

The Communicator

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Special Reunion edition 2005

Why reunions are important

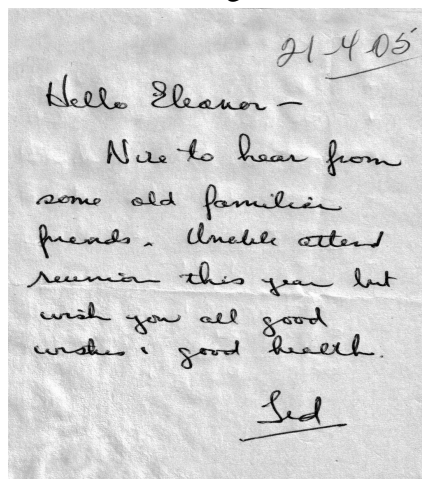
By David Smith

As this is being composed in early August, there are just a few weeks before our second National reunion of 2005. This newsletter will be a “Reunion edition” to get you thinking about next months Ottawa reunion. It doesn’t seem 5 years ago that we held our first reunion in September of 2000. Since then our friends and colleagues have held reunions in BC (Parksville) in 2003, New Brunswick (Dieppe) in 2004, numerous Lime nights in Ottawa and even more numerous meetings of a small group of volunteers who work to make these things happen.

So much has happened since that first reunion and it is gratifying to see how we have developed as a group. It’s always good to look back and remind ourselves of where we’ve been.

Ten years ago, a large group of us “departed” the Pearson building. Many went on to retirement (which took many forms) while others continued new careers in DFAIT (now FAC – Foreign Affairs Canada) and still others took up duties in totally different fields. All of which begs the question “where on earth did those ten years go?”

Who will forget our reunion in 2000 when we once again came together as a group to renew old friendships and acquaintances? I place great importance on reunions. Each year my wife and I hold a family reunion at our cottage and if it weren’t for these gatherings, we simply wouldn’t get to see family until the next funeral. That’s reality folks which is why these occasions are such positive events. Reunions are indeed soul food. Back in 2000, I was especially happy to renew acquaintances with former colleagues who had retired many years previously and what a treat to once again chat with those whose hair was now silver (or diminished in my case) but who shared some very good times with us in various parts of the world or at our main bases of the East Block or Pearson building.



One person I was particularly happy to see in 2000 was Ted Warren whom people of my vintage will easily recall. I was again looking forward to seeing him this year but I recently learned from Eleanor Ryan that he had sent the following note which I wish to share with everyone.

It was sad to learn from Ted’s note which Eleanor received on April 21st that he would not make this year’s reunion. It was with greater sadness to learn that 10 days after this note was received, Ted passed away on May 1st of this year.

This is not a happy note with which to begin this newsletter. It does however serve as a vivid reminder of why we must make the most of life and when an opportunity to meet old friends comes around, we would do well to grab it. So grab a pen and fill out that registration form for the 2005 CM reunion. Your attendance will make it a happy occasion and we all look forward to seeing you there.

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It's not too late to join the "Hall of Valour" photo display!

Most of you will have received notice of our need for photos or other memorabilia for the reunion. While a number of you have kindly submitted photos relating to your former lives as CM's, I still have a requirement for more – especially people shots or photos of Embassies/High Commissions that we worked in. There will be a table of memorabilia and I am particularly keen to get my hands on former Courier paraphernalia such as linen tags for the dip bags, lead seals, wax tapers, seals and heck, why not, a lead seal crimper would be nice! Foreign Affairs will be supplying a few artefacts for our display but perhaps one of you might have something of interest lying about for us all to enjoy (and to be returned at the end of the reunion). Have a look and let me know.



Reunion preparations – some of your volunteers

L-R: Howie Abbott, Laurie Archibald, Eleanor Ryan, David Smith

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Apples don't just grow and Reunions don't just happen

When there is a cottage to go to and sunshine to soak up, why anyone would be sitting in Eleanor's dining room shuffling papers around is a good question indeed. And as much as I would like to have been paddling around the lake in my favourite canoe, here we were going over the details of the upcoming reunion. It might be of interest to learn who actually does the work to ensure your reunion is a success.

While many of us work with our Association of Former Foreign Service Communicators (AFFSC) on a fairly regular basis, there are other volunteers who weren't even CM's so here's a little background.

All of the members of your executive are working on this year's reunion. So what does this mean? Well for starters, it means nailing down a place to hold the event and this was done over a year ago. The Hellenic Centre venue was a big success in 2000 so we decided not to mess with success and use them again this time. Discussions over food menus always made me hungry but that's now done. A display of CM memorabilia had to be scouted out and that's coming together nicely. And you thought civil servants only took Government issue pens home with them!

Photos were begged for (we have no shame) and while more would be better, we have some interesting shots and it's always a guessing game as to whom the face belongs. A golf tournament was planned and organized and that's under control. A keynote speaker had to be sourced and we really hit the jackpot this year – unlike the first reunion! For those of a certain vintage, memories will serve to return to a time when we had what was called a “Secretary of State for External Affairs” and of a fine lady by the name of **Flora MacDonald** who served as our minister in the Clark Government. Yes folks, Ms. MacDonald is going to be this reunion's keynote speaker and I can't wait.

And on it goes. Entertainment is done – and this time we even have a group of dancers. Thanks to **Roger Banville** and others, pins will be available (what's a reunion without a commemorative pin). Golf is on tap thanks to **Laurie Archibald**. Decorations and Prizes are well in hand. We even have two spouses, **Maureen Langille and Hazel Marshall** who are working on our behalf. It doesn't get better than that! As an aside, Hazel works throughout the year with Eleanor getting those newsletters of your stories stuffed and mailed. **Michelle Burke** – formerly of the Royal Bank in the Pearson building assisted in the 2K reunion and again this year as well. I think she should be an honorary CM. **Howie Abbott** is working on a souvenir program, a sometimes frustrating exercise getting these computers to behave. He has also worked with Steve Buck on some freebies. **George McKeever** updates the website and keeps us posted on whose attending as well as a myriad of others things he does on our behalf. **Jacques Bergeron** who lives in Costa Rica by the way came up with a number of great initiatives which have been actioned. If you get a call from Costa Rica, you will know who's calling. **John Kruithof** is looking after advertising and other tasks while I (**David Smith**) do some typing and work on the photos and memorabilia. Last but not least, **Eleanor Ryan** does everything, keeping us focussed and making things actually happen. She also pays the bills – no surprise there for anyone who knows Eleanor. She also provides her home as a venue for our meetings.

So there you have it in a nutshell. It's always fun for our little group to get together and at this year's recently held AGM; it was a blast from the past to once again chat with Ralph Guitard and to see some familiar and previously unfamiliar faces. With everyone's dedication and assistance, we look forward to yet another successful reunion and to doing my favourite thing – tripping down that memory lane I so enjoy.

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Old Soldiers Do Die (What's a newsletter without a story)

By Buck Arbuckle

By its very nature, External Affairs generates a massive amount of classified material. One of the problems in the Telecommunications Division was the disposal of the secret waste that it produces. Day to day paper accumulations presented no particular problem. Before shredders appeared on the scene, we burned it. But what about the machinery that had outlived its usefulness and was still classified secret. We couldn't throw it in the garbage and we couldn't shred it. In an outfit responsible for hundreds of secret machines scattered at embassies around the world, the disposal problem was of extraordinary proportions.

One communicator at a Middle East embassy took it upon himself to break up his retired machines into small pieces. He loaded them into a boat and began slowly tossing the pieces overboard as he moved about the lake. He figured this was a lot cheaper than sending them back to Ottawa by courier for ultimate disposal. Smart man and it gave him a pleasant afternoon on the lake to boot. Catch was that he was observed by the local constabulary who were already suspicious of everything foreigners do. They arrested him for throwing "radio equipment" into their lake. It was a good suspicion though not quite accurate, and we never did find out whether it was illegal to throw "radio equipment" into the lake. Anyway, it took our ambassador a lot of fast talk to get our man out of the jam. After that we resolved to recover all retired equipment to Ottawa and sought to do our own dirty work.

There was a foundry a few miles south of Ottawa, and negotiations with the manager extracted a deal to burn and melt down the equipment on successive Saturday mornings. We loaded a rented truck and away we went. Trouble was the combination of materials which comprised the machines, though slow to catch fire, began to burn furiously and generated so much heat they literally melted a hole in the side of the furnace. Needless to say, we would not be welcomed back there.

Now what to do. We found a scrap yard where we could take this equipment and supervise it being run over by a bulldozer. The machines came out rather flat, but we weren't sure the wiring had been destroyed. After all we had to satisfy security authorities that nothing was recoverable. It seemed everything we tried was inadequate, and this obsolescent material kept piling up.

Then someone got a brain wave. The government was contracting to build a new building for External Affairs on Sussex Drive. We contacted the contractor who agreed to help. Arrangements were made to spread out our excess machines on the ground at the building site and he would pour hundreds of tonnes of concrete on them. Thus our encapsulated machines would be unavailable for close examination for a hundred years. Security was ensured.

Now here's the rub. The telecommunications organization subsequently put itself out of business by adopting new technology. However, its obsolete equipment is still depended upon to support the headquarters building and all the department's operations for many years to come.

Perhaps at this point I could add a little aside.

About 1981, the Auditor General did an extensive examination of External Affairs with Telecommunications as a primary target. The auditors had great praise for the many phases of our operations while casting aspersions on the rest of the department. The praise found in the Auditor General's report is entirely due to the unselfish enthusiasm and the application of expertise and ingenuity by everyone connected to the operation. I therefore extend my thanks to all of you who made it possible. These things are not forgotten.

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We'll see you at the 2005 Reunion