

The Communicator

Newsletter
Volume III Edition II
Summer 2003

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Editors Ramble *By David Smith*

Summer's almost here and it won't be long before a number of you will be heading to Vancouver Island for the CM Reunion 2003. Your Association Executive has worked hard to make this event as successful as the last reunion. Barrie Thomas in particular has expended enormous effort and has been the driving force behind the scenes. He and your western colleagues look forward to seeing you there.

Meanwhile, our colleagues' experiences during their careers with DFAIT continue.

Happy reading.

The Dip Bag

Ted Olgivie wrote: ... "Just received the Spring 2003 issue of The Communicator and Dave is to be congratulated, as well as the contributors Leigh, Brian, Buck and John. I enjoyed it immensely!"



What is this crypto machine called?

Association Newsletter published by and for members of the Association of Former Foreign Service Communicators Check us out at: www.affsc.ca

Meeting Queen Elizabeth II, Princess Margaret and Prince Philip *By Howard Abbott*

We were living in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia during the years July 1970 - July 1972 when a Royal Visit took place with a reception being held at the Lake Club Gardens where members of the Commonwealth missions could meet Her Majesty. The venue however was not large enough for all Commonwealth Embassy staff members to attend so each Embassy received some invitations but not enough for all Canadians to attend. The list was prepared and Ada and I were fortunate enough to receive one of the invitations. Imagine our excitement, on our first post, two loyal Newfies, with real British ties having an opportunity to meet the Queen. It was indeed a splendid reception and an exciting occasion. I recall the excited flurry of activity as ladies of the Embassy checked with each other on what they would wear and the exchange of hats that followed so that each person had the right one to match their outfit. Needless to say the men all arrived in dark business suits with no exchanges having taken place, at least not to the best of my knowledge.

Embassy staff all gathered in a special area of the club and each Embassy was assigned a separate area so that the royal group could circulate and meet with some of those present. As the time of their arrival approached we waited in our respective groups and watched the entrance. I was standing in the front row. As the procession moved forward Her Majesty stopped to speak with various individuals from each country represented. When she reached the Canadian group she stopped and spoke with me, asking how long I had been in Malaysia and how I was enjoying living in that part of the world. I forget my exact reply but she moved on and the world did not stop turning so I guess I did not embarrass anyone. Next came Princess Anne and, yes you guessed it, she stopped and spoke to me also. I guess it was my charm and good looks. At this point I remember looking across the room to where all the HOM's were gathered and caught the eye of our High Commissioner, John Hadwen, and signalled to him that I was going to move back a couple rows to allow someone else to greet the Prince. He nodded his acknowledgement and I moved. Prince Philip must have reasoned that Elizabeth and Anne had spoken to those in the front row, so what did he do? You guessed it - he stepped back a couple rows and spoke to me. He asked what I did at the Embassy and when I replied that I worked in the Communications section he displayed interest and said he had served in the same section when he was in the British Forces. A few comments were exchanged after

which a CIDA co-operant standing next to me was asked what he did to which he proudly announced, "I TEACH COMMUNICATIONS". Prince Philip then turned to me and said "wasn't it H.L. Mencken who said **"Those who can, do; those who cannot, Teach"!**

The remainder of the evening was an occasion to remember but I have never forgotten that exchange which so aptly showed the human side of Prince Philip.

* * *

Memories of Accra, Ghana

By Merv McBride

One beautiful afternoon my wife and I and our three children spent a relaxing day at the beach just a little ways from our home in North Labone Estates, Accra, Ghana. The year would be 1970.

The usual attire at the time was bathing suits, already dried by the sun, and a variety of tie-dye and colourful loose shirts. Ron, our youngest was 6, Kathy was 8 and our oldest boy was 11 years of age. Not a scary crew by any stretch of the imagination.

As evening closed in we gathered up our towels and paraphernalia and climbed into our right-hand drive Cortina and headed for home before dark would set in.

We had not traveled more than a few miles when we came to a military road block

manned by a motley looking crew of Ghana's armed forces. Upon stopping at the road block we were confronted by a young soldier who demanded that I get out of the car. I showed him our papers, which included a gray ID card from the Canadian High Commission identifying myself and family as a member of the foreign staff and family.

The young lad then with some force shoved his rifle to my head and pushed while yelling "you will get out of the car without any argument" or something along those lines. That rifle barrel sure felt awful big and lethal. It is amazing how quickly one can exit a car, slithering sideways in such a manner as to not antagonize or jolt the rifle that seemed to be impeded in my temple.

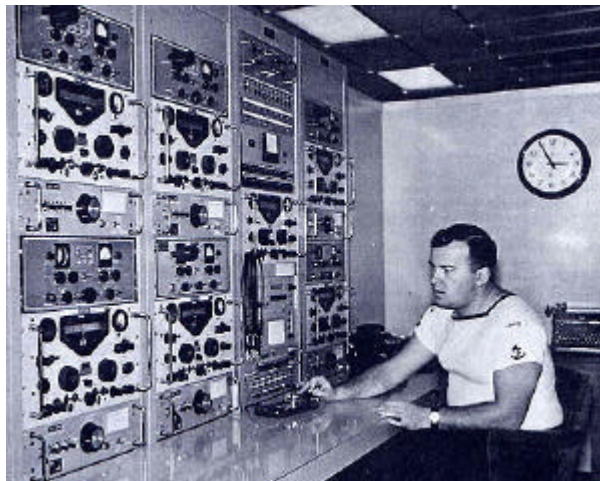
At that point, what appeared to be a senior ranking officer came over and looked into the car at my scared wife and family. Then examined my papers and gave a half hearted apology and told me to get back in the car and get on my way.

I imagined the reaction from External Affairs if this had turned ugly. Their main concern would be - "Oh, a communicator has been shot." - "Let's send a strongly worded protest to the Government of Ghana." And, "By the way, do we have anyone to replace him?"

On Monday, after reporting this incident to the High Commissioner, we found out that there had been rumours that Kwame Nkrumah (?) was planning a coup on the Busia Government and therefore all roads into the city were manned with blockades.

Just another one of our many experiences with the Department of External Affairs. No one could ever say that we communicators didn't have our moments.

* * *



Who is this former colleague of ours?
Look for the answer in the next newsletter.

Down Memory Lane

By George Levasseur

It was Paris in the early 60's when a relatively new communicator in our office was asked to accept a temporary assignment to Geneva. His name was Ron Wensell. The day arrived when Ron was due to return to Paris. At that same time, there had just been an attempt by some five French Generals who were at the time posted in Algeria, to take over the French Capital from Charles DeGaulle. In other words it was to be a putsch. The plan was discovered by the French and the attempt thwarted by the army supporting Charles DeGaulle. However, security in the City and the airports was substantially increased because of these developments. The airport especially was full of CRS, the specialized riot control police. The army were out in great numbers all carrying sten guns and other armaments. Ron's plane landed and taxied to the ramp. Personnel from the embassy are waiting. Suddenly, amongst passengers exiting the plane came our ex sailor Ron carrying a powerful hunting rifle, something he apparently could not resist buying in Geneva. Jean Bleau, the office supervisor was the person who had gone to pick up Ron. Jean being a very nervous person, almost had a stroke when he saw good old Ron with his newly acquired weapon nonchalantly casually carrying it over his shoulder. As a result of being foreign Embassy personnel, nothing drastic happened at the airport but I do recall that Ron was asked not to do this again. The explanation was that carrying a rifle could have been very dangerous! For some time afterwards, Ron gave all of us an opportunity for speculation on what could have happened.

Editor: What a different world we lived in then. Today, plastic dinner knives are now the norm.

The Village Coffee House

By Jim Fanning

The Older Bald Guy sat quietly in his easy chair, listening to Loreena McKennitt on his stereo. The view across the bay and down the harbour was peaceful, the kids were not yet home from school, and yesterday's snow had melted. Although he was perfectly content and fulfilled in his retirement, he occasionally found himself thinking about the joy, and the madness that had been The Village Coffee House.

He smiled to himself as he remembered how the holiday season would always drive the coffee house habitués to greater leaps of creative energy. He recalled, for example, one typical day in December not too very long ago...

The Folksinger was playing her Celtic harp, and singing an excellent rendition of In the Bleak Mid-winter, while the Music-Student-Who-Looked-Like-Bob-Marley joined in from the floor with a complicated, but very poignant counterpoint based on John Lennon's A War is Over. The audience was rapt in collective silence.

The banner behind the postage stamp stage proclaimed And on earth Peace, Goodwill toward People. The Feminist-Art-Major had trouble with the original wording, and so had made that portion of the Scriptures P. C. compliant. The Resident Radical, as usual, had trouble with the sentiment of the banner, and vented his view that banners should only be used to reflect the wishes of the proletariat, or, at best, quotations from Lenin, Marx, Che, or Mao. He favoured something along the lines of Throw off your Capitalist yoke, and recidivist religious superstitions. Exceed Five Year Plan quotas! The OBG quietly preferred the ...Goodwill toward People choice.

The OBG was having his third cup of a blend of two-thirds Kenya Estate AA and one third Mocha Java Brown, a blend suggested earlier by the Poet-with-the-Beret during their (argument) discussion of the efficacy of metered, rhymed poetry in conveying a poetic message to a 20th Century audience. The discussion was left unresolved, but the OBG still favoured his own view that rhyming was overly confining in communicating the immediacy of modern thought. There were, however, times when rhyming could be used to create a feeling, or a mood, more effectively than prose. The piece on his steno pad was case in point...

Stars

The laughter of children,
The suddenness of Spring,
Fond memory in an old man's eye,
A well-worn wedding ring.

The dancing of the Northern Lights,
The wind upon the sea,
Comfort of an oft-read book,
A cup of Ceylon tea.

The lights upon a Christmas tree,
The scent of new-mown hay,
Remembrance of an absent friend,
The moon-path on the bay.

* * *

These stars I've used to mark my way
Home, through soul-dark night:
These memories that ensure I shall
Always walk in light.

* * *

Extracts from the CM forum Board

<http://pub17.bravenet.com/forum/show.php?usernum=1396382057&cpv=1>

Out Routines

By Merv McBride

Do you remember when 'out' routines would take about 2 weeks to complete? Pick up the booklet with all the appointments you must make with personnel for mailing instructions, pay and allowance and, definitely not forget the visit to the Elgin street NH&W to have your needles and your head read.

Travelling from the East Block, over to the Daly building then down the Mall to Queen street. Stopping for lunch and then reporting back for a stint on the line pushing tapes to all the hydra addressees.

* * *

Airport Meat

By Laurie Archibald

I received a phone call at approximately three a.m. in Rome one morning. It was the guard saying he had just played back the Embassy answering machine and there was a message about "Airport Meat". He informed me he knew nothing about a "Meat" shipment, and because of the hot weather he would in no way be responsible for any spoilage. When I came out of the early morning fog it registered, and I assured him that this was likely a change in the courier schedule and we were required at the airport for a meet and to make an exchange. He replayed the tape and booked a driver for me!

Whatever happened to.....

by John Kruithof

After years of wondering whatever became of Ralph Guitard, had my question answered today. He drove up my driveway, with his daughter Tineka (Dutch name because she was born in Holland) at the wheel. Ralph and I recognized each other right away. It was as if we were still in DFAIT. Short recount of events ensued. Ralph looked alert, his hearing excellent and his conversation lively. Seems like doctor's prediction many, many years ago of his impending demise did not materialize. We agreed doctors could hardly fathom what makes old CM's tick. And to beat it all, Ralph lives with his daughter a short walking distance from where I live.

How did this meeting come about? Ready yourself for a short Christmas story. As Director of the Riverside Park Community & Recreation Association (www.RiversidePark.ca), I had been asked to identify a home in our area to participate in a contest for best decorated premises. So Kawsar and I drove around one evening, and identified this particular place. After being checked out later by the President of the Association as being worthy of consideration, the task was to get a signed release form for publicity purposes. To that end, I dropped off an envelope earlier this morning with a request that occupants contact me if they wanted to participate in the contest. That's what they did. Imagine my surprise when it turned out to be the Guitards.

I commiserated with his daughter for having such a reprobate father, and then mentioned to Ralph it was a good thing that home was chosen before I knew who lived there, or I'd be suspected of favouritism. You know how CM's support each other. I did ask him if he was au courant with AFFSC, and he mentioned having been in contact with Eleanor. But how long ago that was, or if his membership is up to date, can be left for after Christmas.

Final Comps "In Memoriam" Members of the CM/EL community to whom we have said goodbye
Dolores Fontaine January 2003