

# The Communicator

**Newsletter**  
**Volume IV Edition II**  
**Summer 2004**

*In this issue:*

- ❖ Rio Huallaga – Part II
- ❖ Shivering in Selfridges
- ❖ You win some, You lose some
- ❖ Mystery Photo

## **Editors Ramble**

*By David Smith*

Summer is almost here and I for one am thankful. We can now end our hibernation and once again get out and about. Just recently I had an opportunity to meet and chat with Merv McBride and John Roy in Carleton Place. The upcoming AGM of our little CM association will be another occasion to renew old friendships. The website, forum board and emails also keep us in contact.

This summer's East Coast Mini-reunion, hosted by Frank and Lissie Arsenault will give some of us a chance to gather and reminisce.

Work has begun on Reunion O-Five to be held in Ottawa September 23/24, 2005. As plans and preparations progress, we will keep you posted.

In the meantime, enjoy your summer wherever you are (and some of us are spread far and wide – geographically speaking!)

I remind everyone I am looking for historical photos from your days with Foreign Affairs for display at next year's reunion.  
Happy reading  
David



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## ***Rio Huallaga- Peru – 1967 - Part II***

*By Merv McBride*

While this went on we finally appeared to be heading into the Andes. I could see through our hazed over portals low mountains on both sides of the aircraft. This was the foothills of the Andes. As we entered the pass I observed snow covered mountain tips that appeared so close that I swore it could not have been more than a ten foot jump away (slight exaggeration). There was a bit of turbulence as we passed through this area but not really scary. The mountains below, and what appeared to be right beside us, were the most desolate looking pieces of earth that I have ever seen. Neither trees nor shrubs, just rocks and snow. I was quite glad when we passed to the other side and entered the jungle area of Peru. What a contrast! Vegetation, so dark and so green. It was hard to believe that we had just passed through an area so devoid of colour and to arrive at the extreme opposite.

Arrival at the Juan jui airport was an almost indescribable experience. As we circled the 'airport' which was actually just a pasture complete with cows grazing, the first thing I noticed was the abundance of vegetation. Trees and growth everywhere, interspersed with tin-roofed huts. The tarmac was simply a pasture complete with some skinny cattle off to the side. After about one circle we landed in this pasture and slowly taxied to the two-room hut at the side of the acreage. The Pilot and co-pilot emerged from the cockpit, said a hasty 'adios', unlatched the door, let down the stairs, picked up their pigs, and departed.

Next to assault us was the wonderful smells of, again, vegetation. After living in the coastal desert for over a year the smell of the jungle was almost over whelming. It was a smell that I had never before had the pleasure of experiencing and have not had since. It was not just humid and wet it was, well, it was just great. I just wish I could describe it more fully but it is something one just has to know.

We picked up our luggage and headed towards the 'airport terminal'. I found a seat along the wall while John & Mac were making arrangements for us to go into town and also to wait for a representative of the Italian Father's who had a church and a clinic here in Juan jui. Apparently they had graciously offered us overnight accommodations. While sitting just under a window I had the distinct feeling that I was being watched. So I stood up and looked out the window onto the street where I saw about a dozen kids

ranging in age from early teens to young toddlers staring at the strange 'gringo'. I must say that I found out that I really stood out as most of the people in the villages we were to visit were normally short and quite dark. I was about 6 ft., brown hair and light blue eyes. Obviously a stranger to the area.

These children took it upon themselves to escort us into town. We had engaged a man with a large hand-pulled cart to load our luggage and wheel it into town for us. We then walked the short distance of approximately 1 km. into the town and to the Italian residence. Here we met three really pleasant Italian priests who were to feed us and to put us up for the night. Also to pass on any of the local gossip from up and down the river.

The next morning, after a breakfast of plantains and coffee, we packed our meagre belongings in our sports bags and headed towards the river. I had been told last night that our next mode of travel would be via the river and we would be hitch hiking a ride on what ever conveyance happened to come by first and could handle the extra load. It turned out that our two choices were either via one of the very large balsam rafts or a dug-out canoe. Both of these types of water craft plied the river from one end of the other. Apparently some of the farmers would load their rafts with rock salt or other produce that they had to sell. Float it down the river and where ever all their goods were sold they would then sell their rafts and head back up river on foot.

I think we were extremely lucky as we had only waited on the beach for about an hour when a nice sized dug out pulled in. This dug out came complete with a 25 hp Evinrude motor that pushed it along at quite a clip. The boat had only two other men in it plus the boat owner and one of the passengers was the mayor of the village we were going to visit, Bellavista.

It is almost impossible to describe this lovely, scenic ride from Juan Jui to Bellavista. We passed many small villages, each one almost identical to the other. Complete with men, women and children down at the beach. Some were bathing; others were washing their clothes while others were busy building balsam rafts. At each and every village that we pulled into we caused quite a stir. We dropped off some mail and passed the news on as we went. Without exception the people were very interested in where, why and who these strange white folk were.

I'm not too sure exactly how long the trip took but by late morning we pulled into the metropolis of Bella Vista.

End of Part II

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### ***Shivering in Selfridges*** ***By Don Graham***

It is prudent that I, Don Graham, provide the authentic details of this incident before Lou and others embellish them. As it is, this is a gruesome tale and even today, usually over beers, the tale is told to our younger colleagues who stare in wonderment and horror at its telling.

Many years ago, after completing one posting, Cyprus, or perhaps two, Dar-es-Salaam, I was assigned to the famous Stan Dabrowsky as a grunt and gofer with the intention of completing the London enclosure whose construction had gone terribly wrong. The Department decided that the project needed Stan's expertise and my sweat to complete the installation, predicted to require upwards of three month's TD.

Accordingly, travel plans were made scheduling us to take the evening flight from Montreal to London via British Airways. or maybe it was still BOAC in those far back days. We traveled to Montreal (no Mirabel in those days) and we boarded the plane. We went to the rear of the bus since business class wasn't even heard of in that era and settled in anticipating dinner, maybe a cognac or two and wake up in London. Alas, it was not to be.

Somewhere over the Maritimes, because of a bomb report, the aircraft was ordered back to Montreal where we made a hasty landing and spent the next eight hours being investigated while the aircraft was searched. The amenities were sparse and there was no chance of sleeping, and finally we re-boarded the plane only to find that there was no dinner available. I understand that BA has improved their service. After a boring and uneventful flight we arrived in London. The captain didn't tell us that the drinks were

free until just before we landed, airlines charged for drinks in the peasant class in those days. We made our way to Selfridges Hotel after more than 24 hours without sleep.

In order to set the scene for the upcoming calamity, a description of the hotel is necessary. Selfridges was a very new hotel built behind Selfridges Department Store on Oxford Street, and close to McDonald House on Grosvenor Square. This hotel is British posh, and snooty to boot, especially to casually dressed, jet lagged El's like Stan and myself. It is so posh that the porters wear spats and speak without moving their lips. However, the rooms were ordinary British, i.e., SMALL. The entry door and the door to the bathroom had mirrors affixed and AUTOMATIC DOOR CLOSERS attached. These were the crux of my upcoming demise and creation of a legend!

Another point to add to this tale is that I always sleep the way I was born....naked. Being thoroughly bagged, I went to bed around 1 a.m. Later I got up to visit the loo, went in, the door closed behind me and I wondered why the loo had elevators! I quickly realized that I WAS STARK NAKED in the halls of Selfridge's hotel. WHAT TO DO?

Every time an elevator stopped I hid behind a potted palm tree while trying to sort out my options since there were no phones on the floor. Traveling to the lobby was ruled out because I envisioned being arrested as the first Canadian streaker in Selfridges and having to awaken the HC to bail me

out. But what about Stan? We did not know each other that well, but I had heard that he was a kindly soul. But what room was he in? Was it room 615 OR 651? What if I knocked on the wrong door to face an elderly spinster? Jail for Donny!!!!

I made my way to the 6<sup>th</sup> floor and timidly knocked on door 615 and a sleepy Stanley Dabrowsky finally opened the door and immediately slammed it in my face! I think he misunderstood my intentions, after all we hardly knew each other and I guess he was reluctant to deepen our friendship at that particular time. After much persuasion through the closed door, he finally believed that my intentions were noble and that I needed to borrow a pair of trousers. Those of you who know Stan may remember that he was quite large whereas I was a lot slimmer. The comparison has reversed over the years. He loaned me a pair of trousers which I had to hold up with two hands and off I went to the porter's desk and a chilly reception indeed. "Are you sure you are a resident here?" "Are you sure you wish to continue being a resident here" said he with his fiercest anti-colonial look. Heated words were exchanged, and remaining at a discreet distance, he returned with me to unlock the door and let me get back to bed. LESSON LEARNED, since that fateful night I always slept with a chair against the door in every hotel I subsequently stayed in!

Think SIGNET is fast? The news of my peccadillo was circulated around the London HC in hours and the world in a day, during an era when most missions were served by telegraph lines. From that time on whenever I passed by the hotel desk I could see the staff trying to contain their mirth. I finally moved to another accommodation! In the end, Stan and I worked together for over a month, successfully completed the enclosure, and I found that he is a nice guy.

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### ***You lose some and you win some***

***By Ted Arbuckle***

Many communicators might be forgiven if they thought the division's offices were a staid and uninteresting retreat where nothing much happened to disturb the perceived, entrenched solemnity. But on occasion we had our problems, imagined or otherwise.

One regular occurrence was the division's Christmas party. Through generous contributions by division personnel we were able to lay in a handsome stock of beer, liquor, and various refreshments. It was our opportunity to let others in the Department and many from outside the Department know that we appreciated working for them and we hoped to continue our good relations in the future. Our receptions drew many compliments which reflected their substantial success. Even those senior management who attended seemed pleased though a bit apprehensive that perhaps, just perhaps, things might get out of hand. Fortunately, as it turned out, the Department found no reason to cast aspersions on the extent or integrity of our celebrations.

But after the festivities there was usually much beer and liquor left over. What to do with it? It belonged to everybody, but nobody felt at liberty to abscond with the spoils. We couldn't leave it lying around for the char staff, so we resolved the problem by temporarily locking the residue in a credenza in the director's office. So far so good, but my office was not meant to be a repository for alcohol. So how do we get rid of it? The thought developed that on special occasions such as staff birthdays we could have a wee shot in our morning coffee. A great idea for a receptive staff. The divisional secretary had knowledge of most people's birthdays and a spiked cup of coffee on such occasions was usually met with some surprise and a fair degree of appreciation. Gradually the director could reclaim his office for its intended use.

Ah, but a rude awakening was in the offing. It happened on St. Jean Baptiste day. The divisional secretary brought in a generous supply of home-made cup cakes and served them with well-laced coffee, with the result that many of our staff developed a certain fondness for the day. As the repast was winding down, our secretary called to say there were two gentlemen from Treasury Board to see me with certain inquiries concerning some items in our budget. Right away my mind started to go like the clappers. We had already gone over many items with departmental officials. We had prepared answers to the House of Commons questions about the cost of telegraph traffic in External

Affairs. What could these Treasury Board people want? And what a time for them to arrive unannounced! The place smelled like a distillery. In such an atmosphere my job could be on the line. Nevertheless we decided to face it down and get it over with. The new arrivals were ushered in and were making themselves at home, opening their briefcases and spreading papers around when in came my secretary with more cup cakes and coffee with generous additions from the liquor cabinet. "Happy St. Jean Baptiste day", she said and politely exited. My guests seemed pleased with the offerings, took a sip and said "Wow". Their beaming countenances scarcely contained the extremes of their unrestricted smiles. We all enjoyed our coffee while exchanging pleasantries but talking little shop. Soon they were picking up their papers, repacking their brief cases, and after expressing the hope they would be invited back, they left. I still don't know why they came to see me, but we were good friends henceforth.

Some people get good mileage out of golf courses, but that day a little tipple and a cup cake did the trick.

P.S. Our budget was never cut.

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### *Mystery Photo*



This clock was made using a piece of equipment used extensively by many Communicators. **Answer to follow in the next edition.**

### *A plea from your newsletter editor*

This edition contains two stories from our EL colleagues and are most appreciated. I encourage other former EL's and all CM's to consider submitting their personal experiences that we know exist and to share them with our fraternity.

With the release of this newsletter, I find I am almost out of articles to share with you our readers and as a consequence, I make this plea for your submissions. I'm sure you enjoy reading them as much as I do. Why not take a moment to jot down your memories and email them to me at [drdee@sympatico.ca](mailto:drdee@sympatico.ca) Thanks.