

The Communicator

Newsletter Volume X, Edition III Fall 2010

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Line Room in the East Block

Editors Thoughts

By David Smith

On a cold and rather miserable day when it's not conducive to playing outside, today is an opportune time to put together the last newsletter of 2010. The final edition of "The Communicator" early in the New Year will wrap up ten years of sharing our memories and our lives as Communicators and Technicians in External/Foreign Affairs. Simply looking at the photo above, a flood of memories will no doubt take many of you back to the 60's and early 70's when our world was vastly different than those of later years. Ah the memories of the good old East Block! No air-conditioning comes to the forefront for me – those hot sultry July nights when the heat of the day only added to the heat coming from the many Rockex Vacuum Tubes in a cramped and stifling "RX Room" just steps away from the scene above. I can clearly remember my first day on the job after "graduating" from Miss McCorquadale's school of higher learning and arriving for duty in the East Block comcentre. I quickly realized I really didn't know my butt from my elbow (and yes, – I still don't). Working away were Pierre Poce and Gus Portelance, both of whom could type like the wind. Gerry Patrick was at the supervisor's desk and Stan Daley was down the hall in his office. I will never forget my first experience with "The Iron Chinaman" – that unforgettable Typex and the journey which began with a climb up the "highway to heaven" – the stairs to one of the towers to where the old beasts were located. Sending telegrams via "Telex" to places such as India were always a challenge. An operator could wait for minutes for the "answerback" acknowledgement – and that was on a good day when you actually got one! Many times after transmitting a very long telegram, no a/b was forthcoming leaving us with the conclusion that it didn't go through and the whole process would have to begin again. Oh for the technology of today. For starters we wouldn't have those rotary phone dialers connected to the bank of telex machines. I can still see Gerry Gauthier keeping an eye on us 1965 "newbies" – Cecil Van Allen, Larry Porter, Jim Koradi - good heavens, it's almost like yesterday.

Many years have passed since those days when one carried a "chicken punch" to correct an error in the Murray code on a piece of teletype tape. How many of us had to learn both Morse code (in the military) and Murray code in order to make these telegrams move around the world (at glacial speed by today's standards). When the young ones in our lives ask what we did in External/Foreign affairs, it's always a bit of a challenge to explain in a way that they can actually understand. No texting on a Blackberry, no sending photos whizzing around the world in minutes, no personal communications, no television providing a look at on-the-spot action no matter where in the world. Yes, things have indeed changed. The photo above in black and white simply underlines that fact.

I read the list of former CM's still working for DFAIT and it is to shake one's head. Just 13 of our former colleagues remain. One can't help but be curious as to who will be the last one left to turn out the lights!

Happy reading everyone.

The Indo-Chinese Conference – Geneva

By Buck Arbuckle

While on posting to Paris in the mid 1950s I was called to the international Indo-Chinese conference in Geneva, along with John Dolan, Jerry Spenard and various and sundry other delegates. The conference was held in the United Nations complex but our telecommunications activities were set up, as we were, in the first class hotel, The Hotel de la Paix, on the shores of the beautiful Lac de Geneve.

The conference droned on through December and was recessed for Christmas, but we stayed on for any telecommunications eventuality, whether or no. There was hardly another guest in this straight laced hotel over the holiday and we were left with little to do but feel homesick. We gathered in one of our rooms on the first floor where, outside our door, a perimeter promenade overlooked the main entrance foyer, reception area and the concierge's desk. We had plenty of booze and were enjoying a community drink when there was a knock at the door. There stood a hotel porter with a large parcel on a gleaming silver tray. He spoke stiffly saying "Parcel from Canada, sir", laid it on a table and quickly exited. Puzzled, we gazed at the brown papered package with various markings resembling postmarks and finally opened it, to find it fully packed with carefully crafted snowballs and a note "Merry Christmas from Canada". Evidently the hotel didn't want us to feel homesick.

We took the box and its contents out onto the perimeter promenade and looked down. There the concierge, porters, head waiter, etc., were all staring up at us laughing. We quickly took a couple of snowballs each and threw them at the pranksters. They were quick to scoop up what snow they could and fire it back. Thus for the only time in our careers we had a full fledged snowball fight in the elegant foyer of a first class hotel. But soon the snow ran out, everything was wet and the combat was over. The hotel staff quickly cleaned up the mess and, one by one, joined us for a drink in the room before returning to their normal duties.

Beats me how the hotel staff could precipitate such a ruckus one minute and display a thoroughly disciplined formal format the next. But that's the Swiss.

A Severance Package

By Buck Arbuckle

Everybody faces retirement as many of our colleagues have already experienced. But I should like to go way back to the very early days of the Canadian Diplomatic Courier Service and recall the retirement of our first courier.

In the beginning, couriers were recruited as couriers and the first courier, Mr. Jack Ashe, was brought into the fold having retired from a career in the army. Not a bad job for someone having had a full and eventful career in the service.

Jack Ashe was assigned to the Ottawa, Washington, New York trip and seemed to have a monopoly on that route. He travelled it twice a week and provided both Washington and New York with excellent service at a time when electronic communications left much to be desired.

The courier service was so regular and dependable that we had no trouble reserving the same seat, tourist class at the back of the aircraft. Eastern Airlines aircrews were so well briefed that they ensured our courier was brought forward and

allowed off the aircraft first. The drill was perfect, same courier, usually same aircrew, same route, same aircraft, same schedule, same seat, first off year after year. Then came retirement. After two careers Jack sought release, not because of the pressure of work but because he felt work worn.

At that time Archie Matthews, then Deputy Director of Telecommunications, thought it would be appropriate to mark the occasion with a gift. He called the local manager of Eastern Airlines, explained his cause and asked that Eastern Airlines remove the “courier’s seat” when the aircraft went in for maintenance. Eastern obliged and the seat was donated to Jack at his severance party, who then had it installed in his recreation room at his house. What a great idea for a gift. Eastern also showed their appreciation with a round trip ticket anywhere in Canada.

Images can be deceiving

By Buck Arbuckle

The Department had a mandate to develop the government’s foreign policy and to promote that policy with governments all over the world. For this task External Affairs sought and trained an exceptional resource pool of refined, cultured and talented individuals.

About this time construction of the new headquarters building on Sussex Drive had just been completed and departmental personnel took pride in their new building. It had everything, even built-in precautions against earthquake damage. The art displays were phenomenal; there was even mobile art in one case measuring at least 6’x 8’. A whole wall in the entrance lobby had reproduced on it an enlarged page typed by Lester B. Pearson himself, complete with all his typing errors and messy corrections. And there were large paintings dispersed throughout the building, each with its own name plate and price tag which ranged from \$5000 and up. The building and art were shown off with enthusiasm, sometimes conveying the impression that everyone in the department must be a connoisseur of fine art.

The Telecommunications Division was a frequent recipient of crates of technical material buffered for shipment with large pieces of styrofoam. One of our technicians saw developmental possibilities in a particular piece of styrofoam. It had lots of bumps and hollows and curves. He spray painted it in multiple hues, labelled it with a brass name plate engraved with the word WOMAN and printed a price tag of \$1500. Then he surreptitiously hung it on one of the walls of our new building.

Now a returning ambassador had just arrived home from posting and was admiring all that the building had to offer, including the colourful creation of our technician. The price was within his range and he postulated that if it was displayed in the department’s new building, it must indeed be fine work. He enquired of the deputy minister how he might go about buying it and only then did he learn that this was a spoof. He wasn’t pleased. The department ordered that the styrofoam art be removed lest some reporter learn of it and write an article casting aspersions on the artistic integrity of some of its elite.

* * *

More Short Stories
By Marty Byzewski

The Night I Slept on Top of the Covers

On my first trip to India and Bangladesh I flew from Zurich to Bombay on Swiss Air. It was a great flight especially flying business. Once I left the aircraft my world rapidly disintegrated in Bombay Airport. There were masses of people, heat, pandemonium and I wished at that moment I was back in my safe world of Canada. I finally got through the customs, everyone wanting bribes and got my two suitcases outside the terminal. More of the same heat, pandemonium and to my astonishment two guys grab one suitcase each and head in different directions. Holy Toledo!! I finally got them together and noticed the hotel where I was staying was about a block away down the road. So I got inventive. I had them carry them while we walked down the street through the beggars, the poor and other unmentionables. I checked into the hotel which was airconditioned. (It was very humid). I went to my room and decided to freshen up. When I turned on the bathroom light there was an array of movements as the local roaches decided to run and hide. There were more in the main room. I proceed downstairs bought myself a six-pack, went back up and sat on my bed and drank the evening away. I never undressed and slept on top of the covers that night with one-eye-open. The next day I flew to New Delhi as I found out in the morning that the flight I was booked on did not exist. Welcome to the joys of travel. (Not!!!!!!)

The City where the Cow is King

I often wonder to this day what they serve inside the hamburgers they sell in India. It is a bit unnerving for the first time traveller to India when driving in downtown New Delhi. The noise, the traffic and the cows!! The cows are considered holy property in India so they wander free at will on the roads, through the public areas making all kinds of messes with their doo-doo. I believe that they must burn the stuff as the air is so polluted. Now getting back to my question! What do they serve inside the hamburgers in India???

The Day the Pope Waved at Me

One day while visiting Rome we decided to go to St Peters Church to see the morning appearance of the Man. There were big crowds with lots of tourists (Tourasses), nuns and all manner of glitteratii. People were dressed to the nines or just in jeans and tee-shirts. It was a real carnival atmosphere and I have to admit I was caught up in the excitement. About 10:30 A.M. we heard a roar emit from the gathered masses and looked to a balcony on the side of the Pope's digs. Sure enough there he was in all his glory. Only about 250 feet away and about 100 feet off the plaza. It was like looking at an ant. Bummer. But I will be the first to admit that when he waved at the crowd he was looking right at me. Can you believe it, He had separated me from the masses and was giving me a special benediction. God It felt good!! Good for you Pope John Pole.

Why My Sneakers are Red

The last time you saw me I know you were looking at my reddish sneakers. Go ahead and admit it, you were looking down at my feet because I know you were attracted to the colour of them. Well it's a long story how a common pair of running shoes became red. I'll try to keep it as short as possible. Well I was visiting Lusaka in Zambia on an installation and Mike Yetman conned me into running the Hash! For you people who are not familiar with the hash well let me explain, the hash is a local run practised in different countries by different embassies when a trail of clues and paper shreadings are spread along a route and a whole bunch of nuts gather to run this run. At the end of it awaits your reward usually a tub of brewskis. Well there we were running through the fields on the outskirts of Lusaka and all the locals staring at us as if we were a crazy bunch of white folks. Well if you have ever been in that part of the country similar to the soil of Brazil you would know that the soil is a rusty red colour I would assume from the rusted iron deposits. Well I started out with a nice shiny pair of sneakers and ended up with some red-globs. Now that's why my sneakers are red.

Boston is the Sneaker Town

The first time I visited Boston I was really impressed with the blend of old and new architecture. The city is very beautiful and has a certain charm enhanced by being on the ocean. The one thing I do remember about the city was all the women were wearing sneakers. It did not matter how they were dressed, they wore sneakers. I guess because of so many cobble stones it makes walking with normal leather shoes very awkward so voila! Everyone wears sneakers to work and then changes. Quite a town.

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Where are they now?

An update to the list of former CM's still working with DFAIT as of October 2010

By David Smith

In the CS group: George McKeever, Steve Galloway, Tom Tierney, Anna Maria Braia-Salvi, Juudy Scrimger, Bob Hutchins, Judy Bakvis, Karn Bell, Holley-Anne Tough, Eric Joyce.

LWOP: Michael Bell (CS) (Spain)

In other groups: Ken Ljungar (GS-MES), Bonnie Ward (AS),

Our former CM complement of almost 300 souls now consists of a total of 11 CS's and 2 in other groups. Contact me at drdee@sympatico.ca if readers know of any changes.

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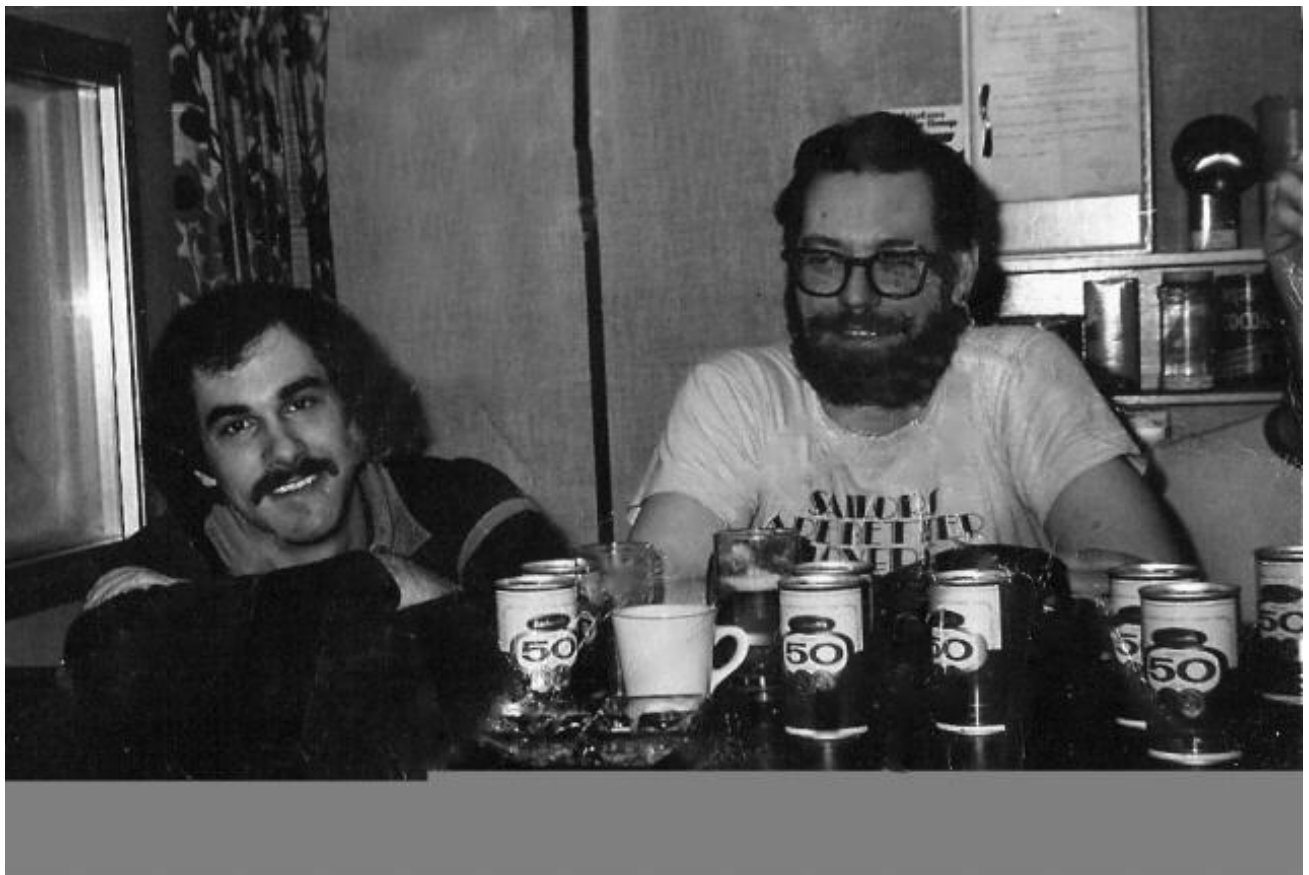
*Some "Blasts from the Past"
Can you name them?*



Who??



Who??



Who is the former colleague on the right?

The Rode Not Taken - (An excerpt from an email dated March 12, 2008)

By BobAlexander

Sometimes I have a few good ideas. Unfortunately the idea to ride to Las Vegas during a heat wave is not among them. Starting in Victoria I was fixin' to swing East then pick up I-15 and ride on down amongst the Mormons to Las Vegas. But, I cancelled all that and swung North in search of the relative coolness of the Rockies after a heat related epiphany at a rest area in Idaho.

The temp was 104 at the rest stop. For me, I had the comfort of an air conditioned Welcome Center but there was no shade for the scooter. Who would have thought the bike would heat up so much just sitting in the sun for a few minutes. It felt like the exhaust had been rerouted through the handle bars. As I prepared to get back on the road I hauled in the clutch and fired the engine in one fluid motion. Imagine my surprise to find that a hot clutch lever feels even hotter when gripped with pressure. I yelped and let it go, stalling the engine. So I put on my gloves and tried again but as I started off there was a terrible metallic shriek as the forgotten sidestand ground out the pavement. Unfortunately this happened just as the guy parked beside me turned his ignition key. I don't know which one of us was more surprised. Then as I reached escape velocity up the ramp to the freeway instead of shifting into third I slammed it back into first, almost catapulting myself over the handlebars. I took this series of unfortunate events as a collective sign that I should get out of the noonday sun and did so without further ado.

I found the saloon at the next exit as per directions given by the helpful information fox back at the rest area information desk. The interior of the saloon was cool and dark as promised (as was she but for different reasons). I knew I wasn't in Canada anymore when the bartender passed me a beer with the same hand with which she was holding her cigarette. I didn't care. I was just happy she understood my grunting and pointing. It's really hard to say "beer" when your tongue has swollen up and stuck to the roof of your mouth. The first guzzle was immediately absorbed by the lining in my mouth but after that the cold beer went down a treat and as I cooled down I became aware of my surroundings and could talk coherently once more. And just in time too, since the burned out Willie Nelson look-a-like sitting on the duct tape patched barstool beside me really wanted to talk. Usually you can make friends at a bar simply by saying "how 'bout them A's", or "How 'bout them '49ers" but I couldn't quite pick up on what game the bar's favourite team was actually playing so I went for the generic opener and said "that's quite some team you've got there". After all, they all pretty much follow the same theme wherein the chap holding some kind of ball has to get rid of it before he gets crushed by the big guy. The generic opener worked just fine and after a 30-minute one-sided conversation that gave me peace to finish my beer we parted as best friends promising to name our firstborn after each other. The equally chatty bartender kept her little group of regulars thoroughly amused throughout the afternoon. She was probably quite pretty once but time can be cruel. She sported a fortune in tattoos and I was transfixed by the remnants of one on her shoulder across which a bead of sweat was making a little trail in the scuff of dirt on her tanned skin. I guessed it was once the name of an ex boyfriend and she had tried to remove it herself with a bottle cap in a fit of pique. I thought of that waitress in a truck stop the day before who had the name "DANNY" tattooed in block capitals starting high on her neck just under her earlobe and running along under her jaw line almost to her chin. While I do admire her commitment I'm glad I won't be there when that relationship goes sour.

I noted on the bar TV that the temp was 120 in Las Vegas. I was close to fainting at 104 and I'm planning to ride into 120 degrees on the desert? Bad plan. So after a couple of hours of beer and chit-chat with the denizens of the bar I headed north for high country and breathable air. At first I wasted some time doing U-turns because the number of the highway I was looking for is also the speed limit and my heat related delirium was causing me some confusion.

The road turned out to be a beautiful ride worthy of many more trips. The road surface is perfect for aggressive riding as it twists along in a series of tight S bends, close by a pretty river that changes every ½ mile from still and deep to white water over large boulders, then back to still and deep again. Everywhere I looked Parks Canada pay-parking ticket dispensers were conspicuous by their absence. There are endless shady turnouts where you can pull over and park for free while you dabble your toes, or, for those times when that last corner turned out to be a lot sharper than you expected you can stop for a change of underwear. Did I mention you can park for free?

The heat of the day was rising to uncomfortable levels as I rumbled down the main street of a quiet little town. The street was deserted. Well, actually the town only had one street so I guess really the whole town was deserted. I looked for a saloon in which to shelter.

The barmaid looked up and smiled as I threw open the door and stepped into the dark saloon, blinking like an owl. She smiled, perhaps a little too broadly, as if thinking "At last, a customer who still has most of his front teeth". Everyone else in the room turned to look as well, mainly because of the sudden bang that announced my arrival. I hadn't realized that one end of the door closer wasn't attached to anything and, losing my grip, had allowed the door to slam against the wall with a resounding crash. I paused in the open doorway for a moment, trying to regain my composure by casually flicking off some of the dust that was drifting down from the rafters. Behind me I could feel the heat waves shimmering in the dusty street and hear the futile bleating of a car alarm triggered by that last blip of the throttle as I backed the Harley to the curb. (I never seem to tire of doing that.)

My eyes scanned the room full of eyes staring back at me. Nobody was smiling except the barmaid. I debated if the distance was greater to walk across the room or ride on to the next town. Then the barmaid smiled again and beckoned me over to a stool near the "swamp cooler". I would never come to know whether "swamp cooler" was a brand name or just a nickname for any high-torque air conditioner. Some time later a couple of nicely dressed young women came in and made happy noises as they stood under the vent with their heads back and their blouses held open. I made a mental note to upwardly adjust the smiling barmaid's tip.

As my eyes slowly adjusted to the gloom I saw that the saloon was sparsely yet functionally furnished with a jukebox, a pool table and a pot-bellied stove for the winter months. The walls were made of dented pine. That's like knotty pine but with dents from bottles and chairs flying about on Saturday nights. All but two of the bar stools had been repaired with duct tape and on the walls hung an impressive array of unregistered weapons including a lever action Winchester, a couple

of shotguns, and a dozen or so handguns. Here and there antlers and bits of animal carcass had been nailed to the wall, presumably by those who derive some perverse pleasure in causing gentle woodland creatures to fall to the ground in agony and bleed to death.

The regulars sitting at the bar were a motley crew and I was reminded of that painting of a late night diner with James Dean, Elvis, Humphry Bogart and Marilyn Monroe. Here we had a couple of Willie Nelsons, a Yasser Arafat gone awry and what Judy Garland might look like today if she'd stayed alive and on drugs. There was another guy who looked like a cross between Waylon Jennings and the Incredible Hulk and in an attempt to get on his good side I scanned the jukebox for any tune featuring a banjo or a Jew's harp. I wondered at first if the latter day Judy Garland was perhaps on day release from a local hospice since she seemed to have completely lost control of her motor skills. I was relieved to discover later when she stopped by my table for a chat that she was only drunk. She hadn't actually intended to stop for a chat but she used it to cover the embarrassment of falling into my lap. She was taking a circuitous route across the room at a serious list to starboard and I just happened to be in her way. They called her Ernie and I was afraid to ask if that was a nickname or her real name before the operation.

The barmaid smiled when saw me move toward the jukebox and called out to wait while she turned the volume down since it was still set at the level preferred by the evening crowd. Even after she turned it down I involuntarily recoiled at the first blast from Toby Keith's guitar. The jukebox was full of cowboy music with one lonely Doobie Brothers CD. No Celine and no Sinatra. I'd heard the name Toby Keith somewhere so I picked one. As luck would have it, it was a rollicking good knee slapper. I followed up with a couple of pounding Doobie's tunes and thereafter I could do no wrong. I was the darling of the bar. I grabbed my beer and steadied the table as Ernie came by to tell me she liked my selections. I was getting used to the way she moved and now when I saw her coming I would prepare to catch her. The barmaid came over, smiled, loaded the jukebox with 20 freebies and smiled up at me as she told me to have at it. I gripped the edges of the jukebox as I muttered through clenched teeth "if she doesn't stop that insipid smiling I'm going to smack her". Then, as yet another reminder that I was not in a Canadian bar, (as if the huge plate of free appetizers wasn't proof enough) she brought over a fresh beer and said "have one on me". And all was forgiven. Smile your brains out, sweetheart.

Finding 20 interesting tunes in a country jukebox is no mean feat but I accepted the challenge with beer enhanced confidence. The themes are pretty much all about some cowboy whining on about losing his truck because he was unfaithful to his dog so even punching numbers at random wouldn't matter much. I could probably have just plugged in the same number twenty times since the only person sober enough to notice was the smiling barmaid. And if she noticed she would just smile about it. If everybody liked them they would sing along and I had good taste. If they didn't I was just an eccentric city-slicker who could be forgiven for not recognizing true musical genius. I figured it was a win-win situation and started punching buttons.

The afternoon wore on and with the lowering sun the temperature dropped out of the 3 digits and into the more comfortable high 90s. It was time to go. Actually it was time to go about 2 hours before that, but that doesn't matter right now. I said

my goodbyes to my new best friends and stepped out into the street. It occurred to me then that the town was not in fact deserted; it just appeared that way because the whole town was in the saloon. I swung a leg over the Big Iron, powered up that long-strokin' twin and rumbled out of town as the futile bleating of yet more car alarms faded away behind me. I began to have an uneasy feeling that at some point during the Tequila phase of the afternoon I might have made a few rash promises but I couldn't remember to whom I might have made them. I don't usually make proposals of marriage to women I've only known for 20 minutes but sometimes it's the only way to make them stop crying. Tequila is not for everyone. I wondered if it might have been that woman who seemed to think it important that I know her trucker husband treated his coon dog better than her and he was currently away on a run to San Diego. Or it might have been Ernie. I hope it wasn't Ernie. Oh God, I hope it wasn't Ernie.

Somewhere along the trail I noticed an annoying phhhit, phhhit, phhhit in the exhaust. It was probably the clamp at the front of the left muffler. It has come loose before. One day I'll fix it properly but for now a safety wire stops it dropping to dig into the pavement and catapult me over the handlebars. I got out some wire and looked for something heavy with which to tap the muffler forward onto the pipe. My camping hatchet would do just fine. Then it occurred to me that here I was at the side of the road fixing my Harley with some baling wire and an axe. Good grief, I've become the cliché.

I came across some road construction. An enormous day-glow red sign with shocking black letters screamed **MOTORCYCLES USE EXTREME CAUTION. GROOVED PAVEMENT AHEAD.** What, are they kidding me? True, I did see a few small scratches in the road but they weren't even as deep as the grooves left by my fingernails as they dragged me kicking and screaming out of Virginia. I'm pretty sure the highways dept puts up these signs as some kind of wry sarcastic humour to amuse Canadian tourists. If these guys ever got a contract to fix roads in Canada their first act would be cordon off and condemn three quarters of the Trans Canada highway.

So I crossed back into Canada and headed West on the Crows Nest highway, still looking for cool. And at last I found it. Just East of Grand Forks a large, dark and snarly looking cloud promised rain. Yippee!! Standing up on the foot pegs, left fist punching the air, right fist winding the throttle to the stop as shrieking like a Valkyrie I rode on into the gathering storm. Imagine my surprise to find that the cloud was full of hail. Looking back it might have been prudent to have put on some gloves but I hadn't so I rode on squealing "ouch, ee, ah, ooh, arg, ah, ow ..." as hailstones bounced off my knuckles. Oh well. If you can't take a joke you shouldn't ride.

* * *

Final Comps "In memoriam"

Members and friends of the CM/EL community to whom we have said goodbye



FRANÇOIS JÉRÔME PERRIER September 27, 2010 at the age of 73



CURRY, Kenneth Robert Peacefully, surrounded by his family on June 22, 2010 at the age of 87



CRIGHT-LAFORTUNE, Louise 10 July, 1944 - 9 August, 2010
Wife of Robert Lafortune



ARBUCKLE, Norma Ann (nee McLachlan) Peacefully on August 23, 2010.
Beloved wife of 64 years, life companion and best friend for over 70 years of
Thurlow (Buck) Arbuckle.