

THEN & NOW

April 1961

'Elaine, I hear you and Les are getting married next week?'

'Yes, on Saturday, actually.'

'Congratulations! It'll be in the Presbyterian church in town will it?'

'Well, no. You see, Les is a Roman Catholic so we *have* to get married in the Roman Catholic church'.

'Why's that? To make it valid or something?'

'As a matter of fact, yes. Our marriage wouldn't be recognised if we got married in my church.'

'A bit tough that, isn't it?'

'Very.'

'Oh well, never mind. Can your minister assist in the service? And you can have some of your favourite hymns?'

'I'm afraid not. My minister can only come as one of the guests; he can't take any part in the service. As for hymns, the Catholic guests and the Presbyterian ones generally wouldn't know the same hymns; also we were told *'Catholics don't sing!'* You see most of their services are silent as far as music is concerned.' *'Catholics usually have a nuptial mass or something don't they?'*

'Yes but we can't because I'm not a Catholic.'

'Not even if you didn't take communion?'

'No, any form of nuptial mass is out of the question in mixed marriages.'

'Isn't that tough on Les?'

'Very.'

'At least you'll be able to go to church together after you're married?'

'I'll be able to go with him, but he won't be able to come with me as Catholics are not allowed to attend non-Catholic services.'

'Don't you have to sign a paper to say that your children will be brought up as Catholics?'

'Yes.'

'Doesn't that worry you?'

'Yes, to a certain extent, but the important thing is that they should be brought up as Christians.'

April 1986

'I hear you celebrated your silver wedding last week.'

'Yes, on Saturday, actually.'

'Congratulations. '

'Thank you.'

'I heard it was rather an historic occasion with a special service conducted by a Roman Catholic priest and a Methodist minister in the same church?'

'Yes, it was really wonderful. Since coming to England we've become involved with the AIF which has given us a tremendous amount of help and support. Then, as a Presbyterian in England, I should go to the United Reformed Church but for several reasons this is not possible, so I go to a Methodist/Anglican partnership. They're on the way to unity and so are we, so it seems appropriate. We've been most fortunate in our respective parishes in having very wonderful and supportive priests and ministers who have been real friends to the family.'

'You're lucky. Tell me about the service.'

'Well, my minister and Les's priest got together and examined what they could and could not do. They decided they could celebrate the eucharist. We then worked out what we would like, chose the readings, hymns, the bidding prayers and so on, then went back to them and we all discussed it. We invited our local AIF group, some of whom provided the music, and a friend played the organ. We chose hymns which were either in both hymn books or were known by most people, and which were significant for us, The service was held in the Methodist / Anglican church and was followed by a Barn Dance in one of the Catholic school halls.

The Methodist minister welcomed everyone, then both clergy conducted the service. Our two daughters read the readings and our son said the bidding prayers. When it came to communion the priest and the minister each consecrated their own elements and Leslie received from his priest while I received from my minister. For the children, however, it was different. They each received the host from one celebrant and the chalice from the other.'

'A symbol of hope for the future.'

'Exactly. The ministers stood side by side and gave out the host to people as they came to them while Leslie and I on either side of the altar gave the chalice to those who came to us. The good thing, however, was that the children didn't have to choose between us.

'It must have been a very moving experience. '

It certainly was. One lovely thing was that an Irish nun who came gave us the most beautiful candle with silver decorations and '25' on it. We placed it on the altar and at the end of the priest's address we renewed our marriage vows and, each with a taper, together lit the candle.'

'The churches have certainly come a long way in 25 years, haven't they?'

'They have indeed. But we didn't feel that our celebration was a forced ecumenical event. It just grew out of a need, and we feel so grateful that the Holy Spirit and two generous clergy and many friends enabled us to celebrate it in this very significant way. One of our gifts, from the Catholic priest, was a bottle of wine from Cana for communion, with a specially baked host together with beautiful flowers from the other church, all emphasising God's generosity to us.'

'You ended the evening with a Barn Dance?'

'Yes, it all seemed a perfect blend. We were even entertained by the assistant parish priest who played his guitar and sang and kept us in fits of laughter.'

'It all sounds very different from your wedding 25 years ago.'

'Oh, it was. How far will we have gone 25 years from now, I wonder?'

'Achieved full unity, perhaps.'