



## First Days in London

I wrote last week about leaving home to strike out on my own - flying to England to seek 'fame and fortune' as an orchestra flute player. As it turned out, I would spend only one year there before returning to Canada, but what a wonderful year I had. I am sure that the next 52 stories in this series could all be episodes from my London adventure! I don't think I should go that far, but now and then in this 'A Story A Week' series, I'll dip into the bag of memories of that time for a theme. Let's have a couple of them this week and next, before moving on to other topics ...

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My parents had given me three things: the plane ticket, a bit of money (just over 50 English pounds), and a slip of paper with a telephone number written on it - the number of an old friend of my father's, a man who had played together with him in the dance orchestra when they were younger. This man was my godfather, and this telephone number was my 'backup' if I were to get in trouble.

So off I went, on my first airplane trip, flying on one of the brand new 747s that had just entered international service. After arriving at Heathrow airport, I took a bus into the centre of London and stood on the sidewalk outside the bus station, with my little bag containing my flute and a few clothes. Where should I stay? I had no idea. How could I make a living when that little bit of money ran out? I had no idea.

Answering the first question - where to stay - turned out to be quite easy. I walked around pretty much at random until I found myself in a residential area, and noticed, pasted on telephone poles, advertisements for rooms for rent in the area. I took note of one of them, followed the directions to the address, and a short time later, found myself settled into my new 'home'. The rent was five pounds per week, and for this I had the use of a small room with bed and chair, and would receive a cooked breakfast every morning prepared by the landlord. I could use the toilet down the hall, but there was no bath or shower.

And so, with a home base established, I set out to explore the wonderful city of London. I walked and walked everywhere, of course visiting many of the famous attractions, but also just enjoying every new street and seeing what was around every corner. I was very shy, and didn't find it easy to talk to people, so I wasn't able to ride the buses at first, because you had to be able to tell the conductor where you were going. Instead, I just walked, even right across to the other side of the city.

I had done nothing at all yet about initiating flute studies, but one day during that first week, I discovered Shaftesbury Avenue, famous at that time for being the home of many music shops. And there, nestled in its case in a display window, I saw a flute - a beautiful wooden flute, with deeply toned silver keys glowing against the rich black wood of the body. I asked if I could try it, and then, upon hearing its soft and delicate, very old-fashioned tone, I lost my head and bought it.

I can no longer remember exactly how much it cost - the money was no consideration - but when I returned home to my room that evening, I must have come to my senses and counted out the money I had remaining. It was not enough for the next week's rent, which was due in a few days.

I had been on my adventure less than a week, and there I was, broke. Now what to do ...

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