

MY PEN

As a former teacher, my pen travels with me wherever I go. As a collector of pens for many years prior to teaching, pens have always been part of my life. Therefore, pens have allowed me to record many of life's incidents.

Some incidents were sad, some were serious, and some were funny. From a Canadian perspective, I was sure that the winners of the American Revolution were the Loyalists, not the Colonists as my Canadian history books so sternly interjected. It was not until I finished high school in Braintree, Massachusetts that it was made clear, in American history books that the Colonists won the battle of the Revolution. C'est la vie! My pen quickly made a notation of this disturbing fact even though Canada remained true to England and her Queen. Incidentally, the pen used to record this bit of intellectual lint was a Waterman's fountain pen! Pens played an important part when I signed my Naturalization Papers to become a naturalized citizen of the United States in the 1950's. The years during this time of adjustment were tumultuous since I had lost all of my St. Anne's School friends, and my birth place as I entered into an American educational institution as a tenth grader. Anyone who has moved

to another school system in their formative years will understand the adjustment one must make in order to resolve any personal undertakings so that the transitional process will proceed without too many disruptions. As a common example, the days would begin with the singing of The Star Spangled Banner not Oh Canada! The words to another anthem had to be penned and learned! Plus the Colonists, not the Loyalists won the American Revolution! Woe is me! Situations at Braintree High School began to resolve themselves. One incident I recall - a girl in our chemistry class home room was splashed with an acid solution which was shelved on our lab desks. The chemistry teacher noticed the incident, raced from his desk to the girl and immediately began tearing off her dress so that she would not be burned. He was successful and she became the most popular girl in the classroom - at least among the boys! So you see normality began to make itself known even in this American place of learning. Other little changes like "colour" became "color" and "zed" became "zee". I was happy to see that Provincial exams would not have to be dealt with in Braintree High School. I began to experience little rays of hope for us Canucks in this new land. I would say that the most difficult experience was in trying to create friendships here at Braintree High after having nine years of close ties to

everyone in Saint Anne's School on Cape Breton Island. It's very difficult to create lasting friendships when years are so limited. My pen became very active during this time because the ties to one girl at Saint Anne's did not wish to be broken. I will always remember Anita because she did not complete her college courses because her life ended during her first year of study. She was an only child, hit by a truck and she died at 19 years of age. Going back to Cape Breton and visiting with Anita's mother in 1992 was very emotional. The house seemed quiet without Anita and her deceased father around. It was satisfying to talk with Anita's mother but very difficult to say goodbye, especially when she said to me, "You have made my day." Life progresses through good times and bad ones. I believe that most people have lives filled with tragic and great moments. Hopefully most will remember those great moments and not let tragedy distract them from living full lives.

My pen writes and remembers the good times in school in Nova Scotia when a parish priest, who loved to play hockey, would pop into our classroom on a cold winter's day to ask the nun if he could borrow three or four altar boys (who were fairly good hockey players) to practice for an upcoming special wedding in the church. When his wish was granted by

the pious, understanding nun, we all left the classroom and met Father M. outside. He quickly informed us that the Marsh and the Bog were both frozen and safe to skate on. "Lets go and round up your skates and hockey sticks. Mums the word if you are asked about practice for the wedding. God knows that the body needs exercise as well as study at Saint Anne's. You are all in my care and I will answer to God for all of you."

That afternoon game was exceptional simply because Father M. knew that in his eyes we were special and he understood how to maneuver us closer to being, "pillars of Christianity. " I always had a sneaking suspicion that all the nuns at Saint Anne's knew about Father M. and his unorthodox methods of "skating for God." These incidents, I'm sure, are remembered fondly by all of us "pillars" - and by all the nuns.

Jumping out of Saint Anne's and into teaching days here in Massachusetts just for a time, I used to try and motivate my English classes in grades 7 & 8 by having them pen short descriptive accounts of walking through the snow woods on a crisp, cool, winter's night and describing deer, mink, fox, beaver, and rabbit tracks against a backdrop of birch and spruce trees lighted by moonlight. A Canadian woods background did not work for inner-city kids. Had to shift gears and think of something more appropriate for city kids. Thought of having them create and write about a scene on

Mars and having them describe a Christmas morning on the planet. - a little more realistic for some - I thought. Even tried having some write about a real life incident, sending it to Reader's Digest, being paid for acceptance up to \$400 - if accepted, having no homework for one half a term. - money and no homework were good motivators but difficult to locate any writers at this grade level for such a project. As an example, I told them about what my young daughter asked me as we watched the flamingos at Disney for the first time - "Dad, how come those flamingos have their knees on backwards?" For me motivation and imagination are two key terms in story writing. As an example, I used to have students compare the differences in listening to tapes and watching films of Robinson Crusoe, The Shadow, Boston Blackie, The Last of The Mohegans. More imagination of characters and situations would have to be used in listening to these tapes. Films of same titles would not require as much dialogue and scenes could be readily absorbed.

While still in the Massachusetts schools, I should tell you about my experience at one school dance at which I was a chaperon. The principal reminded me to keep an eye on Mary and Alan because they were known to have a "thing" for each other. Love was in the air for these two 7th

graders this evening. Dancing together went without a hitch until the dance was almost over. Suddenly the two suspected lovers were missing on the dance floor. Searching throughout the school building did not produce any results. I happened to check the teachers' parking lot, which included some high evergreen trees at one end. Suddenly two heads were moving very quietly towards one end of the bushes. After a quick look behind the bushes two lovers were seen trying to unlock their braces as I discovered their romantic interlude. An embarrassing shuffle to the principal's office did little to ease their increasing mortification. My discovery did not cause them to include me in their wills, but young love has a tendency to right itself after a period of soul searching and parental grounding. So much for chaperoning young lovers!

Penning back to Cape Breton in our young years, just a few of the crazy incidents that would have placed us on our parents lists of forbidden fruits began at Halloween by placing a stream of gasoline across the road, waiting for a car to approach, lighting the gasoline, and running like little devils to hide behind fences or trees so that our presence would not be detected.

Then, as the season drifted into winter, the salt water bay would turn to ice and then break into what we called "clampers". We would jump from one clamper to another as the ice drifted away from the bay. Our biggest

problem became explaining why our feet and legs became drenched with salt water when the outside ground was frozen solid. In a pinch, Father M. would have to come to our rescue, after the fact in confession. So much for Christianity! These dastardly happenings may have triggered the writing of

a quick poem:

The grave
is feared by those
who at the end of life
cannot rejoice because of life
ill-spent.

Quickly moving away from these dastardly periods and trying earnestly to rejoice, I remember writing about an incident that occurred in Washington, D.C. in 1956-57 at Eisenhower's 2nd Innegral parade. My Braintree High friend and myself were asked to fill in with a drum corps to march in the parade which went down Pennsylvania Avenue. My friend played the symbols. As we marched in front of the reviewing stand occupied by General Eisenhower and Richard Nixon, the drummers started a roll off prior to playing, "Hail to the Chief". As the symbols came up, one of them flew off the handle and came crashing to the pavement. Secret Service agents came swarming around, like a hill of ants with their weapons drawn. The seriousness of this interruption was quickly analyzes and the agents went back to their posts without further incidents. Just as a post script, my

friend later lived at Watergate, became a Secret Service agent, and never played the symbols again.

Leaving Pennsylvania Avenue and 1956-57, let's go back to Cape Breton Island and the reconstruction of Fortress at Louisbourg on the southeast side of the island. My brother, Dennis and I would bike out to this reconstruction site and look for and find old tribal arrowheads of battles which took place around the 1750's era. This settlement at Louisbourg, which became a national historic site of Canada, had its walls constructed in 1720-40 for protection from the sea. The initial owners of Fort Louisbour were French. Fort was captured by British Colonists in 1745 - was given back to France as a result of treaties - captured again in 1758 by British in The Seven Years War. Fortifications were then destroyed by British engineers. British stayed at Louisbourg until 1768. Reconstruction of town and Fort began in 1960's and 1970's Watching the finding of original buried skeletal walls with their exact dimensions were of great interest to Dennis and myself. The birth of Fort Louisbourg, in a small way, caused the beginning of coal mining in Cape Breton. The first mine was opened to provide fuel for the people and the fortress. From this point coal mines flourished in Cape Breton. Twelve mines total were providing coal for homes in my hometown and for surrounding provinces of Canada.

The everyday lives of coal miners on Cape Breton Island were lives filled with hard work, fear of cave-ins, disasters, black lung disease, and fire and explosions from methane gas. Historically their pay started at 68 cents per day for boys, \$1.50 per day for men. Their lives were literally controlled by the mine owners. In the 1800's "pit ponies" were used in the mines to haul small cars of cut coal from the coal seams to the elevators which would lift the coal up the shaft to the surface. These ponies were housed in stables down in the mines - some for 20 years before they were brought to the surface to be retired to the fields. Their initial exposure to bright light would cause them to become extremely excited and agitated for a period of time. The coal mined on Cape Breton was "bituminous" or "soft coal". When burned a lot of sulfur was introduced into the air. This sulfur caused houses to become covered with a yellowish haze over a period of time. Houses on an elevated section of my home town began to sink due to settlement caused by the extraction of coal beneath this area. The seams of one mine stretched five miles out under the ocean. Today all mining is finished in Cape Breton - a blessing for miners and their families.

I believe my father, saw the writing on the wall and started to formulate a

means of leaving Cape Breton and moving to the United States. The major areas of employment in Cape Breton were coal mining, fishing, and steel mill related jobs. After traveling across the United States before he was married dad had his heart set on living in California. His education was in civil engineering and he procured a position with Stone and Webster, a large engineering firm based in Boston. He was convinced that living conditions and opportunities would be more positive for his family in the U.S.A. It was not an easy task leaving familiar people, ways of life and going to a country that was unknown to most of the family. Back in 1952, a sponsor, promise of employment were required by the United States government. A waiting period of five years was required before citizenship could be considered for both parents. At this time, buying a house, a car, getting the children registered in school, learning about the transportation system were the necessary concerns for my parents. After the initial never ending life changing problems presented themselves, my brothers and sisters would talk and marvel at the exhaustive lives our parents had to endure for their children's well being. As was the custom in early Canadian life and life in England beforehand, college study was a priority for males in a family because they were thought of as the bread winners. This happened

in our family because my parents were still in this mode of life. I began to realize that my sisters were being short changed simply because of gender. Nevertheless most of my brothers and I went on to college, one brother became a priest, one went into the music business. Only one sister went to college. This was an unfair result for my other sisters, but they all managed in their own occupations. Our family survived and prospered even after our most difficult transition from one country to another. I think that family life became much closer and more meaningful as a result of our adjustments to a new life. Even though both parents are no longer alive, their resilience still exists in all of their children.

In 1952 our memorable excursion to the United States had its last stop in Halifax, Nova Scotia where we were welcomed by the Campbell family, our close cousins. They fed us and wished us well on our last Canadian stop before entering the United States through Calais, Maine. Our hearts were heavy as we left familiar friends and a way of life seemingly forever. Time has a way of lessening our feelings of uncertainty. Many brothers and sisters visited our Canadian home over the years since 1952. Time does not remain still, but familiar structures remain unchanged thus that sense of home always comes back to claim visitors who moved away many years ago.

I want to tell you of my recent trip back to Halifax, NS and the Campbells. The Campbell family planned and organized a four family reunion which took place on July 2-6th, 2016. Planning time resulted in the best part of one year. Air Canada leaving from Logan Airport was pleasantly without any usual long wait time because there were no lines to clear customs . Flying time was approximately 51 minutes into Halifax in a jet that seated 50 people. Halifax airport is international, but space and lack of crowds allowed us to proceed past the passport check in station without incident. At first, it seemed strange to see the Canadian flag flying everywhere. Hearing and remembering that Nova Scotian dialect brought me back to my life on Cape Breton Island - which is the northern part of Nova Scotia. The City of Halifax is approximately 22 miles from the airport. Eight members of our family arrived at the hotel in two rental cars. (Courtyard Marriott). An opening BBQ at Dennis and Kellie Campbell's home took place at 6pm on July 2, 2016. Booklets, prepared in advance by Jennifer Campbell presented us with pictures and a blurb of every attending family member. Remembering family members and their partners and kids was a real challenge. The Campbells are spread all over the United States and Canada. I will give you a brief tour of all other events through the eyes of Dennis

Campbell, the youngest member of the seven Campbell children. Dennis organized and planned most events. He started his business, as a tour guide at 14 years of age. During the last forty years he has developed his touring business to be one of the largest in Canada - had no idea. He does many things, but never boasts about any accomplishments. As an example of his progress:

1. He owns a 400 seat restaurant right on the dock in Halifax
2. He owns two ships - used for tours around Halifax harbour.
3. Owns three shops along the Halifax dock.
4. Bought and reconditioned 68 two-decker English buses.
5. Owns 5 Duck boats - used for tours around Halifax and its waters.
6. Recently moved into a new 10 bay automotive shop for buses, etc.
7. Recently purchased 10 double-sized buses used for tours.
8. Has contracts with most of the tour boats that come into Halifax harbour.

As an interesting idea, Dennis dressed in his tour guide Kilts and white shirt and conducted a tour, on one of his buses, to Peggy's Cove just for all the family members. He said that he would be "rusty" but he knew all the facts about the Halifax Explosion (Christmas tree to Boston), the gathering of the Titanic victims, who are buried in Halifax area, and countless facts about the city of Halifax.

One of the most exciting events we saw was the International Royal Tattoo which is a combination of marching bagpipers, military bands, clowns, orchestras, and trapeze artists, and a U.S. military precision marching unit.

Great memories and new acquaintances were seen in Halifax and will not be forgotten soon.

An interesting and devastating accident in 1917 linked Halifax, Nova Scotia to Massachusetts forever. During 1917 a French cargo ship filled with high explosives collided with a Norwegian vessel in the Narrows, a Strait connecting the upper Halifax harbour to Bedford Basin. At 9:04, (AST) the two ships, the SS Mont Blanc (French) and the SS IMO (Norwegian) rammed into each other due to a misinterpretation of harbour signals. A fire on the deck of the Mont Blanc failed to warn civilians on the shore that a much more destructive event was about to happen. An explosion, the largest ever made, prior to the development of nuclear weapons, was about to take place. With 2300 tons of Picric acid, 200 tons of T.N.T, 35 tons of high-octane gasoline, and 10 tons of cotton, ignited and caused sound waves to be felt as far away as Cape Breton Island, 275 miles. All structures within a half mile radius were completely obliterated. Deaths were 2000 people, 9000 people were injured. Needless to say that the SS Mont Blanc never made it's destination to join a convoy due to cross the Atlantic to a French port in Europe during WWI

A relief train left North Station, Boston at 10:17pm with ten nurses and eleven doctors to aid in the recovery of wounded in Halifax. Halifax

received aid from many countries around the globe, but Boston was the first outside agency to aid the people of Halifax. As a long lasting token of thanks, Nova Scotia sends a Christmas tree to Boston every Christmas. Driving around Halifax this year and going out into the same harbour in a "duck boat" made one feel, to a small degree, the devastation and pain that my provincial neighbors must have experienced. This year the Queen Elizabeth II was leaving the Halifax port, going back to Europe as we coasted around in this harbour. Calmness and goodwill permeated the air as we watched the ship sail to open water in the Atlantic.