

Alma Stearns: Reflections on Her 50th Wedding Anniversary September 1970

Life is fascinating, and sometimes we are not even aware of the wonderful things that are happening to us.

So it was with me. It all started back in 1917. I graduated from a three-year high school in Harford, Pennsylvania. My best friend in school was Genevieve, the minister's daughter. Her father was from Washington, D.C., and so the following year she went to live with an aunt in D.C. and graduated from Central High there. It was lucky for me that another year was added to the curriculum in Harford, and most of our class returned to finish our four years of high school.

Genevieve and I both wanted to go to college, but first we would have to earn money. She wrote to me of the opportunities for employment in the Government because World War I was in progress then; and she told me that if I would come down, I could live at the home of Aunt Grace. This made the idea acceptable to my parents. So I went to Wilkes Barre (PA) and took the Civil Service examination for government clerk. This was 40 miles from home and the farthest I had been from home in my whole life! My brother Russell accompanied me on the trip. I did not have to wait long for an appointment.

My father loaned me money for the trip to Washington. I was both excited and frightened at the thought of going to the big city and so far from home. I had never been away for more than a few days at a time. Then the long train ride. Genevieve met me at Union Station. I will never forget the thrill of looking out and seeing the Capitol of the United States!

I met my "family," and they were so kind and understanding; I loved them right away. It was a big, new world for me. It was the first time I had lived in a house with a bathroom—and also gas lights.

Genevieve went with me to the office the first day and met me afterwards to be sure I found my way home. I worked in the Veterans Bureau and was on the 11th floor. Elevators were new to me also.

Only a few days after I arrived in Washington the Armistice was signed. There was great joy and celebration, and a fantastic parade.

Washington proved to be a city of opportunities. My "family" took me to concerts and lectures and plays, and directed me to the museums and the public buildings. There was no end of things to do, and it was all an education to me.

In August 1919, I went home to Pennsylvania for a vacation. When I returned Mr. Howell met me at the train station. On the way back, Mr. Howell remarked that they had a new boarder, a nice young man from Massachusetts. And that is what I have been leading up to

all this time. For that man was Eric Stearns, whose father was a cousin of Grace Howell, who was a sister of our minister in Harford, whose daughter was my best friend, who encouraged me to go to Washington. So as I said in the beginning, wonderful things can be happening and we don't even know it. Meeting Eric was truly the most wonderful thing that ever happened to me. Life was never the same after that!

It wasn't long before I knew that we were meant for each other, but it took Eric awhile to find it out. He went home for Christmas but came back several days early "because he missed me so." He brought his first gift to me—a beautiful *lavalier* with a tiny diamond chip. He knew it, too!

The Howells lived near the eastern branch of the Anacostia River. It was a pretty walk, especially in springtime. The most special walk was on the 17th of May, 1920. We sat down on the bank, overlooking the river, and Eric gave me a box of candy, as he often did on payday. When I opened the box, the center "piece" was a velvet box; and inside, a diamond ring! We talked and talked and talked till the sun was low. Fifty years have passed since then, but I still remember most everything we said!



**Alma Grace Carey on the day of her wedding to Eric Swain Stearns
September 8, 1920**



Alma and Eric Stearns
50 years later - early 1970s