

# Class of 65 Newsletter

## Bulletin d'Information—Classe de 65

Issue/Numéro 93



Feb/fév 2016

*Disclaimer: This Newsletter is produced for members of the RMC Class of 1965 and is based primarily on inputs from members of the Class of 65. It is not an official publication of the Royal Military College nor does it purport to represent the views or opinions of all members of the Class. Unfortunately, the Editorial staff lacks the linguistic skills to produce a bilingual version. Items are published in the official language in which they are received.*

### Editor's Corner/Coin du rédacteur

Following the last, rather short edition, I received a lot of mail on the articles contained therein and am grateful to those who took the time to write. The contents of some of those letters are shared below. **Hugh Spence** has reported on the annual Class Snowbird gathering in Florida, an event that apparently had an unwelcome visitor this year—El Nino! Finally, **Gord Forbes (Navy)** has put a bit of a new slant on a story he provided for Edition 79 on his early car experience.

### Letters

**Gerry Mueller's** article on the linkage between the Class of 65 and the University of Waterloo prompted **6580 Roger Wright** to write, *"Thanks for the ongoing notes and gossip which I enjoy from the perspective of one who entered civilian life when the navy went green in the late 60's, then spent much of his career out of Canada extracting oil from interesting places. I'm afraid I have to take issue with your statement regarding the Frigate's Chem Eng credentials. There was indeed one Chem Eng survivor in the Frigate - and I have the diploma somewhere to prove it. I'm not positive, but I think I may also be the only one of the RMC 65 entries who spent the entire four years in the Frigate. At the time, I thought it was fine, but in retrospect realize I missed getting to know a lot of interesting people who lived across the square."*

**6511 Dave Barratt** (clearly a man of good taste) enjoyed my Granddaughter's poetry, *"I simply loved your Granddaughter, Addison's poetry. She stimulates me to share one of the many insights my Granddaughter, Claire, shared with me a few weeks ago as we strolled over to her school one morning. She said, "Grand Pa. You act like a three year old!" You have to trust that these evolving young ones probably have got it right!"*

Several commented on the presentation on my father, noting his distinguished careers. To others, it evoked some personal memories.

**6490 Ben Besner** wrote, *"I very much enjoyed reading about your father's exploits. Quite a life he led during the war, and ensuing years. I was interested to hear you lived in North Bay circa 1954-1956. My dad's mining company moved from Val d'Or to North Bay in Sep of 1952, and I resided there until joining the RCAF at CMR in 1960. One of my favourite pastimes in those mid 50's years was to cycle from town to the airport (pushing the bike up airport hill), park my bike against the fence next to the commercial air terminal, and watch jets come and go as I ate lunch!"*



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## Letters (continued)

*There were 2 squadrons at one time, one flew F-86 Sabre Jets for a while, and eventually CF-100s. I may have witnessed some flown by your dad. I was also in Air Cadets from 1956 or so till I left for CMR.*

*I am also very fond of CF-100s. During my post-RMC RCAF career, I was posted to Material Command Headquarters in Rockliffe late in 1967, where I was responsible for maintenance support of some airborne radars (all RCAF aircraft) and defensive Electronic Warfare equipment flown on CF-100s. As I recall, correctly I think, six of those aircraft were converted as ELINT aircraft at the tail end of their useful service life, were still in service when I went civvy and joined Air Canada late in 1969.*

*Interesting that we both resided in North Bay in the mid 50s!*

**6475 Mike Houghton** noted, *"...thoroughly enjoyed reading about your dad, and very pleased to have met him when he was at NDC. My dad, also at Colonel rank, left in 1965 largely because of his outspoken opposition to Paul Hellier's plans for unification. Sad time for these great warriors."*

Finally, I had an interesting exchange of personal e-mails with **6554 Harold Merklinger** who was interested in my grandfather's career as a Minister and as a pilot in the Royal Flying Corps during the First World War. This conversation has stimulated me to try to find out more about him. He died when I was very young and I have no recollection of him at all.

## 2016 Snowbird Rump Roast

I'm not sure how tasty Snowbird is, let alone rump of Snowbird, but **Hugh Spence** has sent his annual report of those classmates that head for the warmer climate of Florida for the winter. Apparently, this year's sojourn was not quite as tranquil as usual as the unfriendly relationship of Mother Nature and El Nino created some uncomfortable weather. In comparison, the relatively balmy winter in Ottawa seemed less daunting than usual.

The following photos and captions on the next page are from Hugh.



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### 2016 Snowbird Rump Roast (Continued)



The Class of 65 snowbird rump met for lunch in Port Charlotte, Florida, on Feb. 24th, during which they were entertained by a passing tornado which produced a lot of rain but fortunately not too much wind, at least not enough to drown out all the reminiscences and war stories. Survivors (l. to r.) are Virginia Ambachtsheer, Lynne Colfer, Carol Harries, Donna Hilliard, Chris Spence, Sandy Holman, Irene Diamond, and Nancy Berman (hostess); plus still standing (then) Gord Diamond, Terry Colfer, Nige Hilliard, Fras Holman and Keith Ambachtsheer; while partially collapsed on the floor are Hugh Spence and Mike Houghton (host).



### Rump Roast (Concluded)



Hugh and Chris Spence keep an eye on the TV weather warnings, including real time radar coverage, as the Feb. 24 Port Charlotte tornado roars by on its way inland. Absent from the photo are 13 other luncheon guests who were reported to be huddled for shelter in the master bathroom. There is no truth to the rumour that Nige Hilliard was in the fetal position in the bathtub under a mattress, though he swore that's where he was heading. The stalwarts of the group soon emerged to assault the contents of the various coolers while watching TV coverage of the twister passing by.



### First Cars by 6533 Gord Forbes

I'm sure that by the time we graduated, almost every one of us had a car. It was, after all, something almost all of us looked forward to; the day we were allowed to have cars at RMC.

For me, it all started with Gary Umrysh. In early December 1964, he told me he had just bought a car; a used Pontiac convertible with a very big V8 engine. I asked him about it and he told me he had bought it from a used car dealer in Kingston who had arranged financing and who had offered to store the car until spring term. The idea intrigued me.

As an aside, in spring term, Gary decided to check out the four barrel carburetor on his car. He carefully stripped it, cleaned and laid every part in the order he had taken it off. He then set about reassembling the beast. After several tries he had 23 parts left over.

My mother had died in October of 1964, and my father was not in good health as a result of the strain of looking after her. I knew that he was going to be hospitalized early in the new year. A car would give me the flexibility to travel back and forth to Oakville whenever it was necessary. Besides, I had a girl friend in Toronto. She did not become my wife, so we'll say no more about that.

Gary took me up and introduced me to the car salesman and he asked what type of car I might be interested in since there was nothing on his small lot that interested me. For some reason, I was fascinated by the Chev Corvair. This was before Ralph Nader wrote *Unsafe at Any Speed*, the book that trashed Corvairs and Volkswagens. He said that he would be going to the car auctions soon and would see what he could find.

A week or two later, the salesman called me and told me had found the car I wanted. He picked me up for a test drive and I fell in love with the car; a 1963 Corvair Monza coupe in silver grey with red naugahyde upholstery, similar to the picture below.





### First Cars (Continued)

The Corvair was General Motor's answer to the Volkswagen Beetle. Introduced in 1961, the car was larger than the VW with a bigger engine, a 3 litre flat six mounted in the rear, driving the rear wheels. Mine had a three speed manual transmission. Corvairs came in three power increments: the basic version had a whopping 85 horsepower; the Monza (like mine) had 115 horsepower; and the Monza Spider boasted a turbo-charged engine with 145 horsepower. When I bought the car, I had oversized snow tires put on the back (remember when we only put snow tires on the back wheels). More about that later.

When I first drove the car, it felt very skittish and light at the front end. Someone told me that the secret was to adjust the tire pressures front to back to achieve equal deflection of the tires. In other words, try and balance the weight difference front to rear. So on the way home for Christmas break, with three other people in the car, I stopped at every service centre along the 401 to further adjust the tires. But in the end, it worked and the car was quite stable and a treat to handle.

After graduation, I was off with my little car to Navy Pre-Fleet training, first to Montreal and then to Cornwallis, Nova Scotia and finally to Halifax. In Halifax, I met my future wife, Denee, and we shared driving between my Corvair, or her Hillman Imp (remember those – even smaller than my car). It was because of the Corvair that I met her. The Thursday evening after I arrived in Halifax, I was in the bar having a drink when I met up with a couple of acquaintances who were hosting some US Navy officers from a visiting ship. They needed a drive downtown and I had the only car. So eight men climbed in to my coupe for a run to about the only night club in Halifax. Having had a couple of drinks, I drove them all back to their ships where they invited me to come to their party the following night. I went to the party aboard HMCS Kootenay, and there I met Denee. We were engaged a bit over a month later.

At the end of November when Pre-Fleet finished, I was posted to Esquimalt and started the long drive there. A few weeks before I left, I had to have a repair done to the transmission. The first day out of Halifax, I ran into the season's first snow fall and had the alternator on the car fail. Fortunately I found a garage just outside St. Stephen, New Brunswick that was just about to close. He replaced the alternator and those big snow tires got me through the snow. I stopped in Oakville to visit my father and started west again near the middle of December. At the suggestion of the CAA, I took a route through the northern US on Highway 2 which appears to run from coast to coast. The route took me through Michigan, across the Mackinac Bridge and west across the northern Great Plains. Some places the highway was only 50 miles from the Canadian border. Along the way, there was snow and ice to contend with. A Corvair, with its rearward weight balance, has a tendency to want to swap ends on icy roads which led to one of the hardest day's journeys I ever had. I was constantly fighting the car for 300 agonizing miles. The only consolation was listening to WWVA in Wheeling, West Virginia which would show up on my little AM radio at dusk every evening all the way across the prairies. Ain't radio propagation wonderful?

I arrived safely in Esquimalt and joined my first ship, HMCS Saskatchewan, a few days before Christmas. There I heard of the adventures of some of my other classmates on their journeys. If you get a chance, ask Steve Arnold about his encounter with Mountain Sheep in the Rockies in his Triumph. It was very interesting



### First Cars (concluded)

listening to him trying to explain this to his insurance agent.

Denee arrived in Esquimalt at the beginning of March with our wedding scheduled for the middle of April. Since we now only had one car, we shared the Corvair. It then became evident that the car hated Denee. On several occasions when she was going to pick me up from the ship, I would get a plaintive phone call telling that she could not start the car. I would get a ride with someone else and step into the car and it would start right away. The culmination of this habit occurred one Saturday about two or three weeks before the wedding. Denee had some errands to do and was going to pay golf at Gorge Vale Golf Course. She dropped my off at the course with the understanding that I would call when I got finished for her to pick me up. So off I went and played my eighteen holes of golf. From the last hole, one had to walk across the parking lot to get to the clubhouse. As I did so, I was surprised to find Denee and the car there. I asked how long she had been there and she replied rather angrily, "I never left. Your %##\*^ car wouldn't start!"

Despite this, she did marry me on the scheduled date and we drove off to San Francisco for our honeymoon. We made it there okay, but on the way home I almost cooked the engine. On the first day, we pulled into a gas station to fill up and the attendant (remember when people filled up your car, checked your oil and cleaned your windshield) said that I had been leaking coolant as I drove in. The only problem was that the Corvair was air cooled . . . there was no coolant! A check under the hood (trunk?) found that the oil filter, which hung down at the back end of the engine, was bent and pouring out oil. There was only a tiny bit of oil left. We had to drive to another garage to get it fixed and that cost another three quarts of oil. Finally we were on our way home where we arrived on a Friday. On Monday, we went car shopping and traded the Corvair for a nice, safe, reliable, nearly new Plymouth, Valiant like the one below.



So after 16 months, 27,000 miles (not kilometers) and numerous adventures, the Corvair was gone. Denee at least was happy.



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## Engineers by 6700 Bob Walker

To end on a light note, the following irreverent (but true) observations about Engineers of all stripes have been provided by **Bob Walker**:

### Understanding Engineers #1

Two engineering students were biking across a university campus when one said,  
"Where did you get such a great bike?"

The second engineer replied, "Well, I was walking along yesterday, minding my own business, when a beautiful woman rode up on this bike, threw it to the ground, took off all her clothes and said, "Take what you want."

The first engineer nodded approvingly and said, "Good choice: The clothes probably wouldn't have fit you anyway."

### Understanding Engineers #2

To the optimist, the glass is half-full.

To the pessimist, the glass is half-empty.

To the engineer, the glass is twice as big as it needs to be.

### Understanding Engineers #3

A priest, a doctor, and an engineer were waiting one morning for a particularly slow group of golfers.

The engineer fumed, "What's with those guys? We must have been waiting for fifteen minutes!"

The doctor chimed in, "I don't know, but I've never seen such inept golf!"

The priest said, "Here comes the greens-keeper. Let's have a word with him."

He said, "Hello George, What's wrong with that group ahead of us? They're rather slow, aren't they?"

The greens-keeper replied, "Oh, yes. That's a group of blind firemen. They lost their sight saving our clubhouse from a fire last year, so we always let them play for free, any time!"

The group fell silent for a moment.

The priest said, "That's so sad. I think I will say a special prayer for them tonight."

The doctor said, "Good idea. I'm going to contact my ophthalmologist colleague and see if there's anything she can do for them."

The engineer said, "Why can't they play at night?"

### Understanding Engineers #4

What is the difference between mechanical engineers and civil engineers?

Mechanical engineers build weapons.

Civil engineers build targets.

### Understanding Engineers #5

The graduate with a science degree asks, "Why does it work?"

The graduate with an engineering degree asks, "How does it work?"

The graduate with an accounting degree asks, "How much will it cost?"

The graduate with an arts degree asks, "Would you like fries with that?"





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### Closing Notes

There are still some engineer stories left, but by now Carruthers is probably having an apoplexy so I'll hold the rest until next time.

Again, thanks to those who wrote, including those of you not mentioned in this issue. Keep the stuff coming.

Until next month.

Mike