



A Sentimental Journey

Lifescapes Writing Group 2020

13TH Edition

A Sentimental Journey

Brantford Public Library

Lifescapes Writing Group 2020

This book was written by members of the Lifescapes group, a memoir writing program sponsored by the Brantford Public Library.

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Foreword

Lifescapes is a writing program created to help people tell their life stories, to provide support and guidance for beginner and experienced writers alike. This year marks our thirteenth year running the program at the Brantford Public Library, and *A Sentimental Journey* is our thirteenth collection of stories to be published.

On behalf of Brantford Public Library and this year's participants, I would like to thank lead instructor Lorie Lee Steiner and editor Shailyn Harris for their hard work and dedication to bringing this anthology to completion.

Creating an anthology during a pandemic has been a truly unprecedented experience for everyone involved. Beyond the stress and uncertainty of facing a global contagion, our writers lost the peer support of regular meetings and access to resources. Still, many persevered with their writing, and it is with considerable pride and triumph that I can share the resulting collection of memories and inspiration with you.

I know that many of us will look back at 2020 and remember the hardship, the fear, and the loss. It is more important than ever to remember that we – both individually and as a society – have persevered through hard times before, and we will persevere through these times as well.

As you read these stories, be prepared to feel both the nostalgia of youth and the triumph of overcoming past adversity. Perhaps you will recall childhood memories of travelling with your family, or ponder the way unexpected encounters can bring insight, change perspective, and provide wonderful new pathways for your own personal journey.

Sincerely,
Robin Harding, Program Coordinator (Adult and Senior)
Brantford Public Library

Message from the Editors

Lorie

Congratulations to all the wonderful authors whose memoir contributions have made this 2020 edition of the Lifescapes anthology so very special!

It's been a bittersweet year, for sure. When we first got together as a group in September, I was looking at taking a slightly different approach to the bi-weekly classes – a little less structured than previous years, a lot more individual interaction, and just full of fun. As it turns out, this eclectic group of writers wasn't averse to homework – in fact, they asked for it. And couldn't wait to share with their fellow authors at the next meeting. Who knew?

Lessons included all the creative writing basics – “The Hook” (catchy beginnings), “The Art of Storytelling” (narrative), “Talking Points” (dialogue), some great Q & A sessions, and several guest speakers for added inspiration. Our first theme in the new year was “Winter Writer's Retreat” – escaping cabin fever through words. And a few weeks later, we celebrated March Break together – wearing Hawaiian shirts, fashionable sun hats, and shades. We ate treats, swapped vacation pics and wrote a short piece about each other's photo, then compared them to the actual stories. What a way to stretch the imagination and bring out the smiles and chuckles.

As it turns out, that levity and camaraderie was just what was needed to hold onto when COVID-19 arrived and the library, unfortunately, had to close. Ironically, we were talking about cabin fever back in January and a few months later everyone was pretty much home-bound again, writing their way through the pandemic. These days, fact is definitely stranger than fiction...

Meanwhile, as strong and brave Canadians, the 2020 Lifescapes continued to *#stayhome*, crafting their memoirs, and this beautiful anthology is the result. A unique collection of stories collected during a most unusual and challenging time that is a true pleasure to read.

It's been my pleasure to be part of this amazing group and I look forward to the program carrying on in whatever form that should take. "Long-distance Lifescapes" – we can do this! Virtual hugs to all!

Shailyn

The authors featured in this publication should be extremely proud of the dedication and thoughtfulness that it took to finish their stories. This year has been anything but ordinary, but these authors were dedicated to seeing their writing through till the end. While I unfortunately never got to meet any of them in person, I hope they feel a sense of accomplishment and continue to share their stories.

This collage of memories truly offers insights from the Grand to the globe. From stories set in historic Brantford to those across the world, they all showcase the importance of friends, family and reflection. I really enjoyed getting to go along on these journeys while reading and I hope you do as well.



The Things We Remember

by Elena Haskell

It's hard to know whether facts are important or just memories. What shapes us more?

One of my earliest memories is from the town of Parry Sound. I remember riding my little trike (pictured right) up what seemed like a very steep front yard.



I was born in the same town and same hospital as my mother, and we are both second born daughters with three brothers. I lived in the same house that she lived in when she was little.

I remember my grandparents visiting with their big trailer that they parked on our front yard. I remember my grandmother teasing me about how when I asked for a drink of water it sounded more like "a sink of water."

I have some vague memories about going to church as a family.

The Things We Remember

My older brother (by three years) once sliced his neck open trying to jump over a shelving bracket. I remember him yelling at me to get Mom, but I didn't know why he was freaking out as his good side was turned to me. Even in the car on the way to the hospital I was upset that he was dripping blood on my booster seat. Guess I still hadn't noticed what was going on. He must have had his hand over it.

I don't have that many memories from before our family's big move to India. The only memory I have in preparing for the big trip was my little Sunday school class saying bye to me. I think my teacher was sad. I was only five, so I'm guessing I didn't really grasp what was going on.

Our New Home in India



In 1990 my family moved to New Delhi, India. (Pictured above: sitting in front of the Taj Mahal.)

People often ask me what living in India was like.

I remember odd things like peeing my pants on a camel ride. When you're five and excited/scared about going on a camel, you don't have time to run and go pee. It happens.

I remember biking by our house with my older brother and I had my Barbie tied on to the back of my seat and these kids grabbed the head off. I guess I didn't bike very fast.

I remember women banging on our door and windows after my youngest brother was born. I remember my mom waking up from a nap and shooing them away.

I find it hard to explain what I remember, and I often tell people to watch movies like Slum Dog Millionaire or Lion as I find those movies show what stood out to me about India. The poverty, the mess and the crowdedness.

Crazy to think that I wasn't more traumatized by the whole thing, but I think it must show that I have good parents who loved me and made me feel safe even though my whole world was being rocked.

Now that I'm an adult, I understand that my parents always had a passion to serve the hurting. Before my birth they lived in Africa and Bangladesh and only came home as the project they were with fell apart, so when the opportunity came up to open the family business in India they jumped at it. Even though they had three little kids!

My third brother was born in India. Funny that I don't have bigger memories of my brother coming into my world; he's five years younger than me and he was born with Down syndrome. I remember my Dad came and told my brother and me about him having Down syndrome. I remember crying and feeling sad, but I don't totally know why. I'm guessing it was because my dad was sad. We asked questions about what he'd be able to do, like whether he'd be able to ride a bike or drive, but when we went to pick him up I just saw my cute little brother.

The Things We Remember

I do remember being sad when I found out he was another brother and not a sister.

Life in India passed by. We were homeschooled so I didn't have teachers and grades to tell the years apart, just a jumble of memories. We played sports at the American Embassy and I remember loving to get chocolate bars and pop from there as it was the same stuff we had in Canada.

Milk tasted yucky as it came from water buffaloes, not cows. Hamburgers weren't the same either. Cows are holy in India, so you can't butcher or milk them. They were everywhere and you had to make sure you didn't hit them when you drove. We had a driver for that reason – well, partly for that reason. To this day I'm not totally sure why. I guess if something happened then the driver at least spoke the language. We were middle business class but I wouldn't say the money was flowing in. It's pretty tough starting up a business with only a little support from the overhead company. Still, if one of my parents was driving and something happened, it could prove very costly.

Seeing kids beg on the side of the road really shapes you. To this day I hate wasting food. I will eat food that's fallen on the floor and say, "It's Canada dirt. It won't kill you."

I once saw a dead horse on the side of the road when we drove to the airport.

We got sick a lot. Once was on the way back from vacation in Goa. I felt so gross on the way home that I think we all went right to the clinic. Another time, I remember sitting on the can and vomiting into the garbage; I couldn't keep anything in me. After a bath, I was so weak I just laid wrapped in my towel on the bed, and my Mom told me I shouldn't stay in a wet towel but I had no energy to do anything. Of course, she helped. During that sickness, my Dad had to carry me into the clinic and I specifically remember the worried look on his face.

It is an odd moment for a kid when you see that your parents are really worried about you.

Brushing my teeth stands out to me because we had to learn to do it differently. The water could almost kill you, so you had to have filtered water in the

bathroom to rinse your toothbrush and mouth. Before you could have a hot bath, you had to remember to turn the little water heater on that was in the bathroom.

Our first house, D-991 New Friends Colony, New Delhi, was a two-story house in which we rented the lower level. There were servants' quarters over the garage.

We had a servant that helped around the house. I have two main memories of her. Once I went up to her little house and she let me put my tongue on a hot pepper. Man, did it burn. I ran down to our house and got some milk as fast as I could. Another time I was trying to help her in the kitchen by peeling carrots and she got mad at me for peeling off too much. I must have cried because I remember my Dad getting involved.

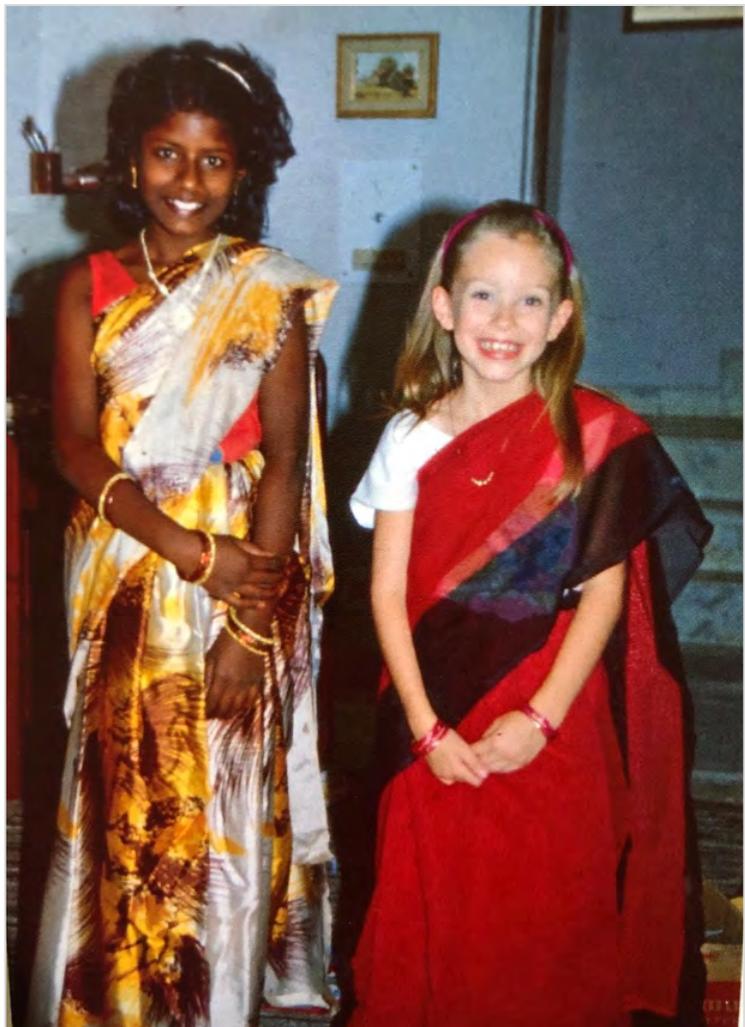
I was pretty young and just wanted to help.

I remember Holi (the Festival of Colours) mostly because I was at a friend's house and I saw one of their servants shove dye in someone's face. I was scared it was going to happen to me. It was an interesting drive back to my house as there was dye everywhere.

There was also Diwali, known as the Festival of Lights. There were fireworks and firecrackers going off almost the whole night. I remember my parents sitting out on our roof watching.

Both of these holidays were frightening for me as a young girl who didn't understand what was going on.

Right: dressed for holidays.



Back Home to Canada

In 1993, we moved back to Canada.

I don't have much memory of leaving India. As an adult, I know more about what went on but my memory is that my brother and I flew back to Canada by ourselves for some reason. I was around 8, he was 12. I remember saying goodbye to our dog and realizing I may never see him again. We felt a little sad as the four of us drove to the airport.

My parents weren't allowed to come in with us. (I later found out this was because of a bomb threat.) When we walked away from my parents, I tried to be brave but a few tears rolled down my cheeks as we followed a man to the check-in counter.

I don't remember waiting in the New Delhi airport, but I do remember my brother helping measure out some Pepto Bismol because I had a tummy ache. After he measured it out and went to put the lid back on, he bumped the stuff he had measured for me. Then he put the bottle down and bumped that. We had a big pink mess to clean up. Poor guy. Thankfully, we did have nice people sitting beside us who helped and the flight crew were very good too. The Frankfurt airport kids' lounge during the layover was kind of boring as everything was in German – the tv, the books – so I do remember that wait feeling long.

My grandma picked us up at the airport and took us to her place. I think it was over two months till our parents joined us in Canada; during that time I felt homesick. We asked to go stay with relatives who had kids that we could play with. I liked being there, as my aunt so badly wanted a daughter that she made me feel special. I am surprised I don't remember my parents arriving back in Canada and being reunited with them.

Now, I'm almost 35 and feel good about where I'm at, and I'm still fascinated by what stands out in a person's memories.



An Endearing Friendship

by Bertha Joseph

*An endearing friendship unfolded in the lives of two people,
a young woman in her late 20s and a Gentleman in his 90s.
She had 20/20 vision and he was nearly blind, unable even to see her face.*

So many years ago on that day the weather outside was beastly cold; however, in his advanced years Mr. Whittaker, dressed accordingly, didn't seem to mind.

It was nearing the end of the era when menfolk took pride and dressed in their suits and ties to go to town, to go on Sunday walks and even to go on picnics. The seniors of the day still held onto this manner of attire into the 60s, 70s and onward to the present. Mr. Whittaker, astutely attired, wore a black suit, white shirt, tie and vest topped by his black woollen overcoat. A woollen scarf snuggled his throat. A charcoal Fedora set upon his head, resting upon black furry ear muffs.

Upon entering the bank, the gentleman came to the counter in front of my desk.

"May I help you, Sir?" I inquired.

An Endearing Friendship

“My young lady, could I possibly have your help with something of grave importance?”

“Yes, of course, what is it you wish me to help you with?”

He removed his fur-lined leather gloves, placing them neatly upon the counter. Opening his overcoat, he withdrew from the right inner pocket a roll of brown paper securely tied with string. He passed it to me.

“You see, I am near blind and cannot see to address this package. It is the Brantford Expositor papers which I regularly mail to my niece. It is important they get mailed today, as she lives out West and keeps up to date with the current happenings in our fine City of Brantford.”

He unbuttoned his suit; a gold chain lay across his chest secured in his watch pocket. From his inner suit pocket, he withdrew a small piece of paper on which was written his niece’s address.

I addressed his package and offered the courtesy to mail it. He assured me he would have no problem getting to the Post to send it off. Thanking me, he reached for my hands and held them.

The warmth of his hands left me thinking of words of the great photographer, Yousuf Karsh:

There is a brief moment when all there is in a man’s mind and soul and spirit is reflected through his eyes, his hands, his attitude. This is the moment to record.¹

This was the first of many parcels of the Brantford Expositor I addressed for Mr. James T. Whittaker. This little service led to what became a wonderful, albeit short, three-year relationship with this grand gentleman.

Time passed until one day I, along with my husband, was invited to spend an evening with Mr. Whittaker. It was a marvelous, unforgettable evening. One filled with stories dating back to the 1800s forward, of history, memories and stories of Mr. Whittaker's life. His thoughts went back to his childhood days, painting in our minds a picture of what it was like being born in England in the year 1877, and those early years growing up in England and Brantford.

As a young man, Mr. Whittaker worked for P.U.C. (Brantford Public Utilities). With the permission of his employer, he was involved with Stratford Opera House until a fire destroyed the building in 1908. After the fire, the Opera House was moved to the old skating and curling rink on West Street, which became known as The Grand Opera House. In later years Mr. Whittaker became Lessee and Manager of the Grand Opera House.

Mr. Whittaker displayed photos and memorabilia of his days with and the history of the Opera Houses and theatre in Brantford. We were privileged to view his collection of signed portraits of great entertainers. I didn't keep a journal in those days, and although many faces of those portraits still hold a place in my memory, their names have disappeared along Memory Lane. To his credit, Mr. Whittaker brought many of the 'Greats of the Day' to the Grand Opera House to entertain the citizens of Brantford.

Our visit lasted until late in the evening. I never again experienced such an interesting, informative and enjoyable time. It was intriguing to hear stories about the days of Silent Movies and Talkies and on to theatres. Then interest in opera houses and live entertainment slowly faded, causing the demise of the Grand Opera House in 1930. But Mr. Whittaker, still with P.U.C. until his retirement, stayed active in the arts and entertainment in the community.



Street view of the Ker's Music Hall which later became the Stratford Opera House²

An Endearing Friendship

One afternoon at work I looked up from my typewriter to see a lady standing in the lobby staring at me. She smiled. I smiled. This happened a couple of times. I asked if I could help her.

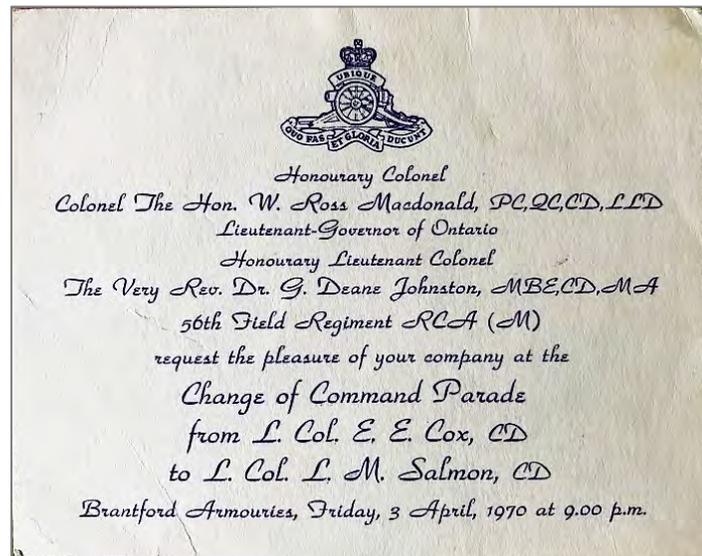
Coming to the counter, she said: “No, I just wanted to look at you.”

“Why?” I chuckled.

She said, “I wanted to see the person my brother loves so much. He wants me to tell him, with eyes that can see, what you look like. I am Lilly Main, James Whittaker’s sister.”

We chatted a bit. She was pleased I took the time to befriend her brother. She told me when people grow old and their family members dwindle in numbers, it becomes a very lonely world for them. And my kindness to James brought great comfort to her and made him smile again.

On Friday, April 3, 1970 my husband and I accompanied Mr. Whittaker by invitation (right) to the Change of Command Parade of the 56th Field Regiment RCA (M) at the Brantford Armouries. My husband, a former soldier with The Black Watch Regiment, was elated. It was an interesting and enjoyable evening. Mr. Whittaker was 93 years old at the time.



During the many times we were together, Mr. Whittaker told me stories about Brantford’s growth, industries and the war years, all taking place over the decades. He told me about working at P.U.C. and the first water meter to be placed in one of Brantford’s industries.

On one of our visits, he wanted me to hear a story about when he was a “young fella” and fishing “in the Grand,” as he called the Grand River, with his best friend.

He and his buddy would go fishing in the Grand and often wandered afar. One day they decided that on the morrow they would rise early, pack slices of homemade bread and cookies with a bottle of milk, and head for the Grand. In the cool of the morning they would catch fish for breakfast, and by noon they would catch enough for lunch. Building a small fire, they cooked the fish and enjoyed both their breakfast and their dinner.

“However,” he said, “the fish were not interested in biting that day.”

The sun rose high in the sky and it became very hot. The boys found a shaded spot to lie down and rest and thought that maybe the fish just might be hungry later on and start biting then.

Both were tired and, to say the least, hungry.

A gentleman came walking along the path by the river. He stopped and a long period of telling fish stories took place between the gentleman and the two boys; fish stories like none they had ever been told before. They sure enjoyed each others company and had a lot of laughs.

The gentleman, who was called Mr. Bell, looked at the boys and said, “I see you are very tired and bet you’re pretty hungry by now, means you have been out in the fresh air since early morning. How would you like to take a walk with me up the Heights and have some fresh made cookies and fresh cold milk?”

They jumped at the idea. They leapt to their feet and the trio were on their way to the Heights. On arriving, the milk was taken from a contraption made at the river’s edge to keep the milk cold. They entered the house, welcomed with a large plate of freshly baked cookies placed in front of them. They were given a sandwich along with all the cookies they could eat. He told how refreshing the ice cold milk was.

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After their feast was finished, the gentleman took them on a little tour of where he previously lived on Tutelo Heights. The boys were told about the invention of the telephone and other inventions during Bell's life on Tutelo Heights. He told them many things. They were given the opportunity to see Mr. Bell's favourite spot by the river. It was there he lay watching the flow of the Grand and all the while, lost in thought, dreaming and planning his next inventions and experiments. They were then shown Mr. Bell's workshop.

On another of our times together, Mr. Whittaker spoke at length about Alexander Graham Bell and the invention of the telephone. He said the visit to Tutelo Heights when he was a young fella stayed fresh and dear in his memory all his life.

Life was busy at the Grand Opera House. News was in the air that a memorial would be built on West Street to commemorate Bell's invention of the telephone in Brantford, Ontario. Sculptor Walter Seymour Allward was commissioned to design it. The unveiling of the Bell Memorial was scheduled for the 24th of October, 1917.

Mr. Whittaker was excited and would attend, however he knew he would be lost in the midst of the enormous crowd. In order to not miss this glorious occasion, he made a plan. Mr. Whittaker told of the excitement in the air. The day and time of the unveiling was at hand and folk crowded into the area. To everyone's disappointment, the weather did not cooperate and rain filled the air. With glee he said, "I witnessed the unveiling of the Bell Memorial from an upper window of the Grand Opera House, for not only did I have a bird's eye view of the unveiling of the Bell Memorial, I stayed dry."

His plan was an excellent one.

History in the making – the walk to the Heights so many years before, the stories of Alexander Graham Bell which he heard from the gentleman on Tutelo Heights that fine day when he was a young fella – came full circle when he witnessed the unveiling of the Bell Memorial in 1917.

It was late summer and I had just returned from vacation in Nova Scotia. My mind was at unrest for I was thinking: *it has been too long since I heard from my friend.*

I became anxious. Autumn was in the air. On the way from Nova Scotia, we were blessed with the colours of Autumn heralding the ending of one and the beginning of another season.

I arrived home from work to a phone call message. It was the John Noble Home with a message from Mr. Whittaker, requesting I come very soon to visit him.

That same evening, I visited my dear friend. I asked my mother who was visiting from Nova Scotia to accompany me to meet Mr. Whittaker. He was absolutely thrilled, excited and happy to see me and especially happy to meet my mother.

It was a great visit. I told him all about my vacation and how grand it was to place my feet once more on the soil of my homeland. I spoke about how the golden colours of autumn spoke to my heart and how anxious I became without his call and about all the photos I had taken. He asked that his picture be taken with my mother. I cherish this photo as a beautiful memory and keepsake. I now wish I had my picture taken with him. It was another enjoyable time spent with Mr. Whittaker. That night, I talked at great length with my mother expressing all the happiness Mr. Whittaker brought into my life.

Mr. Whittaker was a fascinating person. He related so many interesting stories, like how he loved music and brought joy and happiness to the community for so many years by way of entertainment at the Opera Houses and Theatre. Over these wonderful, albeit short, years of friendship, Mr. Whittaker filled my mind and heart full of stories of Brantford, history of its peoples, industries and buildings.

Our friendship continued until another call came to me, the call of the loss of my dear friend. On the 22nd of October, 1971, in his 95th year, James T. Whittaker passed. He is resting in Greenwood Cemetery with his beloved family, leaving me with sad and heartfelt memories.

An Endearing Friendship



James Thomas Whittaker...
... *walked into my life...*
... *upon going*
... *left his footprints in my heart.*

Sources:

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³ Illustration showing 'The New Opera House, Brantford, Canada', printed in The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News, August 19th 1882. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
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Meet the Author

I was born and raised in Nova Scotia. Since 1964, Brantford, Ontario has been my home. I am a proud Mother, Nana and Great Nana.

I love to write stories. I am writing memories. My book is called Strolling Through The Diamonds. The “diamonds” symbolize the precious years of my life. These are my stories written for my children, their children and all their little children, who one day, like me, will wonder about those who lived before and from whom they descended. In reading my stories, they will come to know me and may grasp a little of what life was like so long ago.





The Night the Sky Turned Orange

by Margo Karolyi

Mom rushed into the bedroom.

“There’s a fire across the street,” she said, thrusting empty white pillowcases at my sister Sharon and me. “Pack whatever you need for a sleepover at Lenore and Jim’s in these. Be quick about it. I have to go get the grandmothers.”

Sharon and I exchanged a bewildered look. She was eight; I was five and a half. We’d just finished our bath and put on our nightgowns, ready for bed. It was around 7 p.m. on a weeknight in late March 1959. With no real understanding of what was happening we did as we’d been told. We began filling our pillowcases.

A few minutes later, our fifteen-year-old sister Gail came into the room carrying our pet rabbit Snowball. “Hurry up,” she snapped. “We have to go NOW!”

Bulging pillowcases in hand, Sharon and I followed her through the house to the front hall. We pushed our feet into our boots and slipped our coats on over our nightgowns. Gail handed the rabbit to Sharon and picked



*Sharon and I, Valentine’s Day 1959,
5 weeks before the fire*

up our old deaf cat, Daisy Mae, who was meowing loudly and winding herself between Gail's legs. Mom appeared with eight-month-old Bob in her arms and our cocker spaniel Tommy at the end of his leash.

As the only one with a free hand, I opened the front door.

Our brother Terry, who'd just turned seventeen, stood at the bottom of the steps, our red wood wagon beside him. He took Mom's suitcase and Sharon's pillowcase and put them in the wagon with three other bundles and the covered birdcage holding Mom's canary, Sweetie-Pie.

The grandmothers, who lived in separate apartments on the upper two floors of our house, came out the second-floor door and stood momentarily on the landing.

Grammy Nell (Dad's mother) started down first, one hand holding the railing, the other grasping the handle of a small black suitcase. Grammy Cook (Mom's mom) followed behind her, an expression of impatience on her thin face. They lived next to one another but they didn't really get along very well.

As soon as they joined us on the sidewalk, Mom said, "Let's go."

"Wait. Where's Daddy?" I asked.

"He's staying behind to spray water on the house," my mother explained. "To keep the sparks off. He'll be fine." I think she said it to reassure herself as much as us. She nudged me with her elbow. "We need to get a move on."

Our house was located at the western end of Oakville's main street, which was now closed to traffic. Our motley-looking family parade headed off down Colborne Street. Behind us, sirens wailed and bells rang, firefighters yelled incomprehensible instructions to one another, water poured from hydrants through hoses into the sky, and smoke filled the air as the Trafalgar Building burned.

It only took a few minutes for us to reach the home of my parents' friends, Hilda and Doug Wood, a block and a half away on First Street. Their apartment

The Night the Sky Turned Orange

occupied half the first floor of an old Victorian mansion. They had no children but we visited them regularly. I loved the high ceilings and huge windows in their living room, as well as the linen cupboard at the end of the hall that held a selection of special toys and colouring books for young visitors.

“We’re going to stay here until Jim comes to get us,” Mom explained. Jim Craig and his wife Lenore were my parents’ best friends. They had a house on the west side of town that was big enough to accommodate our family for the night.

“Take the animals down to the den until he gets here,” Mom said, adding, “and keep the door closed.”

I took Tommy’s leash from Mom while Gail and Sharon carried the cat and the rabbit down the hall to the room Hilda and Doug called the den. It was a darkish room with a big desk and chair on one side, a couple of comfy chairs in the middle, and a padded bench under the window. Hilda had put newspaper on the floor and placed a box full of holes in the corner. Sharon put Snowball in the box and folded the top flaps down while Gail set the cat on the floor and unclipped Tommy’s leash. The cat and dog, fast friends, lay down together, shaking with fear over the strange surroundings and the tension they could sense in the people around them.

“Stay here and make sure they don’t make a mess,” Gail instructed Sharon and me as she left, closing the door behind her.

Sharon curled up in one of the comfy chairs, wrapping her arms around her pulled-up knees. I retrieved my favourite teddy bear from my pillowcase and, hugging him to my chest, climbed onto the bench to look out the window. Past the trees and beyond the apartment building to the northwest, I could just see the roof of our house. Above it, the sky glowed a bright orange. The sight of those flames, reaching high into the night sky, was both fascinating and frightening. I couldn’t tear my gaze away.

We weren’t at Hilda and Doug’s long before Jim Craig arrived with his station wagon. Mom, Bob, and Terry sat in the front with Jim, while Gail, Sharon, and I climbed in the back seat. The cat, dog, rabbit, and canary were loaded in the rear.

The grandmothers opted to stay at Hilda and Doug's overnight. They waved from the front porch as we pulled away.

Jim had to take a circuitous route up Douglas Avenue and around the downtown core before he could cross the Sixteen Mile Creek to reach their house on Anderson Street.

The animals were relegated to the basement. Terry was dispatched to Freddy's room (they were the same age), and Gail, Sharon, and I were given sleeping bags and space on the floor of Nadine's room (she was two years younger than Gail). Lenore and Jim insisted Mom and Bob sleep in their bed, saying they'd be fine on the foldout couch in the living room. It's surprising any of us got any sleep that night, but we did (although I suspect some slept more restlessly than others).

We were having cinnamon toast and bananas for breakfast the next morning when Dad called to say the fire had been extinguished during the night and we could go home. After Mom hung up the phone, she told Lenore and Jim how Dad, whose parking meter and house numbering business was located in the building that had burned down, had been the one who'd discovered the fire.

"He was just leaving his office to come home when he smelled smoke," she said. "He called the fire department and then went around banging on doors to make sure everyone got out."

My dad, the hero.

After breakfast, Mom rounded us all up and said, "Get some clothes on. Jim's going to take us home."

"What clothes?" I asked.

"The ones you packed in your pillowcase," Mom replied.

Sharon snickered. "She didn't bring any clothes," she told Mom.

Mom looked at me, brows furrowed. "Then what did you put in your pillowcase?"

The Night the Sky Turned Orange

When I didn't answer right away, Sharon volunteered the information. "All she packed was her teddy bears."

"You said to pack what we needed," I explained. "You didn't say anything about clothes."

My mother sighed and shook her head.

"Well, you'll just have to go home in your nightgown then," she said. "Now go pack your teddies."

The main street was still closed due to the fire. This time Jim took the southern route along the lakefront and up Allan Street to our house.

Dad was talking to the Fire Chief, Mr. Wilson, as we pulled up. He came over as we piled out of the car. The air smelled of wet soot and smoke. Dad told us the grandmothers had already returned to their apartments and that our house had survived, completely undamaged. He'd spent the whole night keeping the roof wet with the garden hose.

There was nothing left of the Trafalgar Building except some metal beams and various chunks of concrete around the foundation. Unfortunately, everything related to Dad's business had been destroyed in the fire, including all his files and paperwork, drafting and blueprinting equipment, and several dozen parking meters that were reduced to unrecognizable blobs of melted metal. At least a dozen other businesses had been wiped out as well.

The cause of the fire was eventually determined to have been a still-smoldering cigar carelessly tossed in a wastebasket in one of the first-floor offices. I don't know if charges were ever laid. Luckily no one died and there were no injuries, thanks primarily to Dad's actions.

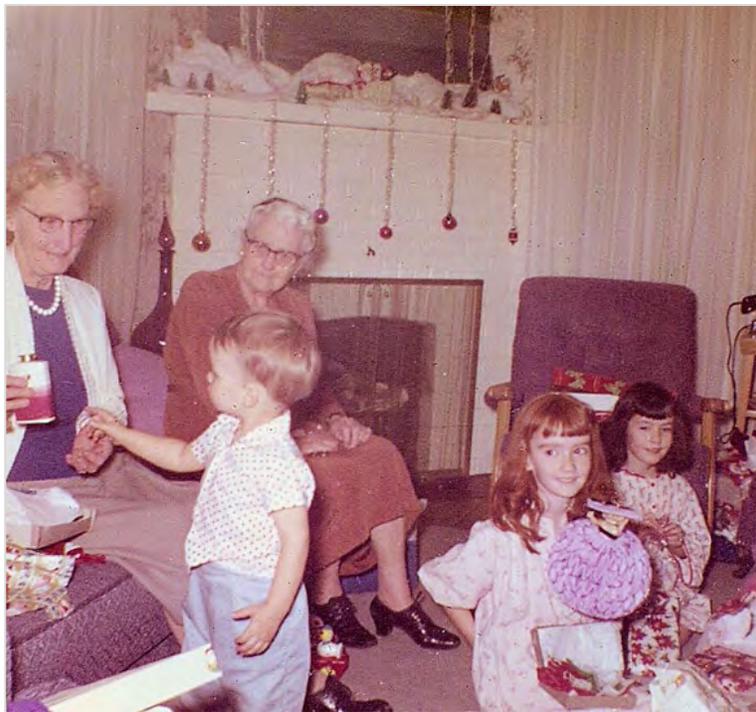
It was several days before things calmed down, the main street reopened, and the gawkers stopped coming by to stare at the destruction.

Spring arrived soon afterwards, and Sharon and I eagerly headed out into the backyard to play on the teeter-totter Dad had built for us the year before. Sharon

climbed on first, balancing on her tiptoes to hold the crossbeam straight so I could get up on the other end. As I clambered up, I noticed a large black stain on the left-hand side, right next to the curve where my leg went. It was a burn mark caused by a stray spark from the fire!

By fall people had stopped talking about the Great Fire of 1959. The blackened remains of the Trafalgar Building were removed and the design for a new Chamber of Commerce building was unveiled. My father used the insurance money he received to renovate the single car garage behind our house into an office for his business. Sharon and I were given the very important task of testing the new parking meters (by feeding them nickel after nickel and turning the handle to ensure they worked properly). Things were soon back to normal.

But for years afterwards, every time I climbed up on my end of the teeter-totter, I would run my thumb over the glistening black scar that marred its surface and remember the night the sky turned orange.



Bob, Grammy Cook, Grammy Nell, Sharon and I, Christmas, 1959, 8 months after the fire.

Meet the Author

Margo Karolyi is a former college professor who retired to the rural paradise of Scotland, Ontario, where she spends her time reading, writing, and puttering in her garden (when the weather permits). "The Night the Sky Turned Orange" is one of several memoir pieces she has penned about her long and varied past. She also writes short stories, poetry, and longer works of romantic women's fiction, some of which can be found on her blog at <https://theothersideof55.wordpress.com/>



Lucky 7

by Lois Oliver

A mother's love for her children is beyond description; a grandmother's love is called adoration. It begins before they are born and continues through all stages of their lives.

It has always been said that seven is a lucky number. I have been blessed with seven grandchildren and I am a very lucky grandmother indeed. I have so many wonderful memories with each one of them, from the time they were born and through the years.

1. Jamie

Jamie is my first grandchild. Needless to say, excitement does not describe the joy that he brought when he was born and still does to this day.

When Jamie was born I was out on the ice in a curling game. The club secretary motioned to me that I had a phone call, and instinctively I knew! It was my husband calling me to tell me that our daughter had been taken to McMaster Hospital. I threw my broom, dashed to my car, and got from Brantford to Hamilton in 20 minutes, just in time to be there when our son-in-law came out and announced, "It's Jamie!"

They lived in Dundas at the time, and I put many miles on my car driving back and forth to see him. Three years later, it was heart-wrenching when they moved to Calgary, although over the years I have been able to visit often.

Growing up, Jamie took part in the usual things boys do in school and sporting activities. Then one of his teachers submitted his name to The Young Canadians School of the Performing Arts, which performs in the annual Grandstand Show at the Calgary Stampede. Jamie went for tryouts and was chosen. He had never had experience before but proved that he had a musical talent.

He performed in the show for seven years. I was very fortunate to go every year to enjoy the wonders of the Calgary Stampede, especially the Grandstand Show. The whole show was spectacular and featured famous performers, but watching Jamie perform gave me that heart-warming experience that only comes from being a parent or grandparent. It was hard to believe that the quiet kid around the house was a dynamic entertainer.

As Jamie also has a talent for art, he then enrolled in University of Victoria, taking Fine Arts and Photography and graduating with a degree in Fine Arts. One of his paintings is among my favourite possessions. Jamie is now a talented artist and musician living in Victoria, B.C. I have always been, and always will be, so proud of my first grandchild.



2. Tori

Jamie's sister, Tori, is my second grandchild. She was born in Calgary on Thanksgiving Day. At 1 a.m. our son-in-law called to say "Loey, you have a granddaughter!" Unable to sleep the rest of the night, I got up and started to prepare Thanksgiving dinner. I flew out to Calgary the next day, arriving just as my daughter brought her home from the hospital.

Tori has always had a real zest for life. She is very inquisitive, always putting her heart and soul into new challenges. It was no surprise that she took an interest in and enrolled in gymnastics, which was a perfect outlet for her abundant energy. When Tori graduated from high school, she had the opportunity to take her first year of university on a tall ship called The Concordia based in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. The program was called the West Island College Class Afloat, with professors from Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. It was to be an exciting six-month journey from Lunenburg, visiting Portugal; Ireland; Corsica; Malta; Istanbul, Turkey; Tunisia; Morocco; Dakar, Senegal; Brazil; Montevideo, Uruguay; and South Africa.



*Tori and father pictured with the SV Concordia before setting sail.
Credit: Calgary Herald, 20 Feb 2010.*

Lucky 7

I was fortunate to accompany my daughter to Lunenburg to see Tori depart on her journey along with 47 other students mainly from Canada, United States and Mexico, plus 16 staff members and crew.

They stayed anchored for the morning where they were schooled in putting up sails, tying and handling the ropes and learning the protocol of running the ship. They then started their university classes.

It was wonderful to watch the students learn their duties on the ship and enjoy the departure ceremonies. When the Concordia departed from the docks, there were many parents, relatives and friends cheering, along with many tears, as the ship pulled away for the trip of a lifetime.

They took turns on day and night watches, galley duty, and assisting the ship's cook – especially on birthdays, Christmas, and Thanksgiving.

Their first stop was Horta in the Azores Islands off the coast of Portugal. Tori remarked in one of her posts that, "It was like a postcard of a perfect European town." Their next stop was Dublin, Ireland where they had the opportunity to explore the city, visit an old farmhouse and go to a pub for Irish dancing.

Tori celebrated her 18th birthday while sailing off the coast of Spain through the Straits of Gibraltar, on the way to Corsica. They anchored for the night in Majorca. The Greek Islands were next, then on to Tunisia. When they had a four-day desert trip, she was billeted with a Turkish family who took her to Turkish Atascadero, a large mosque, the Grand Bazaar and the Spice markets. She explored Morocco and the Sahara riding a camel.

Christmas was celebrated with a special breakfast, gifts they made for each other, and a bountiful Christmas dinner. The ship was decorated with tinsel and streamers.

It was a wonderful experience until disaster struck.

After leaving Africa on their way to Uruguay, the ship was hit by a microburst, slamming it over on its side and capsizing in the high seas.

Panic ensued but all students and crew survived, thanks to the efficiency of an experienced crew and the students' emergency training.

They spent 18 hours in the middle of the Atlantic, in a raging storm with the rain constantly pelting their skin. The ocean was frigid and their lifeboats were hundreds of kilometers from port.

Their distress signal reached the Brazilian coast guard, who messaged the Brazilian navy and two merchant marine ships that were in the vicinity. A Brazilian air force plane located the lifeboats and all survivors were taken by either helicopter or ship to Rio de Janeiro, 550 kilometers away. They had developed rashes and skin peeling from the saltwater, and the ship's medical officer suffered a dislocated shoulder, but it was a miracle that all 64 people were saved with relatively minor injuries and emotional stress.

The parents and families had been informed about the ship going down the night before, but no one knew until the next morning whether our children had survived. All we could do was pray.

From Rio de Janeiro they were flown home to their very grateful families. The story of The Concordia was published in the Readers Digest and in newspapers across Canada. The February 23, 2010 Calgary Herald featured Tori reuniting with her father and brother with their arms around her (right).



The whole experience for Tori was very frightening but she never complained. She only had praise for the captain and crew. Prior to the disaster she had a wonderful trip, which included riding a camel, working in an orphanage, and meeting people from many parts of the world. She has an amazing attitude and has progressed in life looking at the positive and not the negative.

She went back to Lunenburg to finish her University courses and her official Class A Float graduation was the most touching and emotional ceremony. Afterwards, we were sitting at the B&B when Tori was asked how she felt when she was in the

lifeboat. She replied, “I expected to see a helicopter flying over with my mother hanging out screaming ‘Tori, I’m here. I will be right there.’”

Tori went on to finish her university studies in Marine Biology at Victoria University and followed that path until she later qualified for a teaching degree. She taught for one year. Then, true to her adventurous spirit, Tori took the opportunity to teach in Sweden and visit more European cities. She now teaches in a high school in a small town in British Columbia.

As her very proud grandmother, it is so gratifying to have been part of Tori’s life and to see what a lovely young woman she has become.

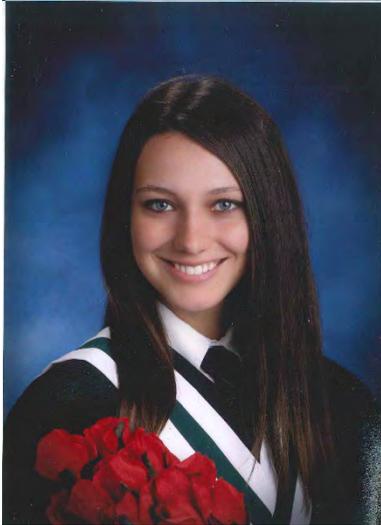
3. Hannah

My third grandchild is Hannah, a beautiful, talented girl who is my son’s eldest daughter.

She was born just after midnight on November 1st. Fifteen minutes earlier and we would have shared a birthday, as my birthday is October 31st. We stood outside the delivery room urging her to be born but she showed then that she is a very special girl who chose to have her own special day.

In 2004, when she was twelve years old, I opened a very thoughtful Christmas gift from her which was a printed book called *A Small Treasury of Poems and Stories by Hannah Wood*. She created one every Christmas for five years. Her poems and stories were beautifully done – very descriptive and insightful at such a young age.

She finished her years at public school as valedictorian for her graduating class, also winning the Proficiency Award and the Leadership Award. She went on to attend Hillfield Strathallan College in Hamilton, Ontario. Besides excelling in academics, Hannah took part in acting and singing in the school’s productions. She graduated as an Ontario Scholar.



Hannah went on to earn first class honours in History at McGill University. While there, she was a producer for the musical *West Side Story*, was in the debutante ball, and headed the Remembrance Day Poppy Fund.

To pursue her interest in Medieval History, Hannah applied and was accepted at Oxford University in England to continue her Master of Studies. It was a wonderful experience for her, living in England, enjoying the curriculum and rituals of Oxford. It also gave her the opportunity to travel around Britain and other parts of Europe when she had time off from her studies. After graduating from Oxford, Hannah enrolled in a PhD program at the University of Toronto to qualify as a professor in Medieval History.

When she graduates from the University of Toronto it will be interesting to see where her future career will be. Hannah is a remarkable girl, not only for her academic ability, but also her talent for singing and acting. When we turn the music on at our family parties, Hannah entertains. I have always said that she should be on stage!

4. Trevor

Trevor is my fourth grandchild, my youngest daughter's first child. As I was waiting outside the delivery room when he was born, his father brought him out and put him in my arms. It was a very emotional moment for both of us.

I had the pleasure of taking care of him quite frequently. When he was a little older, I would take him in his stroller to see the lions on the steps outside the Post Office building in Brantford, then down to the Eaton's Centre to ride up and down on the escalator, and then on bus rides around the city.



As he was very young when they moved to St. George, I put a lot of mileage on my car to spend time with him. Trevor went to St. George Public School and then on to Paris District High School.

There he was first Defense Captain for the Junior football team and played on the Senior team. He won the school awards for the Most Sportsman Like Player, Hardest Worker, and Most Co-operative. He also played for the Brantford Harlequins Rugby team. While I enjoyed going to his games, I cringed every time one of his opponents tackled him.

Hockey was and still is his favourite sport. He played many years for the St. George teams. I don't think I missed too many games as it was so much fun watching him play.

Trevor was always very independent, working at various jobs all through high school. He decided on Fanshawe College for his post-secondary schooling, taking Construction Engineering. He was always interested in building and working with his hands.

After graduating from Fanshawe College, Trevor worked on framing houses. He started his own business, Newman Built, specializing in general contracting, renovations, and building outside decks and fences.

As a proud and very thankful grandmother, I was so pleased with the deck he built on my home, featuring a beautiful privacy fence. My next door neighbour was so impressed with his work that she commissioned him to build a different deck for her plus a fence all around her property.

I am so fortunate to have a grandson with his talent and his thoughtfulness in helping me with so many jobs around my house. Trevor is my favourite handyman!

5. Payton

Payton, my fifth grandchild, is the sister of Hannah. I have always thought of Payton as a ray of sunshine, given her cheery disposition as a child, and she has grown up to be a happy and thoughtful girl. I still keep all the beautifully written post cards and greeting cards she has sent me.

Payton excelled in her studies at public school and was valedictorian for her graduating class. She will probably be remembered, however, for her performances in the school talent shows. She and her male partners imitated singers such as Sonny and Cher, Dolly Parton and Kenny Rogers, and Olivia Newton John and John Travolta in Grease. They received standup applause! Payton followed her sister to Hillfield Strathallan College, acting in the school productions and playing on the girls' rugby team. She served as school ambassador and received the Duke of Edinburgh Award for Community Service and the Silver Award for Achievement.

Payton's choice for university was Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, the same university that her dad had attended. It was a long way from home, yet she made many friends there and the small-town atmosphere perfectly suited her friendly personality. She became involved in charity work in Wolfville and many school social functions.

The summer before her graduating year, Payton worked for Irving Oil in New Brunswick, where I and her other grandmother were invited to visit. She was a wonderful tour guide, introducing us to another picturesque province in Canada.

When she graduated from Acadia, her parents, grandparents and sister went to Wolfville for the graduation weekend. We were treated to the wonderful hospitality and friendliness of the people in Wolfville and enjoyed a memorable graduation ceremony. After graduating with a



degree in Business, Payton made a new career choice and was accepted into Law at Dalhousie University in Halifax.

Payton has developed some extraordinary talents over the years. She taught herself to knit and crochet, and creates hats, headbands, mitts, socks, shawls and sweaters. She once told me that her favourite shopping adventure is a trip to Mary Maxim's! She opened a successful business online, advertising and selling her creations. She also started embroidering jean jackets and selling them online. Baking is her other passion: decorating cakes, cookies and cupcakes that look so professional.

As a proud grandparent, it is so rewarding seeing how far she has come. She is a beautiful girl who has a very promising future.

6. Carter

My sixth grandchild is Carter, brother of Trevor. He was in a hurry to be born and explore this world and has been anxious to progress to his next stage ever since.

As a child he was so inquisitive, examining light switches, dishwashers and anything mechanical. He was mostly interested in vacuum cleaners! When he came to visit, he would immediately want to vacuum, saying, "Grandma, your house needs cleaning. I will vacuum for you." We bought him toy vacuum cleaners but he preferred the real ones.

Carter has always been very social. When he attended St. George Public School he excelled in track and field and played hockey for the St. George minor hockey teams. He was in the enrichment class from grade four on and in his eighth grade was elected Prime Minister of the student council. He received the Environmental Award for his role in achieving a Silver designation for his school in the EcoSchool program.

Carter was a server at St. George United Church. When his grandfather from New Zealand was a guest Minister, he assisted in the service. When the service ended, I was standing with Carter in the reception room when the Minister of the church said to him, “It looks like you may be a Minister like your grandfather.”

Carter replied, “No, actually I think I may be a doctor.”

He was ten years old at the time. He went on to Paris District High School playing on the football teams and also the Brantford Harlequin rugby teams.

In his third year he was elected President of Student Council and was involved in fundraising and planning many events for the students. It was such a proud moment at his graduation when he received the Chamber of Commerce Award, the Prime Minister Award and placed on the honour roll.

Carter chose to attend Trent University in Peterborough. During his years at Trent, he was a member of the rowing team, Vice-President of External Relations for the Trent Student Association, and President of the College residence. In his last year, he worked two jobs plus his classes.

He saved his money and, after he graduated, embarked on a six-month journey to Bali with possibilities for other stops such as Europe, Australia and New Zealand. Unfortunately, he was only in Bali for a month before the Coronavirus broke out and he had to return home. It was such a disappointment for him, but he is still young enough to eventually pursue his dream.

I am sure with his outgoing personality and intelligence, he will be a success in whatever path he chooses, even possibly Prime Minister of Canada, something he jokingly declared to me when he was younger!



7. Bretton

My youngest grandchild, Bretton, has always been the happiest, sweetest little girl. She grew up with older brothers Trevor and Carter wrapped around her little finger, as the saying goes. They have always taken such good care of her.

At five years old, she began taking figure skating lessons at the St. George Figure Skating Club, following her mother's participation in the sport. She competed in singles skating, and then went on to skate on synchronized skating teams all through public and high school. One of my greatest pleasures was watching her skate in the synchro competitions.

At age eleven, Bretton was visiting me one day when she proclaimed, "I have had an epiphany. I am going to change my life. I am cutting my hair. I will now be a vegetarian and am now going to be called Brett." This was quite a surprise! Brett had followed her brothers to St. George Public School and then attended Paris District High School. At age thirteen she applied and was hired as a cashier at the Canadian Tire store in Paris. She then went on to work at a local restaurant, which led her to her interest in cooking. She registered in the Grand Erie School Board's Hospitality and Senior High Skills major program at Tollgate Technical School in Brantford, working with the chef, preparing for a culinary career. She attended there one day a week along with her regular classes at Paris High School.

This was the beginning of her future career.

Brett was fortunate to attend a special teen camp at The International Culinary Centre in New York City. She was given a chef's uniform and a toolkit containing knives, cooking tools, books and supplies. It was an exceptional opportunity for her to learn her craft from some well-known professional chefs. She was interviewed on the Hamilton TV station and her experience was written up in the local newspaper (pictured, right).



*Paris teen heading to camp at NY culinary centre.
Credit: Brantford Expositor, 29 Jul 2015*

After graduating high school, Brett enrolled at George Brown College in Toronto, taking Culinary Arts and working in the kitchen of a popular restaurant in downtown Toronto. Our family has learned a lot of new cooking tips from her.

Brett's goal is to open a restaurant of her own in the future. At the age of twenty, she is a happy, easygoing girl who embraces life to the fullest. She is a lovely, vivacious girl. I am sure she will have a very successful career in her chosen field.

~ Lois ~

I take great pleasure in expressing my pride and love for all seven of my grandchildren. My wish for each of them is for fulfillment of their dreams and living their lives with happiness, integrity and honesty.

I cannot help but compare my younger life to theirs. It is certainly a different world than when I was growing up. There is a vast difference between the opportunities for education, self-confidence, social behaviour and travel. Most families lived in the same city as compared to families sprawled all over the world today. Thankfully, because of social media, we are able to keep in contact with our families.



Memories Relived

by Brenda Ann Wright

Dedicated to John Frederick Southcott

June 18, 1928 – March 6, 2012

I had the pleasure of reminiscing with John, father of my friend Susan, over his last Christmas dinner in 2011. I appreciated his sharing of his brothers' wartime pilot services. The following are two tender stories as told by his daughter, Susan Southcott.

The Scarf Incident

As I wandered around feeling the keen loss of my dear father just a week prior, I aimlessly walked the downtown streets of Toronto, Ontario, through St. Lawrence Market.

I came upon a Croatian lady's booth of creations. Her name was Bora and I was taken with her lovely orange hued scarves dancing on a clothesline. These sparkly multicolored scarves moved vigorously in the breeze, reminding me of the cold winds over Northern Ontario lakes. As I touched the delicate threads of the cascading gold, coppery, metallic ones with ribbons of peachy, melon, and tangerine colors, my eyes went to the sea blue ones and to the purples and magentas, all with tasseled well knotted ends.

I spent the next evening with my school chum and dear friend, Brenda, a non-fashionista. I recounted her disappointment about the length of the scarf, about 18 inches, as it didn't seem useful for anything much except maybe a pocket triangle.

No one at Church that morning clued in or offered a suggestion or even noticed, until Brenda asked to see the said piece as we travelled to Niagara-on-the-Lake for a bite at the Irish Tea Room on Main Street. Brenda noticed the fine threads, admired the stands of gold and the disengaged the layers between her fingers to find that it, in fact, it had been doubled and was actually 36 inches long.

It proved to be quite a wearable, beautiful addition to otherwise somber attire.

Dad's Recently Dug Resting Place

On Monday, March 25th, 2013, I retraced the route Dad had taken to his graveside.

I ventured first into Cockadoodle, the local diner where he liked to take breakfast, to let others know of his passing.

Then, to the cemetery, my footsteps followed a well-worn path.

'His' flowers adorned his grave. Sedum (also known as Stonecrops) has a hardy leaf-shaped purple bloom, and I had added succulent carnations. I began arranging them to suit me as I spoke to Dad.

In my distraction I stumbled into the freshly dug earth. I fell, grabbing at the headstone as I did, just as the rain began in earnest. A hole formed as the rain melted it all into mush, and in my new shoes I became mudbound.

Out of the corner of my eye I could see the reactions of other people there. My scramble to solid earth was tenuous.

Sorry, Dad. I love you always.

Remembrance Day Tribute

My poem placed first in the St. Catherine's Standard for Remembrance Day Tribute. I was 12 years old, so it would have been roughly 1971.

We thought this piece was long gone. I couldn't find a copy of this poem anywhere, nor could I remember this from about half a century ago. My dear mother braved sorting through her mother's belongings and happened upon a copy I had penned to my grandmother. It is a well-worn and fragile bit of paper.

This poem is dedicated to my great uncle Alec who served in WWII.

Sons dying...
(parents crying)
bodies everywhere.
Smoke! Airs hazy
Is war crazy?
courage in the air

Noise galore
and to the core
Fighting for peace?
Is there a way to
insure the day
when the WAR will cease.

With sadness
ever gladness
Do we ever think?
in deep great depths
Our grief suppressed
We will surely sink...

LIBERTY
We now carry
and to show we care
Appreciate...
the cost so great
Hope FREEDOM will flare.

**In Honor of PTE Peter Joseph,
September 18, 1935 – October 26, 2006**

My dear friend Bertha Joseph and I have shared many a cuppa in her home, relaying stories of our experiences. Her sons, I can see, embody certain traits from their father. I feel I have a sense of who Berthas dear husband was, so I wanted to share and remember Peter Joseph. For Bertha and family.

Black-thatched hair, to Elite Black Watch
Brown limpid eyes, fast as a shot
Slender young boy, was proud to be schooled
Chased about by thugs, did not care to act cool
Tall and straight, he grew, to a man of his word
Perceptive, forgiving, with twinkles in both eyes

Long standing love, connections honor-bound
Last of a generation of such proud men around
Peter Joseph born in the fall of '35
Quick witted, practical joker, he'd say "ok ... 1, 2, 3 ... All cry"
(Tartan kilt, ascot, black felt beret with red silk)
"Brothers in Arms" Joey & Tommy, solid friendships built

Trade life in war common, for 700 million souls
Special Regiment Black Watch Clan, Mission to Save
November 11th, WE remember all Sacrifice
On which everyone's Freedoms depends

"Lest we forget ... all gave some, some gave all."

Friends and Memories: A Story in Pictures



Left to right: Mary Walker,
Mary M. Cushnie-Mansour,
Jana Kelly, Brenda Ann
Wright, Bertha Joseph

Left to right: Mary
Walker, Cathy
Deslippe, Kathy
Roberts, Bertha
Joseph, Jana Kelly



Mary Elizabeth Walker (nee Pearce)
August 6, 1940 - August 21, 2015

*Mary's Celebration of Life was at the Station
Coffee House and Gallery, Sunday September 13,
2015. Brantford, Ontario, Canada*

Meet the Author

How very important it is to record individual's life stories, generationally, for reference and as to how our lifetimes were.



I was born in 1959 and raised in St. Catharines, Ontario. I am the eldest of three sisters (Brenda, Gail and Sandra) born to a Port Boy from Port Dalhousie, Ontario and La Petit Maman from Montreal, Quebec. I also have three daughters (Lisa, Marianne and Sarah) as well as a son (Neil), and am Nana to nine grandchildren.

In the early 1970s the St. Catharines Standard selected my Remembrance Day poem for publication. Entitled *Sons' Dying*, it was dedicated to my Great-Uncle Alex who served in World War II.

In addition to assisting on a number of published works/books, anthologies, etc., I have a passion for music (especially Jazz, the Blues, and the clarinet), poetry (Cohen, Neruda, and Gibran, among others) and literature. When reading, my preference is for historical fiction and non-fiction, biographies and genealogy.

I appreciate my association with members of the Lifescapes at the Brantford Public Library, including Bertha Joseph, pictured right. (Thanks, Robin Harding and Lorie Lee Steiner!) Also: the Brantford Writers Circle, the Brantford Poetry Guild, Barb Days, Speak Technique, and Mary M. Cushnie-Mansour.





What I Did Last Summer

by Herbert Sormin



Last summer my wife Su and I joined my siblings (pictured above) on a trip to visit the homes of my grandparents, Ompung Doli and Ompung Boru, in Indonesia. We arrived in Singapore just before midnight on Wednesday, June 26, 2019, and rested at the Youngberg Wellness Centre at 800 Thomson Road. Above the Centre is the office of the Southeast Asia Union Mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and next to it the SAUM Community Church.

This was once the site of the Headquarters for the Far Eastern Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Far Eastern Academy, a boarding school for the children of missionaries. In 1919, the Division office had been located in Shanghai, China. Then a reorganization in the late 1990s established the Northern Asia Pacific Division in Seoul, Korea, and the Southern Asia Pacific Division, which would soon move from Silang, Philippines, to Singapore.

In 2000, shortly after the quintennial World General Conference of the Adventist Church in Toronto, we received a letter from the General Conference in Silver Springs, Washington, inviting our help for an important project. Land had been requisitioned by the Singapore government at the site of Southeast Asia Union College (SAUC) and SAUM granted over 60 million dollars to create a Mission College.

In 2003, we celebrated and praised God for His leading. The College, to be renamed the Asia Pacific International University, was recognized as a degree granting institution and honoured with a speech by Royal Princess Soamsawali.

Startling Surprises in Singapore

By 2019 the Wellness Centre and the SAUM office had replaced the original office building, and we were stunned to find 10-storey condos sprouted all over the former FEA campus!

On Friday we took a taxi to where Clifford Pier looked out over the Sumatra Sea. While I recognized street names, most of the buildings were different—tall buildings and condos changed the scenery present during the 1960s. The Prime Minister's residence was still in its pristine condition on Orchard Road, as was the Singapore Museum. I missed the sight of the beautiful Cathay Theatre.

I did see St Joseph School and was excited at the sight of the Covenant of the Holy Infant Jesus, remembering the annual Talent Shows.

The historical Anglican Church still stood across from the Capitol Theatre, where my buddies and I would go for Sunday movie shows.

What I Did Last Summer

With a left turn we passed the Parliament Building towards Sir Stamford Raffles Bridge. This bridge crossed the Singapore River, leading to the waterfront. My heart pounded as we passed over the bridge. There on the right was the historic Victoria Theatre, where I sang in a gospel Quartet and with the College Church Choir during evangelistic meetings. That is where I heard the powerful sermons of Pastor H. M. S. Richards, founder of the Voice of Prophecy ministries. I had listened and been captivated by Del Decker's amazing singing, and that of the King's Herald's Quartet!

Crossing over Raffles Bridge, I heard the splashing sea and knew we had finally reached Clifford Pier.

Clifford Pier is about the size of four basketball courts. In the old days, passengers going to Borneo, Burma, French Indo China, India, Java, Malaya, Siam, Sumatra, and to other parts of the world would have to go through Immigration and Customs at the Pier. They would hire small boats to transport them to large ocean steamers.

As we got off the taxi, everyone seemed to need to go to the restroom. We walked to the front of the Pier and were warmly welcomed by hotel hosts. Coming out of the restroom, I saw rows of round tables with waiters serving guests. We walked out to the front of the hotel and around the side to the waterfront.

Wow, I mused. What a beautiful change.



I turned to my brother Ed and he smiled. He'd done most of the trip planning and wanted us to enjoy the surprises.

And then my eyes looked across the street to Change Alley ...

... Oh! Mama!

Rumble on the Docks!

In my memory, I am seventeen.

My sister, Alice, was studying Nursing in Sydney, Australia. A friend of hers had already graduated and was in Singapore on her way to India to serve as a missionary. Mama and I took her on a shopping spree at Change Alley, a place where you could get better a better exchange rate than the banks.

As we walked in the Alley carrying her bags of purchases, she mentioned getting a Rolex watch. Before we could say a word, two hawkers came up with glittering watches in their hands. She was captivated.

I drew close to her and whispered, "We'll buy your Rolex at the Robinsons."

One of the hawkers screamed in Chinese and lifted his fist and swung at me. The rumble was on! I ducked, grabbed his fist and knocked him with a punch.

Mama screamed. "Bert, watch out!"

I turned around. Mama had her hands around a guy's waist. Just as he raised the box of apples over his head, I hit him in the jaw.

Then I was in deep trouble. My back was against the cement wall and two guys were in front of me.

Suddenly a screeching whistle blew and a plainclothes police officer came to my rescue.

"Do you have money to go home?" he asked.

"Yes," I responded.

"Go! Run to the bus! I'll take care of things. Your Mama will be okay."

Mama winked and I was off!

Queen Elizabeth Walk

At the end of Change Alley stands a plaza of shopping stores. The main one is the Robinson Store, with rambunctious restaurants following along the Singapore River into Chinatown. This is where we had supper.

Leaving Clifford Pier we walked along the waterfront, passing the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank plus other world banks and financial institutions on our left. Towards the Raffles Bridge, we saw the General Post Office.

The Victoria Theatre stood on our left as we walked over the river towards Queen Elizabeth Walk on our right. My family and friends from the SAUC campus on Upper Serangoon Road took an hour-long bus ride here to enjoy delicious meals. We enjoyed Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Arabic food on Saturday evenings at the Walk.

In 1953 I watched the raising of the Union Jack at the Walk. The crowd sang God Save the Queen to celebrate Queen Elizabeth II's coronation. It was a momentous occasion.

Today the Walk has transformed into Gardens by the Bay, a nature park consisting of three waterfront gardens and spanning 100 hectares of reclaimed land. The view of the waterfront is breathtaking, including colorful pavilions, surreal Super Trees and indoor waterfalls.

Sabbath Surprise

On Saturday we attended the SAUM Community Church, next to the Wellness Centre.

It was wonderful meeting with childhood pals who had gone from primary school through college and university together. I loved meeting their spouses and sharing old memories.

Just before the opening hymn, Dr. Wong Yew Chong, the presiding Elder, stood up to extend greetings. Yew Chong was my roommate at the Adventist University of

the Philippines where he was working towards his MA degree in Theology and I was in my final year of a BA program in Education. His mentorship led me to theological studies and receiving an MA in Religion in 1971.

As he welcomed the congregation and visitors, he extended his hands towards me and said, “Welcome, Pastor Sormin, it’s wonderful to have you and your family worshipping with us today.”



At the conclusion of the service, everyone (pictured left) was invited to stay for lunch. We were embraced with hugs and slaps on our back.

A young lady came up to me, mentioned her family name and that her dad had worked at the Malaysian Publishing House, living just next to the Girls Dormitory where my family lived. Holding my

hand, she said, “Bert, you’re a pastor? Wow! I didn’t know that!”

I smiled and said, “Yes, Daisy, our gracious God used Yew Chong to call me to the ministry.”

Growing Up in SAUC

In 1948 my family moved to the SAUC campus in Singapore from Sunny Hill School, in Kuching, Sarawak, when Papa was invited to be Treasurer of his alma mater. The campus also ran a primary and secondary school where students would complete the Senior Cambridge exams before entering college.

With students coming from all across Southeast Asia, the cross-cultural interactions and linguistic diversity was for me a challenging educational experience.

What I Did Last Summer

In Primary II, I got into a fist fight and had to kneel in front of the class holding on to my ears. Every time I let go of an ear the class monitor behind me would strike me with a cane. Outside of the classroom, school prefects made sure that you obeyed the rules.

Looking back, despite all the altercations and mistakes through my teen years, my supportive friends and involvement in church and social activities had a positive impact. I was a member of the Pathfinder Club, which was much like the Boys Scouts. I was elected president of the Temperance Society and enjoyed playing soccer and badminton.

I was also introduced to Gordie Howe via Hockey Night in Canada when Professor P.G. Miller (from Lacombe, Alberta) would borrow movies from the Canadian Embassy. This inspired us guys to make portable goalposts and hockey sticks at the college workshop. We played hockey games with tennis balls when torrential rains poured on the basketball court!

Prof. Miller had a positive impact on my life. While I was considering following Papa as an accountant, Miller's lectures on education and his involvement in sporting events opened my eyes to the meaning of acceptance, respect, and teamwork. He taught me togetherness in the classroom, on the soccer field, in the church, and in the community.

When my family arrived in Canada in 1977, I had the privilege of meeting Prof. Miller when he attended a meeting in Oshawa, Ontario, the headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada. He contacted my brother Edwin, with whom we were living in Chatham and we met up in Toronto. I was thrilled to enjoy my first live Hockey Night watching the Maple Leafs play at the Maple Leaf Gardens.

In 1979, while attending an educational meeting at Canadian Union College (now Burman University) in Lacombe, Alberta, he contacted me and invited my family to stay over at his home in Aidrie. He and his wife took us to the Calgary Stampede and the next day to my first Indigenous Pow Wow!

Bandung, Java: Home of Ompung Manullangs

We arrived in Jakarta on Sunday, July 30. There we were greeted by cousin Moira and her husband Rudolf Manurung. They drove us to visit her mother and our Auntie Mauli (pictured right) who helped birth me, May, Edwin, and Florence in Sarawak in the 1940s.



In 1946 at age five, I remember women running into Mama's room. I heard a baby crying and saw Auntie Mauli with a bundle in her hands.

"Is May okay?" I chirped.

"May's okay. Mama's fine. You've got a baby brother!"

It was wonderful to be hugged by Auntie Mauli. We had a great family reunion and supper together. That evening Auntie placed a Batak Ulos (a colourful handmade shoulder cloth) over me, and later another over brother Edwin.

The next day we drove to the city of Bandung to visit the home of our maternal Ompungs, Pastor and Mrs. Theophilus D. Manullang, at No. 72 Jalan Naripan. The house is currently owned by one of my Aunties who resides in California.

We previously visited my Ompungs in that home in 1952 and 1957 and enjoyed munching the delicious fruits and veggies from their backyard.

Ompung Manullang was a Christian of the Lutheran Rhenish Mission and developed a friendship with Pastor Dallas Kime, an Adventist missionary of German descent from the United States. Kime had started the Batakland English School in the village of Sipogu, and language and friendship led to Bible studies.

What I Did Last Summer

As Ompung searched the Scriptures he was convinced that the Ten Commandments was God's Law and should not be changed. He accepted the Sabbath truth and was baptized by immersion and later ordained as a Seventh-day Adventist pastor.

Ompung Manullang was fluent in Dutch, German and English and ran a newspaper and publishing business in Tarutung, Tapanuli in Sumatra. He translated many of Ellen G. White's books and health literature and was Editor at the Indonesian Publishing House of the Seventh-day Adventist Church for many years. He was eventually elected as the first indigenous President of the West Java Mission and in 1960 became the Vice President of the West Indonesian Union. One of his books, *Rahasia Rumah Tangga Yang Senang*, (The Secret of a Happy Home) has been influential in the church and community.

As a younger man in 1986 I had embarked on my first visit to the Bible Land, visiting the Empty Tomb of our Lord Jesus at Gethsemane. Christian groups of different faiths were singing, and I could hear hymns in Indonesian.

I walked over to the group and greeted them in Batak. "Horas!" and then, in English, "That was great singing. I'm sorry but I do not speak well in Indonesian ..."

Smiling, they asked my name. I mentioned both my paternal and maternal names and they responded by asking, "Do you know Theophilus Manullang?"

I answered, "Oh! He's my Ompung Doli."

"Do you know that he compiled Lagu Sion?"

I did.

In 2019 we drove to their grave site after visiting their house and sang a hymn. We prayed together that we'd all be faithful to Jesus till He comes again and, by His grace, would meet our Grandparents once more.

Then we drove along Jalan Tandjung, the old Dutch quarters.

Our niece Alicia was excited to see where her dad, Maarten Keyer, a Dutch and veteran of the Nederland Army, had lived in the area. Maarten married my oldest sister, Alice, when they worked at the Branson Hospital in Toronto before moving to Surrey, BC.



We drove next to UNAI, University Indonesia Advent.

We walked through the beautiful campus and met the staff. Looking across from the university Church was the gymnasium named after Ompung Manullang.

What a legacy! Muliante! Ompung Doli!

Tapanuli: Home of my Batak Ancestors

I remember visits with Ompung Doli in the village of Onang Hasang, Pahae.

My cousin Arta (my Ito or female sister in Batak adat) would hand me two wooden buckets to help fetch water from the wells under the waterfall. The wells were a quarter kilometer walk away.

In 1957 Ompung Doli had invited the village Chief and Elders to his home, and everyone sat on floor mats for a delicious meal prepared by Ompung Boru (Grandma) and served by Nang Borus (Aunties).

Papa and I were motioned to come and sit before the Elders. Ompung Doli placed an embroidered Ulos Batak over Papa and me, bequeathing his land to son Mian Pastin Sormin and grandson Sahat Matua Sormin (my Batak name).

The Batak Museum

On this trip we flew into Medan, Sumatra and soon met up with Dr. Kiem Giok, a high school friend in the late '50s in Singapore. Giok invited us home for a fabulous Indonesian lunch. Giok and her husband, both dentists, help the needy in the community in their retirement. Of Chinese descent, she speaks Indonesian and Batak fluently. My siblings and I were glad that we could converse with Giok in English.

The next day our nephew, Herwin Sitompul, welcomed us to Batak Land and arranged our tour. Arta named her son Herwin after Herbert and Edwin (first syllable Her-, second syllable -win).

We arrived at an Adventist College in the village of Padang Siantar, where Papa and Mama had bought a piece of land for retirement.

After visiting the campus, we drove four and a half hours to Balige and rested at the Hotel Grand Toba to visit the Museum TB. Silalahi Center. The museum is also called Batak Village and the buildings are surreal, built like giant Batak houses in Batak villages that you'd still see in the province of Tapanuli and Silingdung valley. There was a long house with a steeped rooftop, triangular side walls with patios and the front door underneath.

We were welcomed by a historical presentation featuring Batak drummers and dancers before entering the museum. On the walls were pictures and accounts of the renowned Norwegian missionary, Pastor Nommenson of the Rhenish Lutheran Church, who introduced Christianity to the Batak people.

I discovered that my Ompung Doli (my maternal Grandpa, Theophilus D. Manullang) was the son of Radja Singel Manullang. He was the shaman and cousin of Sisinga Mangaradja (the Iron Ruling King) and the last of the Radja Bataks! Nommenson introduced my great grandfather to Jesus ... Praise the Lord!

From the Museum, we drove fifty minutes to the town of Tarutung. This is where Ompung Doli ran his printing and newspaper business. Names like Hutabarat, Hutapea, and Hutaauruk, were everywhere, reminding me that this is Batak Land.

Su found a store with hanging colorful sarongs and kebayas. She got me a black T-shirt that featured Samosir Island/Lake Toba.

Sabbath was the next day. We drove to Onang Hasang, Pahae, home of our paternal Ompung Doli Gideon Sormin. He had owned over 200 acres of farmland.

It was a day of walking through the acres of land with the Chief and Elders. We saw groves of banana, papaya and sugar trees and acres of rubber, palm, and coconut plantations (pictured right).



There we were, after 62 years, standing by Ompung Doli and Ompung Boru's graveside-next to Ompung's home. We sang and prayed together.

Then we walked through the village homes. On the door post of one home read S.N. SIREGAR. It was the home of our cousins. Siregar was my history teacher at SAUC. His son Johnny is a retired police officer and tour guide at the Singapore Museum. Johnny's younger brother and sister, Bella and Harold, also reside in Singapore.



We walked down the path towards the waterfall, where I used to fetch water with cousin Arta. We enjoyed the sunshine and the acres of land Ompung had given us if we had settled in Batakland.

By evening, we were on to Silimalombu Farmstay at Inna Parapat to enjoy the tasty fruits.

What I Did Last Summer



Then, on to Taman Simalem Resort in Merek for 4 days. Here we took joy in jungle treks and fishing by the stream. We boated across Lake Toba to Samosir Island (left) and feasted on delicious meals as the sun was shining over the Lake.

It was a wonderful family time together by Lake Toba!

I recall Mama telling us her love story: Mama holding Papa's hands, wrapped around with traditional Ulos Batak. Two hearts bound in love saying, "I do!" in a little church beside Lake Toba in '37.

Then on Friday, it was to the airport in Medan. After-a 40 min stopover in Kuala Lumpur, we were off to Bali for a week of relaxation on the beach at Hidden Villa Seminyak (right).

There was a lovely view of the Java Sea. The hotel even had hot showers and a swimming pool. A 10-minute walk through main street could go 45 minutes, depending on what caught your eye.



We rented a beach umbrella and soaked in the sunrise, relaxing to the sound of the ocean splashes. We cooled our feet and dived into the waves.

"How'ya mate?" Aussie accent, eh. "Am I at Bondi Beach?"

Interesting to meet Aussies enjoying their holidays in Bali.

A Day to Remember at Johore, Then Heading Home

On Friday July 19, Su and I boarded Garuda Air for Singapore, heading to the Youngberg Wellness Centre. We worshipped at the Community Church that Sabbath.

We joined the Church excursion on Sunday to Johore, the southern state of the peninsula of Malaysia. As the bus left the Centre, I looked to my right to see MacRitchie Reservoir, a natural reserve for drinking water and a park we enjoyed trekking through. Minutes later, the Royal Golf Club appeared on Upper Thomson Road. Then on to Bukit Timah Road, where at 18 years of age I ran a marathon with my brother Ed. Starting at the Royal Botanical Gardens, we had run 15 miles to Johore and then 15 miles back.

Two countries, connected by a causeway, across the Straits of Malacca. Now, crossing the causeway, I was reminded of our Pathfinder Club camping days on Pongool Beach. Sea planes taking off and roaring across the sea over our tents, the sounds of the Seletar Royal Air Force base. I used to listen to war stories in the evening by the campfire.



By noon we got to the durian farm and walked to our tables. Three feet stacks of durians surrounded us (left).

The servers cracked the fruit of thorns and placed the split open fruit before us. I munched those delicious durians, with Su handing another one every time I threw the seed into the bucket.

Then it was time to drink water from the inside of the empty bark. Finally, we indulged in baskets of sweet mangosteens. I can see Su now, smiling as she savoured her mangosteens.

On Monday, we took off for Tapei, transferred on to Eva Air and headed home to Toronto.



How The Fresh Start Effect Saved My Life

by Brian Bosnell

Before midnight on December 31st, 1979, I had no idea that I would start 1980 as a non-smoker, or write about it forty years after the fact.

There is a concept called the Fresh Start Effect. It has been an entirely new concept for me, and one that I swear did not exist in 1980. According to this school of thought, people are more likely to take action towards a goal when temporal landmarks exist that represent new beginnings. Such landmarks might be the start of a school semester, a birthday, starting a new job ... or the start of a new year.

My story starts with a New Year's resolution, a minor temporal landmark in the earliest moments of 1980. What follows proves how a blue-collar work ethic, married to an indomitable will, can produce results from a spur-of-the-moment bet. I will now detail how I replaced a cigarette in my left hand with a racquet in my right, a racquet that I swung until Covid-19 stopped me in my tracks.

After that clock struck midnight and a heartfelt request by a close friend, I never smoked a cigarette again.

In this story I will acknowledge many of the *characters* I have met. I will describe how the two main venues that I played in have come and gone. I will examine how one of those sports has virtually disappeared.

Let us start.

The Start Line



Outside of and to the far right of this photo was another chair, recently upholstered with the same material as the couch.

The photographer sat in that chair, and it was he who proposed that life-altering bet to me. I recall sitting in that chair under a great deal more hazy conditions. I do not think it was the same night, although the Christmas cards hung from the curtains do show the proper season.

I also do not see any beverages but it could just be too early in the evening.

All I remember is that I sat, and Brian stood as he made a short pitch to me about the benefits of not smoking. It is ironic as I think about it now that Brian had the same first name as mine. Somehow, I was primed for change. Was it the time of the year or the admonishment of my doctor? I do not know.

From the '90s to the 2000s I diligently followed an Expositor column that listed local historical events in this format: 10 years ago, + the year, 25 years ago + the year, and 35 years ago + the year. I duly cut out, pasted, and filed these columns as proof of the longevity of my participation. You will see some samples below.

But first: becoming a non-smoker.

An Indomitable Will

I cannot remember the first day of January 1980, or much of the rest of the year. I do recall several random but brief layoffs from my timekeeping position at White Farm, as one of those allowed me to focus and bear down on the task at hand for a couple of weeks.

I know that it was difficult. I mean, you are talking about a man who loved his first coffee of the day together with his first cigarette while sitting in the tub. And (almost) everyone smoked at their desk in the office.

I remember going to the local office of the Canadian Lung Association for information. I returned home and thumb-tacked one specific brochure to my bulletin board. It said that quitting smoking was the hardest thing I would ever do in my life. I dismissed that statement at first because I imagined a host of other things that I considered to be harder – like public speaking, for example.

However, it soon became clear why that was written in bold type.

Early on my cravings were so intense that I would gulp a glass of water and fire out the door to jog until they subsided. Water was supposed to help. Nicorette gum had just come out (by prescription only) and I started to chew several pieces per day. Even eight months later I was still chewing at least one per day.

Sometimes I would have intense dreams where I woke up in an intense sweat thinking that I had started again. I had tap myself to verify whether I was awake or dreaming, since the line between the two states can be quite blurred. I stopped drinking beer with the boys (for a while at least) because alcohol would always make me drop my guard. It took a long time to drink a cup of anything without a cigarette.

The physical cravings disappeared after two weeks or so, but I had to keep the *promise* for years afterward.

To the day that I retired, I would constantly reaffirm to my grade school health classes that it was the hardest task I ever had to do. *Do not start*, I would implore.

The racquet club went through several name changes in quick succession after start-up but eventually came to be known as Park. The All-Canadian Club quickly became The Circle. I joined in the spring of 1980 and made it a part of my concerted action to complement my new non-smoking lifestyle.

So, to Park I would go in the early months of 1980. I could not last that long in the beginning, but I prevailed and my fitness improved and my lungs healed. I had always run around as a child and teenager and my hand-to-eye remained excellent. I took to sucking on the licorice form of Altoids.[®] They were tiny, strong tasting, and fit securely in my cheek. They were a long-lasting artifact of my smoking habit until I could no longer buy them.

Some health and safety reading somewhere along the line said that one should not chew gum or have mints in your mouth during intense exercise. Therefore, I quit that habit too.

35 Years Ago, 1976

These two columns (right) appeared in the Brantford Expositor in 2011.

The Y courts both for squash and racquetball were concrete and the ball smacking off the front wall was *loud*. You could hear the ball whiz by, especially the racquetball, if you hit it hard enough.

On the concrete courts, the ball hit true – that is, it did not make any weird bounces. On the wallboard courts of Park, the ball rebounded differently.

35 years ago 1976

A privately-owned indoor racquet sports facility, costing nearly \$1.75 million, will be built next year in the northeast section of Brantford.

Werner Wielding said Wednesday that construction of the 80,000-square-foot complex will begin in the spring, depending on the weather, and be completed in late summer.

Mr. Wielding, who operates a racquet sports facility in Munich, Germany, said cost of construction will be about \$1.5 million.

The seven acres of land, on which the centre will be constructed, was purchased from the city for \$210,000.

The facility, which will be known as the Brantford North Park Racquet Club, is to be built on a seven-acre parcel of land east of Park Road North, and north of the Dunsdon Street extension.

35 years ago 1976

A second racquet sports facility in the city will be built at the Brantford YM-YWCA on Queen Street in 1977.

George Glover, executive director at the "Y" said Friday that conditional approval for about \$104,400 in Wintario funds for the project has been received.

He said final approval for the funds should be given by Wintario after further documentation is provided.

The total cost of the racquet facility, which will have two regulation size squash courts, and two regulation size racquetball-handball courts, is about \$150,000.

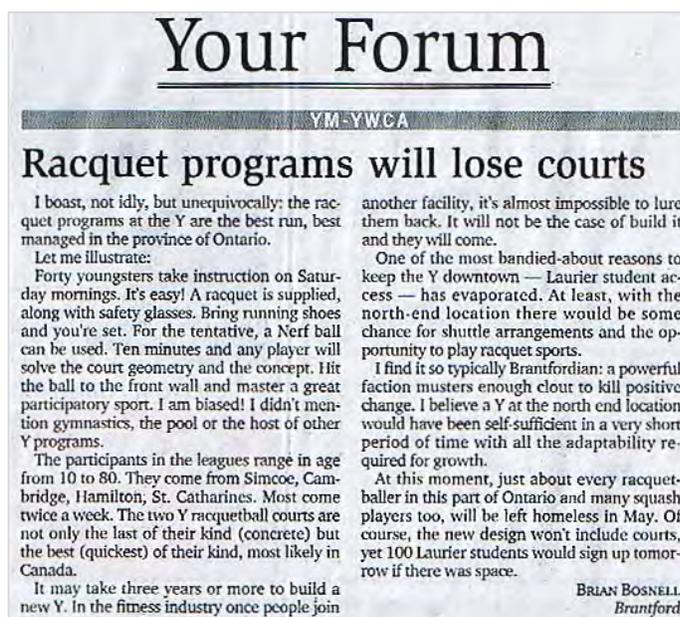
The remainder of the money will come from funds the "Y" has on hand, Mr. Glover said.

"The board of directors is investigating ways and means of raising the necessary funds," he added.

The new facility at the "Y" will be on the site of the present annex, between the main building on Queen Street and the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce parking lot.

I spent a great deal of time at both over the years. There was a pro who shifted between facilities when he fell out of favor with management at one or the other.

Finally, despite a protracted fight, the Y courts were torn down and the building was re-fitted to become a student residence. I found myself back at Park.



Here is a letter to the Editor (left) that I wrote as the YMCA's days became numbered.

I drafted the letter because the Y had just begun the hunt for a temporary facility and Park had just gone up for sale.

In my view, Park would have been the ideal location because the racquet programs could carry on. A public meeting was to no avail.

Park lasted another year or so until it was sold to a condo developer.

My early days at Park have been seared into memory. Recently I wrote a stylized account of my first ever visit to a hot sauna about a month after I had quit smoking:

Nicole: "It will pass, it was your first time!" She took a sip from her freshly pressed OJ.

Me: "It is a lot more than that!" Tears rushed to my eyes and I choked.

Nicole: "Six more times or so and you should be good to go."

Me: "I don't know; I'm leery now. I had to fumble my way to the bench and breathe through my towel."

Nicole: "As I said, the first time is always the most difficult. It does get easier. You do adapt. You have been off the cigs for only a couple of months."

Me: "I guess. Choking, gasping, and almost-puking is not my measure of a good post-workout experience."

Nicole: "You gotta be positive. You have quit. You seem committed to staying off the smokes. You have been on the court a dozen times, you have smacked that blue ball around, and now you have been in the sauna. In six months, those cilia in your lungs that were once cemented in tar will be flipping their tails like crazy. They have almost forgiven you now."

I soothed my raw throat with a chocolate mocha shake.

Nicole finished her juice, slipped off her stool, stuck her racquet in her bag, and, with a quick flick of her braids ...

Nicole: "Soon, very soon you will be thrashing me. But that's OK, I always play for fun!"

That is my recollection of my first visit to the dry sauna (at the time) at Park Racquet and Fitness. I could not help but cough.

It was the same on the court.

The Players

The game of squash took to me and I took to it. It was easy to pick up a game any evening of the week (if I was working days) and another on the weekend. Three games a week became the norm for several years.

There was not much in the way of organized leagues at first because the club changed hands a few times, along with the club pro. But when Tony came along, that marked the beginning of a three-decade-long association.

The Fresh Start Effect

One weeknight I sauntered down to the end of the hall next to the squash courts, turned right, and was met with five brand new racquetball courts, two of which had glass front walls.

The game was still relatively new at the time and I did not even have a racquet. I soon obtained one and learned the game (totally different from squash both in terms of equipment and court layout). I ended up deserting squash for a couple of years until someone convinced me to play both, however racquetball (both singles and doubles) stayed as my game of choice.

I do believe that I hit at the heart of my affection for all racquet sports when I penned a letter (right) after the closing of Park.

After all those years of competitive play, I learned many hard-won lessons. I learned to lose with a certain gritty grace.

I learned respect. I learned oh so many times never to take your opponent for granted based on size or perceived athleticism and, of course, gender.

Many times, I played a young woman when I was first introduced to racquetball. Every time we played, she just destroyed me. I did become competitive with her, but do not recall ever taking a match from her. So, you tip your cap and say well done!

You never play down, you never catastrophize on the court, you play to the end, and you give thanks for the match (best three out of five).

Along my forty-year path, I have met and played with hundreds of players. There have been other Brians, half a dozen Mikes, lots of Ricks, Johns, Adams, Gregs,

CLOSING OF 'CLUB' MEANS DEATH OF RACQUETBALL

With the closing of Park Fitness, the sport of racquetball no longer exists in Brantford. It has been killed by bottom-line economics.

After all, it's not feasible or cost effective to place two (sometimes four) persons in that much enclosed space.

For 30 years it played me and I'm grateful it did. The game stopped my smoking, and saved

my mental and physical health.

Fondly, I lump all racquet sports together: racquetball, squash, table tennis, badminton. They're all the same, lifelong, individual, maximum participation sports.

I simply fell into mine through a New Year's resolution some 30 years ago. Now it's gone. Shame!

Is this a dying sport?

- Six junior players off to the national championships next month

- Well-run youth programs that teach racquet skills and sportsmanship

- 100+ league players and a solid recreational base

- Players who have travelled for years from Hamilton, Haldimand/Norfolk, Cambridge, even Elora

Brantford was a racquetball hotbed and now it's gone! The economic reasoning for its demise is nothing but statistical quackery.

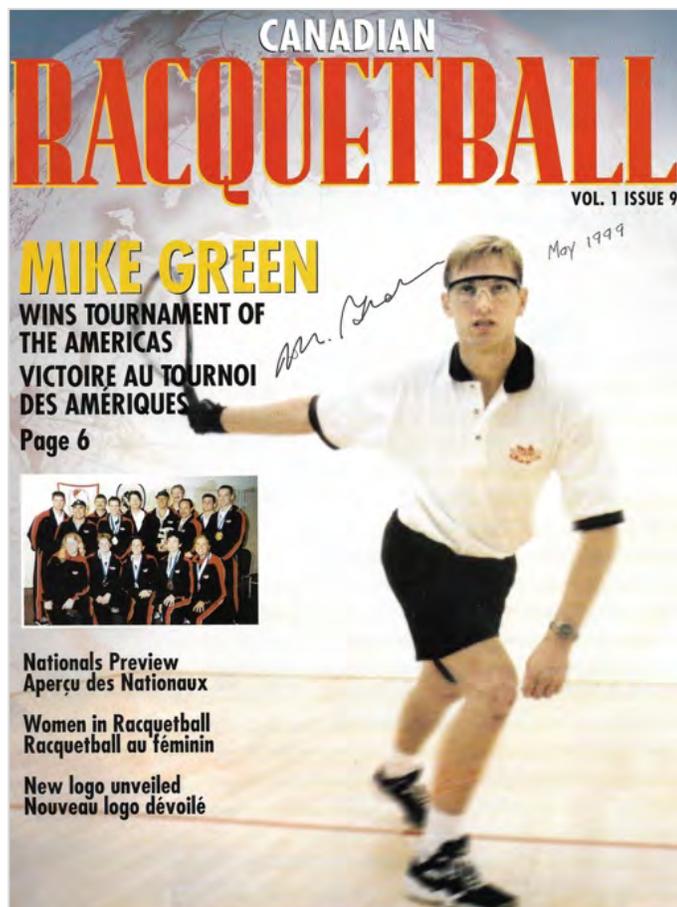
I extend heartfelt thanks to the hundreds of members: the fitness people, the weightlifters, the runners, the spinners, the staff, and the countless others who made the "Club" a special place.

Brian Bosnell
Brantford

Sues, Cathys and Kathys, Karens, Kevins, Jessicas, Katrinas, an Ursula, Debbies, Frasers, Ians, several Tylers, Marks, Tonys, Brads, Toms, Bobs (ten at least), Collins, Jeffs and Geoffs ... and the best Canadian Racquetball player of all time: Mike Green.

I spoke with Mike in the same week that Movati Athletic shut down due to COVID-19. He still plays doubles squash after all this time. He was a racquetball tour-de-force for over twenty years. Note the date on my autographed copy of Canadian Racquetball, pictured below.

I swear I would not be alive today if I had not quit smoking and adopted a racquet sport.



My copy of Canadian Racquetball, Vol. 1, Issue 9, autographed by Mike Green in 1999.

Memorable Moments

I was helping to referee a racquetball tournament match when one of the Ricks in my list backed up and crashed through the 5/8-inch-thick safety glass. This was pre-smartphone days but a video recording of that fountain of glass blasting into the air would have made the nightly news, for sure! Even as I stepped quickly back from the door, I had several glass shards in my hair. Rick suffered minor injuries. Whew, safety glass, yes!

Once for a fundraiser, thirty of us (two at a time) got to go on the court with Mike Green to play two against one. He never lost a game even though he played in slow motion!

80	Pettit	Rob	960
81	Tapper	Everton	956
82	Beaulac	Larry	949
83	Kuchman	Steve	945
84	Elgie	Rob	942
85	Kilbride	Fintan	941
86	Salter	Devin	937
87	Bayley	Mike	925
88	Beals	Darin	922
89	Jenkins	Brian	917
90	Bosnell	Brian	907
91	Penner	Ralph	894

Left: The first and only season I managed not to lose a single match. I was even provincially ranked for a while. 907th, but hey – at 40, that is still good!

RACQUETBALL FALL HOUSE LEAGUE ADVANCED LEVEL 2	WEEK 1 THURS. Oct-21	WEEK 2 THURS. Oct-28	WEEK 3 THURS. Nov-04	WEEK 4 THURS. Nov-11	WEEK 5 THURS. Nov-18	WEEK 6 THURS. Nov-25	WEEK 7 THURS. Dec-02	WEEK 8 THURS. Dec-09	WEEK 9 THURS. Dec-16	WEEK 10 THURS. Dec-23	TOTAL POINTS	FINAL STAND!!
1 RICK WRIGHT 770-3637	Vs. 10 A/G	Vs. 08 5:40	Vs. 06 5:40	Vs. 04 7:40	Vs. 02 8:20	Vs. 09 7:40	Vs. 07 5:40	Vs. 05 5:00	Vs. 03 5:40	Vs. 10 5:00		
2 FRASER BUSHELL 427-7988 OR 428-7734	Vs. 09 8:20	Vs. 07 7:40	Vs. 05 7:40	Vs. 03 A/G	Vs. 01 8:20	Vs. 08 6:20	Vs. 06 9:00	Vs. 04 A/G	Vs. 10 A/G	Vs. 09 7:00		
3 GREG HILL 445-2493	Vs. 08 6:20	Vs. 06 7:40	Vs. 04 7:00	Vs. 02 A/G	Vs. 09 9:00	Vs. 07 A/G	Vs. 05 7:00	Vs. 10 9:00	Vs. 01 5:40	Vs. 08 5:40		
4 KEVIN HAYNES 751-4327	Vs. 07 9:00	Vs. 05 6:20	Vs. 03 7:00	Vs. 01 7:40	Vs. 08 6:20	Vs. 06 5:40	Vs. 10 7:40	Vs. 02 A/G	Vs. 09 8:20	Vs. 07 5:40	2003	
5 TYLER RUDD 758-9842	Vs. 06 5:00	Vs. 04 6:20	Vs. 02 7:40	Vs. 09 A/G	Vs. 07 5:40	Vs. 10 A/G	Vs. 03 7:00	Vs. 01 5:00	Vs. 08 6:20	Vs. 06 8:20		
6 IAN McDANIEL 761-2341	Vs. 05 5:00	Vs. 03 7:40	Vs. 01 5:40	Vs. 08 6:20	Vs. 10 5:00	Vs. 04 5:40	Vs. 02 9:00	Vs. 09 8:20	Vs. 07 8:20	Vs. 05 6:20		
7 ADAM HILL 753-0854	Vs. 04 9:00	Vs. 02 7:40	Vs. 09 8:20	Vs. 10 7:00	Vs. 05 5:40	Vs. 03 A/G	Vs. 01 5:40	Vs. 08 6:20	Vs. 06 8:20	Vs. 04 5:40		
8 DAN BARBER 751-7885	Vs. 03 6:20	Vs. 01 5:40	Vs. 10 A/G	Vs. 06 6:20	Vs. 04 8:20	Vs. 02 6:20	Vs. 09 A/G	Vs. 07 6:20	Vs. 05 6:20	Vs. 03 5:40		
9 JOHN ADKINS 770-4818	Vs. 02 8:20	Vs. 10 9:00	Vs. 07 8:20	Vs. 05 A/G	Vs. 03 9:00	Vs. 01 7:40	Vs. 08 A/G	Vs. 06 8:20	Vs. 04 8:20	Vs. 02 7:00		
10 BRIAN BOSNELL 752-0812	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	30	1

Left: My best single racquetball season.

The Injuries

Having played for forty plus years, I have fared well, all things considered.

I played through pulled calves, bouts of plantar fasciitis, ingrown toenails, an abdominal strain, and sprained ankles.

I tripped and sat on my racquet handle once (briefly, but acutely painful), suffered for a day with sixth nerve palsy, and even a three-day bout of cellulitis on the top of my foot. I spent hours at the Emergency Department on an antibiotic drip on Christmas Day to get rid of that.

I did suffer one severe knee strain and the lateral collateral ligament. It was so severe because I returned too soon, spending just six weeks away from the court. I have worn three braces over twenty years.

My worst injury that should not have happened occurred to my right ankle when I 'skated' in my shoes up near the front wall. The floor had been cleaned but not well enough near the front. I tore the ligaments on both sides as I skidded! I saw my ankle touch the floor on the right, straighten, and then touch the floor on the left.

Why was the floor slippery? Sawdust. Some office doors had been sanded on the court. It took several weeks of physio and a strong ankle brace to get back on the court.

The End?

As of June 2020, I have now gone the longest period ever without playing. Covid-19 stopped me in my tracks. It is now twelve weeks and counting. As I write this, I do not think the courts will open any time soon.

I sit now with a collection of memorabilia, some of it forty years old.

The Fresh Start Effect

My final photos detail the equipment that I have used over the years.

There are small trophies, plaques, ancient racquets, braces, and crests. I even have an original racquetball that was used when the sport first migrated from paddleball. The sport of racquetball has deteriorated to such an extent that it is hard to find a court to play on.

My memories though have been coalesced into these photos (below). What a run it has been!



Meet the Author

Brian Bosnell is a retired elementary school teacher. Now, early in every day, he's learning to write and at any other time, he's a pathological reader.





Vignettes: Glimpses of My Life, The Third Part

by Wayne King

*I have never been able to see life as
anything but a vast, complicated practical joke,
and it's better to laugh than cry.*

- Robert A. Heinlein

The first two parts of my Vignettes series (Lifescapes 2016 and 2017) described events in my preteen life during the nineteen fifties. This Third Part expands the time frame slightly.

I hope you enjoy.

A Picture of Sartorial Splendour

The early spring of 1951 found Mum, sister Janet (almost three years old) and yours truly (almost four) preparing for our upcoming five-month stay in England.

At that time, it was *all the rage* for mothers to dress their sons in costumes when it wasn't even Hallowe'en. Costumes were especially *de rigueur* for boy tourists visiting foreign lands via Transatlantic ocean liners. Anyway, that's what Mum told me. Mum's enthusiasm for costumes was fine with me. I didn't have a problem with costuming, especially when promised perks included guns and whistles.

Mum purchased two costumes for me. Costume one: a sailor suit. Costume two: a cowboy outfit. Plus, of course, guns and whistles.

Sailor Suit

Donald Duck and Popeye, their many nephews, as well as, miscellaneous Royals have all worn sailor suits. I was in good company.

There were two types of sailor suits: summer whites or navy blues. My suit was navy blue. Perfect for the North Atlantic crossing and English summers.

Let's take a close look at my sailor suit starting at the top.

The sailor cap featured a ribbon band but, as in wartime, the name of my ship was not shown.

The midshipman's blouse featured a v-shaped collar at the front and a low flap at the back. The blouse fitted loosely not tucked in. Silver rings trimmed the sleeve cuffs. Bell bottom trousers easily rolled up when it was time to scrub the deck. A necktie wound around my neck.

Completing my suit, the whistle attached to a lanyard was great fun.

Vignettes: The Third Part

I enjoyed piping visitors onto my ship. I am uncertain whether this honour was always appreciated.

So, it was in the late spring of 1951 that we sailed to England aboard RMS (Royal Mail Ship) Franconia. My sailor suit enabled me to fit in perfectly with the nautical surroundings. As a key member of the Franconia's crew I went on regular inspection tours of my ship.



Advertisement for Bosun's Whistle.¹

The ocean voyage broke the ice for me as far as wearing costumes. I was ready. Aye ready.

Six days later we disembarked in Liverpool and caught the night train to London where we taxied to my grandparents' home, Page Street, Westminster, SW1.

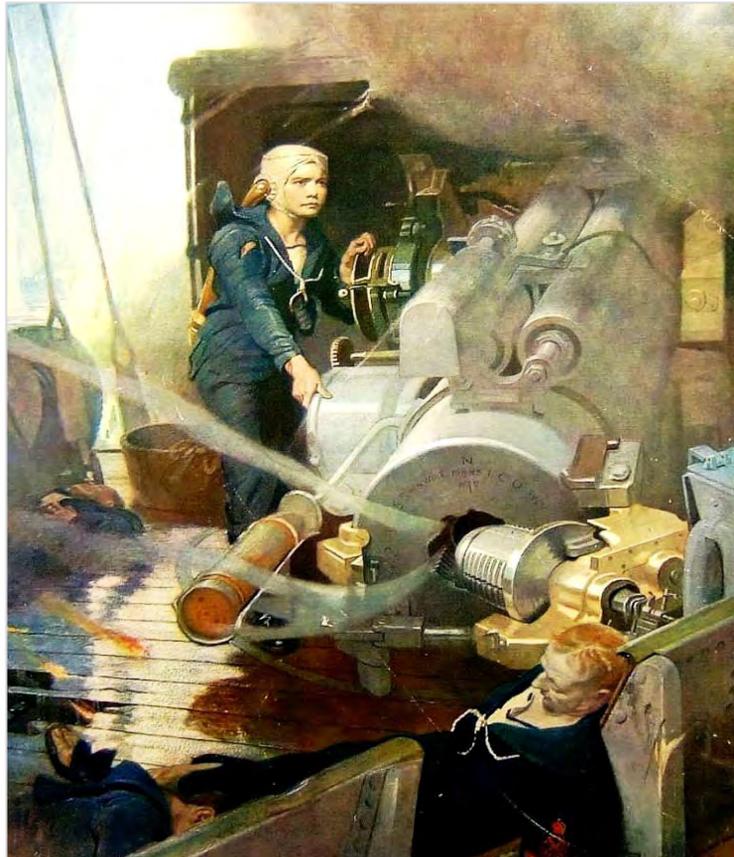
Whether in Canada, England or at sea, I wore my sailor suit on many outings. Truly a picture of sartorial splendour!



Wayne in his front yard. St. Thomas 1951.

To this day I enjoy Navy stories. My naval heroes include: Boy sailor, Jack Cornwell, VC (Victoria Cross); Commander Barclay; and Admiral Lord Nelson.

Favourite warships? HMS (His Majesty's Ship) Warspite and HMCS (His Majesty's Canadian Ship) Haida.



Faithful Unto Death. A painting of Jack Cornwell by his gun, by Frank O Salisbury.²

***Away, away with fife and drum
Full of the devil and navy rum
R-r-rump-a-tum-a-tum-a-tum
Here we come, the North Atlantic Squadron***

*The North Atlantic Squadron.
Performed by Stompin' Tom Connors.*

Cowboy Suit

The cowboy suit. Ah yes, the cowboy suit. I hail from southern Ontario so was familiar with cowboys via movies and radio. TV had not yet arrived in our household. One of the most distinguished cowboys of his era was Hopalong Cassidy, Hoppy as he was affectionately called by his fans. Not to forget Hoppy's horse and best friend, Topper, the smartest horse in the west or east. My cowboy suit was patterned after the one actually worn by Hoppy ... or so I was told.

Hoppy was the perfect role model for a young lad. He was a brave, excellent horseman and ready to right any wrong. He did not drink, smoke, chew, carry on with notorious persons or gamble. Occasionally a grateful maiden would bestow a kiss on a cheek. Reward enough for our stalwart hero.



Hoppy and Topper³

My cowboy suit was all black with contrasting white graphics featuring Hoppy and Topper on the vest and chaps. Each piece was accented with red piping. My head was protected from too much sun by my 10-gallon hat. Over top of an ordinary, everyday shirt I sported a vest; Hoppy on one side, horse and faithful companion



Reach for the sky, varmint.

Topper on the other. No buttons or zippers to challenge me.

I wore ordinary trousers which no one noticed when I wore the huge chaps, also emblazoned with pictures of Hoppy and Topper. In some circumstances, chaps were inconvenient because of their bulk. In warm weather, and if on tour, I wore trousers or shorts and knee socks instead.

All in all, a picture of sartorial splendour!



Left: Wayne practices his quick draw. Spot the gun and whistle.

My pride and joy was a plastic reproduction of Hoppy's single action, Colt 45 Army Revolver with belt and holster. The belt was looped for carrying extra ammo. You never knew when the need might arise. Street shootout? Ambush? Arresting a bad man?

Oh yes, I wore a whistle and lanyard around my neck to call Topper because at four I had not yet mastered the art of whistling.

Shootout at Westminster

In my mind I saw a dusty street. High noon. The sun glares down from a stark, blue sky. Silence. The town folk hold their collective breath and tremble with fear. I stand in the middle of the street facing down the Brixton Kid.

I must save the town from the depredations of the Kid and his gang.

A mere forty feet (twelve meters) separates us.

The Kid's looking to add another notch to his pearl handled Colt. Only one of us will get out of this alive.

Blank expressions mask intentions. Two pairs of eyes squint in the noon day sun studying each other.

Let the Kid make the first move! I know I can beat him!



Hoppy and his trusty Colt Army model 45, single action revolver.⁴

Vignettes: The Third Part

The moment of truth. The Kid draws. Lightning fast. My draw was a hair faster. Quick aim; pull the trigger. A blast of powder. A plume of smoke. A split second passes. A lead bullet reaches its target. The Kid looks bewildered as his Colt spins out of his hand, leaving him unarmed. A cry of pain and frustration. The town folk cheer. The Kid is finished in this town!

The Sheriff finally appears and escorts the beaten Brixton Kid to jail. His gang disperses, never to appear again.

The town is saved. The citizenry rejoices with joy and relief. I have no need for thanks. I whistle for Topper. We fade quietly into the afternoon sun.

Observations on Costuming

Whether on land or sea my costumes enabled me to sport a number of different looks, thereby extending my wardrobe. This was important when travelling for extended periods of time.

Costumes encouraged my fantasies.

I don't remember any negativity expressed or implied by anyone, least of all me, regarding costumes. I enjoyed dressing up. It was like Hallowe'en, but in daytime and with great weather.

I never felt that I was making sport of anyone. I respect cowboys. I respect sailors. All in all, costumes were fun.

In the ensuing years I have worn a number of costumes (or uniforms): cubs, army cadets (see my upcoming story "Draft Dodger"), security guard, businessman, etc. None pleased me as much as my sailor suit and cowboy outfit. When donning sailor suit or cowboy costume, I became a picture of sartorial splendour.

Strangely I don't recall ever seeing another kid wearing similar costumes.

Notes:

A quote from Michael Palin in his book, *Erebus*: “the Boatswain's whistle was a vital part of life on board (a ship): it served as the equivalent of a modern PA (Public Address) system, with different cadences conveying different orders.”⁵

Hoppy (William Boyd, 1895 - 1972) was the first good guy cowboy to wear all black. His suit was actually dark blue, although his movies and TV appearances were all captured in glorious black and white, so it didn't matter. Certainly it didn't matter to me. Boyd's extra pale face and silver hair, which he had sported since the age of 19, highlighted the “black” outfit, further complemented by Topper's white coat and black ears. Hoppy still holds the record for the highest number of films in a series – sixty-six. He also produced about fifty television episodes. Boyd was an astute businessman. He was one of the first stars to actually own his films and develop Hoppy's promotional materials.

Super horse, Topper (1935 - 1961) was a white Arabian stallion. He appeared in every Hoppy movie and TV show. Topper had a well-earned and long retirement.

Sources:

¹ <https://www.hammacher.com/product/her-majestys-royal-navy-bosuns-pipe#>

² https://stmargarets.london/archives/2015/06/looking_for_heroes.html

³ <https://reelrundown.com/celebrities/Horses-of-Famous-Western-Film-Stars-and-their-Sidekicks>

⁴ <https://www.americaremembers.com/product/hopalong-cassidy-revolver/>

⁵ Palin, M. (2018). *Erebus*. Toronto: Random House Canada.

A Halo of Bees

Have you ever thrown someone under the bus? I readily admit that I was forced, by cruel necessity, to throw someone under ... on one occasion, at least.

The stakes were high that day, calling for a cool head and quick decision making. Here's what happened:

Yours truly was a teenager, living at home with my parents and sister and brother, Janet and Brian. The scene was the King family dining room, on a weekday evening in the summer of 1965.

We were at supper. Dad sat at the head of the table, a picture window behind him.

I sat opposite Dad, at the foot of the table. I considered it the best seat in the house. From my chair I watched the TV news and passed on any relevant information. But my real responsibility during meals was as gatekeeper. I answered the phone that hung conveniently on the wall behind me and greeted any callers at the front and side doors. Facing forward, I looked right past Dad through his picture window and straight up Barwick Street to the bridge, observing everyone entering or exiting our small neighbourhood.

Mum sat to Dad's left while Janet and Brian sat on his right.

This particular evening, like all evenings we talked about the events of our day, our plans for the future, gossip, whatever. Outside was quiet. Our neighbours, like us, relaxed after a busy day. Tea poured. Boston Cream Pie cut and distributed. Conversation continued.

All was right with the world but as a philosopher once warned, "When you least expect it, expect it!"

That was when the screaming started.

“What's that unearthly wail?” “Sounds like a wild beast in distress!”

Wailing turned into screaming mixed with very human cries of “Help, help me.” It seemed to emanate from somewhere in our backyard. All conversation stopped.

We listened and wondered.

What could it be?

What should we do?

It's getting louder and closer.

Seconds ticked slowly by. The screaming continued.



The King backyard. The house is just visible beyond the hedge.

Dad took matters in hand and strode to the kitchen window at the back of the house. From that vantage point he could see most of the backyard, the “back forty,” and beyond to the gulley.

Dad exclaimed, “Someone's runnin' up the side of the house.”

Frantic banging started on the side door. Typically, it was unlocked.

Screaming and crying rent the air.

The screaming, crying and banging unsettled all of us.

What's going on? Who's at the door? Sounds like bloody murder.

“Wayne, see what's goin' on,” Dad ordered.

It was my job, so with some trepidation I rose from the table. I opened the dining room door and walked down the stairs.

Vignettes: The Third Part

With fear in my heart, I swung open the inside door to reveal one of the neighbourhood kids, nine-year-old Joey Brown. He wasn't alone. His upper body was engulfed by bees!



“Help, help. Let me in,” Joey cried. His arms flailed in the air as he tried to ward off his attackers.

The bees buzzed as they flew constant sorties against our friend Joey.

*His upper body was engulfed by bees!
Well, not quite this many.¹*

Why's he here? His house is just as close.

I had microseconds to assess and act. *Let him in...and the bees too? What about us?*

I quickly realized; *I can't let him in. The bees will get in the house for sure and sting the family and Joey will still be stung.*

Without hesitation I told Joey, “You can't come in.”

Determined, I closed the wood door, first ensuring that both doors were locked. Abandoning Joey to his fate, I turned around and walked back inside.

The last we heard was Joey's screams as he ran down our driveway to the street.

Everyone felt sorry for Joey, but no one questioned my decision.

I drank my tea and finished my Boston Cream Pie with a clear conscience.

I never did find out the circumstances behind Joey's predicament. We later learned that Joey had been stung a few times. Of course, one sting is too many but Joey was young. He quickly recovered.

What would you have done in my place?



*The King House, 1960. The side door is halfway down the left side.
Brother Brian in carriage.*

Sources:

¹ www.buzzfeed.com/kmallikarjuna/things-that-shouldnt-be-covered-in-bees

Paper Boy Blues

We've all read about successful people who claim that delivering the newspaper as a youngster laid the foundation for their overachieving in later life.

I almost believe them.

My newspaper experience was quite different. I was almost thirteen, way back in 1960, when introduced to the world of business via the newspaper industry. I use the term paper boy, note, because that was the term used in 1960.

Here's my story.

First Business Meeting

A bleak March day. Heading for home after school, I walk over the bridge. Home a mere hundred meters straight ahead. In front of me a strange car, a Volkswagen, is parked on the slope leading to the bridge. It faced toward me. A driver, partially visible, sat behind the wheel.



Barwick St. Bridge. Our house is straight ahead. Mr. Henbest parked on left, past the bridge.

As I got closer, I checked out the driver. Bland middle-aged face, a fedora with a discreet feather in the band and black framed glasses. A suit and tie, but no overcoat.

I drew parallel to the stranger. He cranked his window down.

“Are you Wayne King?” asked the man.

Oh oh, he knows my name. What did I do now?

I simply replied, “Yes.”



The big city paper's current logo.¹

The stranger got right to the point, “My name is Mr. Henbest and I am from The London Free Press. Are you interested in a paper route?”

I had never thought about having a paper route, which made me wonder: *how did he get my name?*

But then I realized. *Of course, it had to be Dad. He must have volunteered me.*

Dad was a go getter. He was a member in good standing of what some now call the Greatest Generation. He came of age at fourteen, in the midst of the Great Depression when jobs were hard to find and money scarce. Just when the economy started up again World War II reared its ugly head. Dad did his patriotic duty and put his life on hold for over four years. When it came time to start a family, he never forgot the hard life lessons he had learned. To Dad, any job was a good job. Dad himself always had a full-time job and a small business of some sort on the side. Any spare time was spent in constant construction on the house and landscaping which included trimming over three hundred feet of privet and levelling and earth moving a large backyard. He was an accomplished moon lighter in demand to garden and dig and whatever. He had no fear of physical labour.

In contrast I was a spoiled baby boomer. I gave no thought to the far-off future. I only thought of now, and working was definitely not on my agenda.

Vignettes: The Third Part

I debated the pros and cons. *If I turn down the job Dad will be irate ... he wouldn't understand. The money would be welcome though. Really, I have no choice.*

"Okay Mr. Henbest," I said.

"You have fifty customers. Here are their cards with their names and addresses. Each card has pull off tabs, one for each week. That's the customer's receipt and your record that they paid. You collect forty cents from each customer weekly. That's twenty dollars. You pay fifteen dollars to the Free Press every Saturday afternoon. Your pay is ten cents a customer or five dollars a week. Oh yes, papers must be delivered by eight, even on Saturdays. The office opens at six. Get your bag and papers from them. Here's your customer book. Plan your route. You start Monday morning."

Well that's that. I'm committed!

Business completed, we went our separate ways. My house sat on a curve in the road in such a way that our dining room window looked right down the street. I wondered whether my parents had watched us. I never asked. They never told.

The Route of All Evil

So, I became a paper boy.

My route ran east/west for seven blocks and north/south for three and sometimes four blocks. There were almost three hundred residences. I served about one in six households. My house was at the extreme west end of the route. The Free Press office was another kilometer south of my house, on Talbot Street. The bottom line? I travelled a great distance per customer.

Most people in St. Thomas subscribed to our hometown paper, the St. Thomas Times-Journal (T-J), and their routes were compact in comparison. Their paper boys delivered to more customers in a much smaller area. Many of their routes could actually be walked. Other advantages of the T-J were a much thinner paper and evening delivery.

With a large area to cover, a bicycle was absolutely essential to deliver within the required time of eight o'clock in the morning. My bike was the CCM standard model: no gears, no hand brakes, nothing fancy. I added an iron framework carrier in which I inserted a large cardboard box.



Ready to deliver. I actually looked like this - the stereotypical paper boy of the '50s.²

The office supplied me with my own newspaper delivery bag. It was a very rugged piece of canvas work, but not entirely efficient. It had a slit down one side as well as the main opening at the top. Neither the top nor the slit had means of closure.

Delivery Daze

Next thing I knew it was Sunday night. Get organized. Check the bike tire pressure. Prearrange my wardrobe. Don't forget to wind the clock. Double check that the time is set accurate and the alarm correctly set. Typical workday was up at 5:30 a.m. Get to the office by 6 when the papers were supposed to arrive. There could be printing problems in London that led to delays in delivery. Trucks also broke down occasionally, affecting delivery time.

At the Free Press office, I plied wire cutters, supplied by the office, to break open the bundles of papers. Each paper must be individually folded then arranged in the carrier. As mentioned earlier, my carrying bag was useless except as a water-resistant cover. Efficient packaging saved time.

My hands turned black from fresh newspaper ink. *No use washing my hands until the papers are delivered.* In the meantime, I better not touch my face.

Before I leave the office, I deal with paperwork. Simple – Add a new customer? Fill out a card. I also received cards that explained a customer's complaint to be corrected or a missed delivery, change of address, and so on.

Vignettes: The Third Part

Sometime between 6:30 a.m. and 7 a.m. I cycle to my route. Delivery begins. Rain or snow? Doesn't matter. My job is to deliver the paper...by 8!

Saturday's delivery was the most challenging. Most days one visit to the office was sufficient, but special editions and Saturdays, well that was another matter!

First, the delivery truck must be on time. Secondly, the paper was so huge that it could not be folded. We didn't have individual plastic bags. Elastic bands lacked strength even if we had them. The monster paper had to be laid flat in the carrier, covered by the bag in wet weather. Some Saturdays I had to make three trips to the office, but even on an average Saturday two trips were necessary.



This photo shows a dangerously unbalanced rear load. I would never do this!³

Complicating matters, Saturday's paper would not fit in many mailboxes and sometimes had to be placed in exposed areas during marginal weather. Wet weather was especially challenging, any day of the week, because many homes did not have decent cover.

Nevertheless, it was the responsibility of the paper boy to deliver a paper, not only timely but in good condition.

The paper boy took the heat for any negative situation. I fielded complaints with the office or at the customer's door. *After all it's my business.* Occasionally, I would be a paper short but wouldn't notice until near the end of the route. Rather than go back to the office, I would not deliver to a customer – preferably one who had not paid for a while. The office would field the call and then deliver the paper.

On the plus side, according to my friend Kerry, whose grandparents subscribed to the Free Press, I was the “best paper boy” they had ever had.

Finish before eight. Usually.

If I finished early, I might visit the Home Dairy and purchase a big coke and day-old donuts. Time to relax and recharge the batteries. I enjoyed a regular breakfast or my Home Dairy purchases and read the latest editions of my favourite satirical magazines – *Mad*, *Cracked*, *Sick* and sometimes even *Help*.

Well-fed and rested, it was time to walk or bike to school.



What, me worry? Mad Fifties Anthology

Getting Paid

As with any business, positive cash flow is the key to success...

I collected the weekly payment, always in cash, after school one or two evenings throughout the week, as long as there was daylight. The best time to collect? Saturday morning. People were happier and more available. Saturday afternoon was usually ok, except it came but once a week and there were many other things to do. Sunday collection was something I never entertained. After all, the Lord's Day Act was still in effect.

The challenge was that some people kept putting off payment, so I had to pay their thirty cents to the Free Press. Of course, I didn't get my cut of ten cents either. Some customers would drag payment on for four weeks, or even longer. A number of people were rarely home. Thank goodness only a few lied and insisted that they had paid, when their card showed otherwise. Well, I was just a kid dealing with adults.

When I finally caught up with one customer, they claimed that a charitable organization paid on their behalf. The office had no such record. I felt helpless until the office allowed me to cut them off. Meanwhile, I was on the hook for six weeks of missed payments. The office was not affected. I still had to pay them.

Vignettes: The Third Part

Another time, my friends Kerry and Kevin accompanied me when collecting. This particular house was the residence of a girl named Margaret, who attended the same school as us. Knock, knock on the door. A couple of knocks later a man answered. Much to our surprise, he was clad only in briefs. I decline to describe him in more detail. Anyway, I tried to keep a straight face. I think I succeeded but not too sure of my cohorts whom I could see were struggling. My customer, undeterred, gathered up his cash and handed it over. I tore off his receipt. Finally, the door closed on us. The three of us burst into laughter.

Oh well. At least he paid!

I wonder what people would say about this incident today?

As previously mentioned, my earning potential was five dollars a week. I worked about twenty hours meaning my wage came in at around twenty-five cents an hour. Contrast that with my friend Pete who delivered groceries on his bicycle for five dollars for twelve hours of work, resulting in a little over forty cents an hour. Hoeing turnips earned me fifty cents an hour, although I did have a long commute in and out of the countryside via bicycle.

What happened?

Finally, things came to a head. I was not collecting enough money to pay for the paper and earn a fair commission. The London Free Press fired me. We parted ways after less than a year.

I don't remember Dad being upset. I would like to think it was because he realized I worked hard for little return.

What did I learn from this experience? On the negative side: never work for straight commission. However, on the positive side, I did learn about customer service and finance which stood me in good stead when I entered the work force.

Contrast my experience with that of the modern Paper Boy. Today they are largely anonymous adults, of any gender or age, and absolutely need a car. Their pay is automatically deposited into their bank account – no collecting, no commission.



Wayne, a year later, at the age of fourteen.

Sources:

¹ The London Free Press (Facebook)

² <https://thetablet.org/former-tablet-paper-boy-walks-the-camino/>

³ <https://www.pinterest.com.mx/pin/717198309386178728/>

Meet the Author

Born and raised in St. Thomas, Ontario, I have made my home in Brantford since 1981. I am married to Sharon and father to Amy, Aaron and Ian. My work career focused on sales/marketing for a variety of businesses, both local and international. Interests include gardening, history, cycling, photography, brewing, genealogy and walking/tai-chi/yoga.

Being retired I am able to devote more time to creative writing and reading. I have enjoyed and been inspired by the work of many authors throughout the years.

Once again, I thank the Brantford Public library for supporting such a wonderful program. I look forward to future writings.



This is the 13th edition of the Brantford Public Library's Lifescapes anthology. The authors in this book have participated in a year-long memoir writing program which offers community, writing workshops and guest speakers. The program is intended to encourage local participants to share their stories with others.

While the authors were forced to finish their pieces remotely, they continued to preserve in their writing and connecting with the group. We are proud to present their work and hope readers enjoy embarking on this sentimental journey.



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