the newlyweds were able to leave amidst a shower of rice and good luck wishes.

They found themselves alone for the first time all day as John drove to the airport where they were to catch a plane for Las Vegas. Edna was surprised when John pulled off the main highway and drove down a secluded, wooded side street.

"Where are we going?" she asked as the car came to a halt.

"I wanted to come parking a bit," John grinned as he pulled his wife to him. "I haven't even gotten to kiss you yet, except for that little peck at the church."

"You're a devil," Edna laughed.

"You better believe it, sweetie. It took me 85 years to find you and I want to enjoy you all I can. He put his arms around Edna and kissed her.

"I love you, John."

"And I love you," John told her as he played with a lock of her hair. Then he continued, "Are you as happy now as you were when you married Frank?"

"I was happy then and I'm happy now. I don't think I can say I'm happier, but I'm just as happy. Remember, I loved Frank too."

John nodded. "I guess I just want to be sure that you don't regret marrying me."

"How can you ever think that? You're a very special man and I'm lucky you wanted me. I'm never going to regret this."

John squeezed Edna's hand and then kissed it gently. "I wish I'd met you 50 years ago, so I could've had more time with you." Then he added thoughtfully, "Course, you probably wouldn't've wanted me then. That's why I never got married before. Not too many women want to marry a cop."

"Darling, if I had met you before Frank, I would have married you then, no matter what you were."

He hugged and kissed her again. "We're going to have a good life, Edna, for a long time. I'm going to make sure you're never sorry that you married me." Then he giggled, "Hell, who said life begins at 40? It begins at 85!"

"And 72!" Edna added happily.

The next two weeks passed in a romantic blur as John and Edna began their lives together. They spent every second together, gambling a little, sightseeing and going to shows. And of course, there was a lot of time set aside for just getting to know each other.

But soon it was over and the Porters returned home. They had rented a small white house in a middle class suburb. John insisted on repainting the entire house, himself, despite Edna's protests.

"Damn it, old woman, just because I'm 85, doesn't mean I'm ready for the rocking chair!" he argued.

"I didn't say that you were, John, but don't you think you should get someone to help you a bit?"

"I don't have any intention of getting anybody to help me do *anything*. This is our house and I want us to fix it up *our way!*"

"So do I, but I just don't want you to overdo it."

John put his hands on Edna's shoulders. "Edna, didn't you say that one of the things you liked best about me was the way I didn't act my age?"

Edna nodded, sensing that she was about to go down in defeat.

"Well then, keep that in mind and stop trying to put me out to pasture before I'm ready to go."

"Why are you so stubborn, I just. . ." Edna stopped in mid-sentence, looking very crestfallen.

"What's the matter?" John was confused at his wife's sudden change in mood.

"John," she said softly and sadly, "I think we're having our first fight."

John thought this over for a second. "Why, I believe you're right. Hee, hee, how 'bout that?" He punched Edna on the arm. "Hey, if I'da known you were such a good fighter, I might've married you the day after I met you."

Edna wasn't amused. "I don't think it's funny," she said sadly. "We've only been married two weeks. We shouldn't be fighting."

"Sure we should. How are we ever going to get to know each other if we don't argue sometimes?" John told her. Then he put his arms around her. "Besides, fighting's kinda fun."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, when we have a fight," he kissed her, "we have to make up and," he kissed her again, "that makes it all worthwhile."

Edna laughed, "You're a devil."

"You better believe it, sweetie."

As time went on, the Porters became very well known around the neighborhood. They were a familiar sight as they took their nightly walk around the nearby streets and they always had a smile and a hello for anyone they passed along the way. Their friends marveled at the way they took care of their own lawn and garden. Edna gave up trying to get John to slow down and joined him in his youthful exuberance. But no matter what they did, they always did it together. "What's the use of having a wife if you can't spend all your time with her?" John was fond of saying.

The night of November 14th was a quiet one for the Porters. They stayed at home and watched TV, resting up for the next night when they would celebrate their six month anniversary at a party given by Edna's son and daughter-in-law. They had been in bed for about two hours when John suddenly sat up.

"What's wrong, dear?" Edna, who had been awakened by his stirring, asked.

"Can't seem to get to sleep," he told her.

"Why don't you let me make you some warm milk, that might help?"

"Good idea, but you go back to sleep, I'll get it myself."

An hour later, John was sound asleep, warmed and relaxed. All was quiet in the Porter bedroom. But the kitchen was a different story.

Muffy, the kitten that John had given Edna as a one month anniversary gift, had decided she was tired of sleeping and started playing with a towel she had dragged from the bathroom. She jumped atop the stove, with the towel, where John had forgotten to turn off the burner. The towel caught fire immediately. Seconds later, the fire jumped to the curtains at the window to the left of the stove. In a matter of moments, the entire kitchen was ablaze.

In the bedroom, John was awakened by Muffy, who had jumped on the bed. He smelled smoke.

"Edna, Edna, wake up, I think there's fire," he shook his sleeping wife.

"Wh-what'd you say," she asked sleepily.

"The house, I think it's on fire, I smell smoke."

Edna was suddenly wide awake. "Oh my God, Muffy, where's Muffy?"

"I've got her, right here, now come on, let's get out of here," he pulled her out of bed.

By now the fire had spread to the living room. John and Edna were almost to the front door when suddenly Edna turned around to go back to the bedroom. "Our wedding pictures, I can't lose them," she was thinking.

John, who did not realize that Edna had gone back, made it out the door to safety. Fire trucks were already pulling up in front as a result of a neighbor's alert call. People were starting to gather to watch the blaze.

Mike and Sandy Anderson, their next door neighbors, ran up to John who was out of breath, partly from smoke, partly from fear.

"John, thank God you're all right," Sandy threw her arms around him.

He nodded, "I'm glad I woke up when I did, cause Edna. . ." He looked around, then panicked, "Edna, God where's Edna?" He looked fearfully at the Andersons as if hoping that they might have the answer. "She, she was right beind m-me. I saw her, she-she was right there."

"Jesus, you don't think she's still . . ." Mike broke off fearfully.

"Edna!" John screamed, turning back to the burning house. As he made his first move, Mike's strong arms reached out to stop him.

"John, you can't!"

But even the burly arms of a 200 pound football coach couldn't stop the old man whose beloved wife was in danger.

"I'm coming Edna, I'm coming," he cried as he made his way through the crowd.

"Fella, stop, you can't go in there," a fireman yelled as John pushed passed him. But it was too late, John was already to the front door.

Inside, the house was like an oven filled with smoke and flames. John's eyes burned terribly and he could barely see. Then, he saw her,

standing in the hallway, going around in a circle, lost and confused by what was happening all around her.

"Edna!" he reached out and touched her hand. He had her back again. Then the roof caved in.

The firemen found John and Edna lying side by side in the debris that had once been a home filled with love. They were still together.

THE SWAMP

Rich Van Wyck

Every little boy has a special place in this world where he goes to be alone. It is a secret place where his imagination and fantasies run wild without being interrupted by outsiders. For most boys, it might be a closet, perhaps a forgotten part of the basement, maybe even an out of the way place in the back yard, but for me it was the swamp.

To a seven-year-old boy, the swamp was an uncharted wilderness extending further than the mind could imagine. Sometimes I was Davy Crockett, clearing trails, fording rivers, making the territory safe for those who would someday follow me. Other days, I was Sergeant Saunders, stalking the Nazis through the thick foliage, single-handedly destroying countless enemy positions. One day it occurred to me that I really should have a base for all my operations. Pruning shears in hand, I set to work at building a "fort" (really nothing more than a clearing in the tall weeds). Confiscating Dad's wood and some old yard furniture, I came up with a pretty neat command post. It was complete with a secret hiding place for important papers and secret messages.