

ISL Season 3 Episode 1: Courtship

Mary Cabe

FF: Well, back then, you mentioned that, was courtin' and all different than it is today? I mean like when a boy come to see you, they didn't do like they do today where they jump in the car and take off and go to shows and stuff. How would they do it back then? Would they come in with everybody and sit and talk?

MC: Sit around and talk for a while, get up and go home. They never stayed all night and went to shows like they do now.

FF: Or maybe would they go out and meet at church or something? Go to a signing or something?

MC: They'd go to church, go home--the boys would go home with the girls maybe, and sometimes stay for dinner, sometimes just take her home and go on back. There wasn't no stayin' out late like there is now.

FF: What were the marriage customs?

MC: Well, I don't know much about that.

FF: Would the boys have to ask, like when you got married, did he have to ask your daddy if it was alright?

MC: No, he didn't ask him. You can if you want to, it's alright anyhow. Lots of 'em didn't know nothin' about it.

FF: Not everybody got married in the church?

MC: No, hardly anybody got married in the church.

FF: Oh really? Would they go to a judge or something? Is that--or justice of the peace?

MC: Yeah, you go to justice of the peace to marry.

FF: Well, what about them shotgun weddings? We've heard a lot about them. Did you ever know of any 'round, shotgun weddin's?

MC: No, I never did know of any. I heerd of 'em.

FF: We've heard of them and all that, never know if they really had 'em, where they had their guns with 'em to make 'em get married.

MC: I don't know whether they ever did or not. They might've threatened them, but then I don't guess they were done much.

FF: Well, what kind of gifts would they give you back then when you got married?

MC: Nothin'.

FF: Nothin'? You just had to make it on your own?

MC: You had to make it on your own. When you started out, you was on your own, make it or not.

FF: In other words, it was a big decision to get married?

MC: If you was old enough to marry, you was old enough to take care of yourself.

FF: I bet you you'd have to be.

Bessie Underwood

FF: Could you tell us a little bit about weddin' and courtin' customs maybe? About how you used to go out on dates if you went out and--

BU: Well, we used to go out in a mule and buggy. And we'd, all the places we went then was to church; there was no picture show, not any kind of entertainment for young people at all. And we'd have parties, candy drawin's. And they'd get in a straight line, the boys and the girls you know, and they'd have two different boxes of stick candy. They mixed it up. And if your partner didn't get a stick of candy like yours, they had to put it back. Then the old time syrup candy pullin's. You'd boil this molasses, you know--we made molasses then--and you'd boil that until it would spin. You know, spin a hair, that's what we called it then. And then you would put butter and soda in that and beat it. And then get it out and pull it. And you had partners. And you would pull that candy. Back then, we didn't even have wax paper. You had to put it on--we'd butter a big platter and when you pulled it til it got real stiff, you would make it in a twist and lay it down and cut it. And that now, and to church was all we had.

FF: Y'all never did go from house to house and have dances or anything?

BU: Well, sometimes we would, but not very often. And back then--I forgot what it was, more or less like square dancin'. But they would line up, you know, and just dance back and forth that way.

FF: What about, where did you usually get married at?

BU: Most of the time back then, you went to the justice of the peace's home and got married.

FF: Is that where you got married?

BU: Yes.

FF: Did a lot of people get married in their own house?

BU: Not too many. Most of them went to the justice of the peace's home, you know, and got married.

FF: Was there anything like a honeymoon?

BU: No. Not when I got married. That's been fifty-two years ago.

FF: What did you do if you didn't have a honeymoon?

BU: Well, back then usually they had their home already furnished and just married and went home.

Lawton Brooks

LB: We married in the hardest times in the world. Hardest times ever been here, we married.

FF: How'd you all date and stuff?

LB: Well, we went to see some of --her brother's wife and my step-brother were kin someway or another. And we went, and my daddy wanted me to go with him and my stepmother over there to see 'em. Which I didn't want to go at the time. But he did know about it and I went with him. Course it was many a mile across the mountain we had to go. We went in the wagon. And so I decided then I would go, I didn't want to go, then I rode up on her. And they were havin' a meetin' down at the meetin' house, down there about a mile or two below there. And so I just sit around there and I kept looking at her and I just thought they was goin' to meetin'. I just thought to myself, "Well, I'm gonna ask her for a date. She can't do a thing in the world but say yes or no." It ain't gonna make no difference to me, no way. I said, "I'm a'gonna ask her thought tonight." So went over there for a meetin' and I sit right in the back of the church. And I got just outside the door, standin' on the steps. Some old boy come up there in front of me and lit up her. And I knew he was waitin' on one but I didn't know which one he was waitin' on. Well, when she come out, he asked her for a date and I hear her turn him down. I just thought, "Old gal,

you'll have to turn me down too!" And so, she come on out and I asked her for a date and I went on home. Yeah, we've had a lot of fun.

FF: Well, did you do a lot of the courtin' at church and stuff?

LB: Well, goin' to church and backwards and forwards and then when they wasn't going to church, we'd go and see 'em anyway. We just set out to courtin'.

FB: In the wintertime we'd get in the front room or the kitchen or somewhere like that and sit.

LB: Sit and talk for a bit. Old folk got to hollerin' bedtime on us. Yeah, that's the way it went.

FF: But that, did you have much trouble--did momma or daddy want to stay in the room with you or somethin' like that?

LB: No, no. No, they didn't do it that way. They just let us have--we's in the kitchen, they'd always be in the front room. If we was in the front room, they's in the kitchen. So we always had a bit where we could do our courtin'.

Margaret Norton

FF: Ms. Norton, do you know anything about the courting customs, you know, when you were datin' and stuff? Is it any different from today?

MN: Yeah, it's a lot different today than it was when I was a girl.

FF: What was it like?

MN: Well, just like you three girls started out walkin', we didn't have cars to ride in. We walked many of a time to somethin' that went on at Rabun Gap School, 'cause that's where we all went to school, you see. And there wasn't any cars to ride in until, I believe there's one car on Betty's Creek, maybe two, before I got married. And we walked to everything.

FF: What sort of things did you go to?

MN: We went to square dances at the school and ball games and movin' picture shows, or anything they had, you know. They always had a week of commencement at the end of school, a whole week--it lasted a week, every night. Each grade had some play they put on, all the grades. So just like anything we'd do, we'd walk. People just paired up and walked. Think that'd be fun?

FF: Were you allowed to walk at night with your boyfriend?

MN: Yes, we didn't have to have no chaperone. We'd go--if your momma and daddy didn't care. But you had a chaperone when you got to school.

FF: Yeah, I'm sure you did. Did you say square dance?

MN: Unh-huh. Mr. Ritchie used to, every Saturday night, let the children have a square dance. Because he said there wasn't nothin' any better than good, clean, wholesome fun for young people. They didn't have any drinkin' or any bad doin's or anything like that.

FF: Well that's nice.

MN: Mhm, that's nice. It was real nice.

FF: How long do they usually last?

MN: About two hours. From about 8 o'clock til ten. Then we got home by 11 o'clock. Early enough bedtime.

FF: You'd walk from your house to the school?

MN: Yes, my house. We weren't up here then; it's further on down the road.

FF: So you had a long walk?

MN: Yeah, we had a long walk.

FF: Well if you're with your boyfriend...

MN: Yeah, it's alright. There'd be a dozen couples along, there'd be at least two--everyone had their boyfriend, maybe their brother and sister along too. 'Cause they had to go and they had to be looked after.

FF: What other kinds of things? Did you go to church, like young couples go to church together?

MN: Yes, everybody went to church, both Sunday morning and Sunday night. They had, then what they called the BYPU. They don't call it BYPU now, they call it ? Union. But they called it Baptist's Young People's Union then. And everybody went to the Dillard Baptist Church to the BYPU.

FF: Do you suppose that's why a lot of people went to church?

MN: I guess it was, so they could have a night with their boyfriend.

FF: Were you allowed to date on school nights?

MN: Yes, yes. That kind of rule hadn't come into being then, 'cause we always got our homework and then we could go somewhere, you know, if it was chaperoned at the place where we went.

FF: Did you have a curfew, a set time to be in?

MN: Yes, yes. We's supposed to be in by 11 o'clock.

FF: Well that's still pretty good.

MN: Unh-huh, it is. 'Cause we had to get up and work before we went to school. Milk the cows and cook breakfast, or clean up the house or whatever our job was.

FF: Did your boyfriend come over to your house a lot?

MN: Yes, he came over and eat with us. Maybe dinner and supper both.

FF: Was Richard (*Margaret's husband*) your boyfriend?

MN: Yes.

FF: Was he your only boyfriend?

MN: Oh no. No.

FF: How long did you go out with Richard before you got married?

MN: Four years.

FF: That's a nice long time.

Stop 12:14

Selma Mosley

SM?: So you have to learn to trust, you see.

FF: Yes.

SM: You have to learn to trust. Let 'em know that they can go out there and be young ladies and young men, and come back that way.

FF: Do you remember, did you have boyfriends or anything while you were in night school?

SM: Oh yeah, yeah. I dated. I dated and I courted. I was popular among the boys.

FF: Did you meet Bruce (*husband*) during night school?

SM: No, I met Bruce, well I done quit school. I was working and he was, Bruce was making his last year in service. He was in World War II. And he was at my hometown. I remember seeing him in his Army outfit. I remember seeing a soldier, but I didn't know him. And really I didn't care that much about soldiers, because I felt like soldiers didn't really care for one girl, you know. They just kind of went from girl to girl, because they are in the service. So I remember seeing him, but I didn't pay him any attention. This was, I think, in '45. And he said he met a boy on the bus going back to the same camp from my hometown that he were in and he said he talked about me to this boy all the way. And said this boy told him, said, Bruce said he told the boy, he said, "I'm goin' back and I'm goin' to marry her." And said, the boy said to him, "If you can get her, you will get you a good wife." And so he said he just made the conversation, just kept talkin'--this is what he told me afterwards, you know. So help me, in 1946 when he come to camp, he got somebody to show him where I live and they brought him to me and of course we met. And that kind of started it. From that, we started datin' and I guess we dated for about 8 months and then were married.

FF: Did you, what month was your marriage in?

SM: June, June the 8th.

FF: Did you have a long engagement?

SM: No, no we didn't honey. We just, we just went out of town and had a short one, to the probation. We didn't have a wedding, you know, we just went and just got married. We went from one city to the next and just went ahead and got married.

LM and Mary Olive Keef

FF: So you just went in and got, just seen her once in a while? So you thought she was pretty?

LMK: That was mostly the reason, yeah.

FF: And what did you all think of each other when you first met?

MOK: That's been a long time ago.

LMK: You direct all these questions to her.

FF: No, you got to answer too!

LMK: Because she has a better answer for them than I do.

MOK: Well, I thought he was real nice. That's the main thing, when I first--

LMK: That was her mistake number one.

MOK: He was real nice looking.

FF: And what did you think about her Mr. Keef?

LMK: I thought everything of her. I thought everything of her.

FF: How old were y'all?

MOK: I was 26--25, 26.

FF: How long had you known each other when you realized that you wanted to start dating?

MOK: Year and a half, do you suppose?

FF: What did you all do on your first date?

LMK: I didn't dare to get near her.

MOK: Just rode around I guess.

FF: What made you get the courage up to ask her out, Mr. Keef?

LMK: What made me what?

FF: Get the courage?

LMK: Oh. I was just, I thought that she'd reject me, see. So I didn't make any advances to her. I'd just hold her hand or something, that was all. Afraid of being rejected.

FF: What? Such a handsome fella like you?

LMK: Oh boy. She--I misled her, I think.

FF: Why do you think that?

LMK: Well, it took me some time; it took me a year and a half to convince her that we ought to be married.

FF: How did you propose to her?

LMK: I didn't. I never did propose to her.

FF: Never did?

LMK: No.

MOK: Just one of those things where you just kind of take it for granted after a while, you know?

LMK: No, I just began to tell her what we were going to do when we got married. I didn't propose to her, I just told her.

OS and Olene Garland

OSG: What made me want to date her, you say? Well, for one thing, she was a pretty girl back then. Well, she is now. I ask her about gettin' married, if she wanted to marry me, she laid her head on my shoulder and roll them pretty blue eyes up at me like a ? and said, "Do you love me?" I met her at school, Clayton school, she went to school and we walked up the road together from Clayton to Mountain City. I used to walk three nights a week to Mountain City to see her. She lived in Mountain City and I lived here. I'd go Sunday night and Saturday night. Had to walk. Her mother, she didn't want us to go together, so we slipped around and went together. Got married. I wanted to ask her father, but I reckon he'd be so scared he wouldn't give her to me. So we were on the way to Walhalla, South Carolina. Her mother, well she liked me alright, she just didn't, she said I had too rough or somethin'. She didn't want me to go with her.

OG: Well you were, you drank a bit.

OSG: Yeah, I drank some back then. After we got married, she thought the world of me. But she, I guess whatever kind of boy I was then, I was kind of rough. I wouldn't want one of my girls to go out with a guy like that. I didn't blame her. She loved me after we got married. She stayed with us in old age. When we got married is one of the happiest memories. Then when we had our first child. And when we had all the rest of 'em too, but the first one--we had nine.

FF: Guess that was especially exciting for the first one.

OSG: The very first one, you know. Everybody most always does.

FF: What kind of advice would you give to young people who are considering marriage?

OSG: What kind of advice would I give 'em? Try to find a nice young man or nice young girl. Reason there's so many divorces now is they marry too quick, they don't know whether they love each other.

FF: So what do you contribute your long, successful marriage to?

OSG: I think it's 'cause we love each other.