

## **A MARIE USQA A MARIE!! FROM SEA TO SEA!!**



Well not quite From Sea to Sea!!! However; in the spirit of adventure, Lois and I thought it time that we took ***“The Train VIA 1”*** from Toronto to Vancouver and from Vancouver onward to Comox on Vancouver Island.

Tickets were purchased taking advantage of a special discount for Veterans and their Spouse. Our departure date was 2010-07-24 and the point of departure was Union Station in Toronto. Greg and Sandra drove us to the GO Train Station in Oshawa, and we enjoyed the one hour “milk run” into Toronto’s famous Rail Museum!!

Travelling as one grows into the Senior Category carries with it certain pleasant surprises and I thought I would document such acts of kindness or surprise on this vacation. It is our intention to enjoy the holiday > 4 days and 4 nights on the train, in 1st Class; holiday with Al and Vi, Lois’s brother and sister in law, and fly back on August 5<sup>th</sup>.

Re Pleasant Surprises: One would think that in the hustle and bustle of Canada’s largest city, Seniors would be the cause of no special consideration!! However; on detraining, it was necessary that I carried both small bags, not just off the train, but also down a flight of stairs. I stopped at the bottom in order to set down the bags and affix one to the other and pull them both on

wheels. At this very point, an attractive young Black Female immediately stopped and politely asked if she could be of any assistance!! I declined as graciously as I was able and we both moved on asking each other if we really looked as if we needed assistance!! Lol



We decide, wisely I believe, that the very first thing we should do is to check in, especially as we had purchased the tickets on line and as a condition of our purchase, we were required to provide evidence that I was a veteran. We of course had the required evidence and when

I presented it to the Attendant, he examined the document and since he saw RCAF on the document, he politely asked if I had flown LANCASTERS!!! Lol: Lois could hardly contain herself > although to her credit she did just that! The young man was being polite, not realizing that I would have to be 94 and not 74 in order to have flown a Lancaster!!! I thanked him for the question but Lois insisted that I go into the washroom and “fix up”, at least put my hat on correctly!! lol

That same young man, see para above, informed us that we were travelling 1<sup>st</sup> Class, and as such we were welcome to proceed to the 1<sup>st</sup> Class Lounge. That is where you now find us, Lois reading and I recording our trip! Many in the Lounge are our age, no doubt proceeding on the same Journey. Maybe, Just Maybe, I should go talk with some of them. Stan 2010-07-24-19:45. Train departs at 22:00. We are scheduled to board at 21:30.

It is now Day 2 of our 4 Day Journey, viz, it is Sunday, July 25, 2010 07:45. Last evening, as soon as we finished placing our luggage, 2 small pieces, in our room, all 1<sup>st</sup> Class passengers were invited to the Lounge Car to enjoy Champagne and the company of each other. Not surprisingly, most of the passengers were our age plus! We shared some conversation



with a couple from Bradford followed by an extensive conversation with 2 American Couples, one from Mississippi, and one from Virginia. (American Couples in pic) The gentleman from Mississippi was a Professor Emeritus,

Engineering. His desire for expression exceeded that of my own! Lol: They were going as far as Jasper, picking up a car and then travelling to Banff; sounded like a well-planned vacation. We enjoyed the evening; had another Champagne and HIT THE PIT!



THE PIT! My god our “1<sup>st</sup> Class Bedroom” was petite, one might even say small! Lol: I used to tell the children that we were taking the Train Ride to get to know each other better, and indeed if being in close quarters with each other for 4 days and 4 nights will achieve that objective >> WE WILL HAVE ACHIEVED THE PRIMARY OBJECTIVE of the Journey!! Lol: To describe the Bed Room. Two bunks, Upper and Lower; A well-lit Mirror and small sink within easy reaching distance from the bunks, so close that one must breathe in to pass between the sink and the bunk!! A small opening to hang about 4 hangers of clothes; a small but very neat toilet and an array of switches and lights. Believe me that was

about it! No wasted space. Oh Yes; There was also a ladder to facilitate access to the upper birth and while going up was not bad, coming down was a challenge, and that from someone a mere 74; many passengers were in their 80s!!

During the day we did have significantly more space. Pic above is of the bedroom during the day. At night, no room available to get any kind of a decent pic??? Sort of lol!! Bunks disappeared and in their place appeared 2 comfortable chairs; fully



acceptable. It will be interesting to take note of my observations when the Journey is over. The Dining Room and the Observation



Car are both 4 Cars up from our Bed Room. Breakfast is served from 06:30 to 09:00 in

the Dining Car. To-day we enjoyed fine service; both of us had the Cheese and Spinach Omelet.

At this very moment, 08:10, we are sitting in the Observation Car as we begin our Day of Travel. Looking forward to the 20 minute stop at **Hornepayne** in Northern Ontario, especially since Lois lived here in 1944. Lois's Dad, was an Engineer on the CNR at that time. Before we detrain at Hornepayne, must tell you about our lunch!! Fully acceptable from the nutritional point! The bonus was the company we had across the table. Two young men were seated at our table and it was not long before meaningful conversation ensued. Both were Americans from Washington State, Seattle. Both had been to a Software Convention in Toronto and were returning. The question was advanced: "What part of the world that you have visited did you enjoy the most?" I answered in some detail, i.e. giving my reasons, that it was St Petersburg, Russia. The young man who had advanced the question responded and in his response indicated that he had been born in the Ukraine and still spoke Russian. He had immigrated to America at the age of 7.



We had a 30 minute stop in Hornepayne, more than the normal as we are running ahead of schedule. Lois lived in Hornepayne for about 2 years, leaving for Elmvale in early 1945. Sister Joyce was born here. At that time, there were very few automobiles as they had to be brought in by rail; thus paved roads did not exist; horses were the normal mode of travel and concrete sidewalks only a dream! Lois remembers a woman who lived "down the street" who came into town only weekly, but each visit was memorable in that she always brought her pet bear! Lois pointed out the general location of a number of spots including the general area where the McConnell Family lived. Sixty-five years have not been kind to Hornepayne! As you will see, the Station has been allowed to completely deteriorate; the only record seems to be the paintings painted in the windows of the defunct former Station. Sixty-five years ago trains had a need to be resupplied, nourished if you will, and Hornepayne and its citizenry met that need. Even to-day, certain limited services were provided to the VIA Train. Even to-day there exists a very large Yard, a Yard mainly occupied by all shapes and sizes of Rail Cars. As we leave, 2010-07-23-15:25, I think Lois is,

although glad she returned, saddened by the general appearance of a part of her early childhood.



On the left, the abandoned RR Station; on the right, the “old Coal Tower” used to supply the coal for the Steam Engines of the Day!

In the late afternoon Lois went down to play Bingo! She “came close” but no banana! However; the American woman from Virginia did win and the prize was a bottle of Champagne, a bottle that she shared with the rest of the Players and their spouse. About the time that ended, it was time for dinner. We had the company of a couple from Quebec. She was bilingual, he unilingual but by the end of the dinner we were all at least understanding each other. I mustered up my best French and told the unilingual husband that we had very much appreciated their company during dinner. I should add that Dinner, all Dinners, were terrific; we had sufficient variety; the food was tastefully presented and the service was top notch.

Following breakfast to-day, July 26<sup>th</sup>, we had 4 hours on our own in Winnipeg. As we left Union Station we were greeted by a Parks Canada (summer student) employee who offered us a free walk through the Historic Site in the general area of the Railroad Stn. The term “The Forks” refers to the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. At one time this entire area was a massive industrial

area in support of train transportation but well before that it was the Meeting Place for the Fur Trade, the location where the Aborigines traded with the White Man. To move from East to West in Canada, it was essential to pass through Winnipeg and since early transportation was by Canoe, and later Rail, this was a significant junction in both periods!!

The Forks of to-day is a world apart from both periods!! All of the traditional train support buildings have been converted to a new and modern use to the credit of the City, the Province and the Federal Govts. I should add that the new Canadian Museum for Human Rights is in this same area. Queen Elizabeth on her visit of July, 2010, laid the Corner Stone for this Historic Building To Be. We then made our way to the corner of Portage and Main and explored the Underground Network designed to allow one to cross in any direction this very busy and very wide intersection without crossing a street; Why some readers may ask? For anyone who has spent a winter in Winnipeg, the reason is obvious >> It is too damn cold to stand at wait at the Corner of Portage and Main!! Lol:

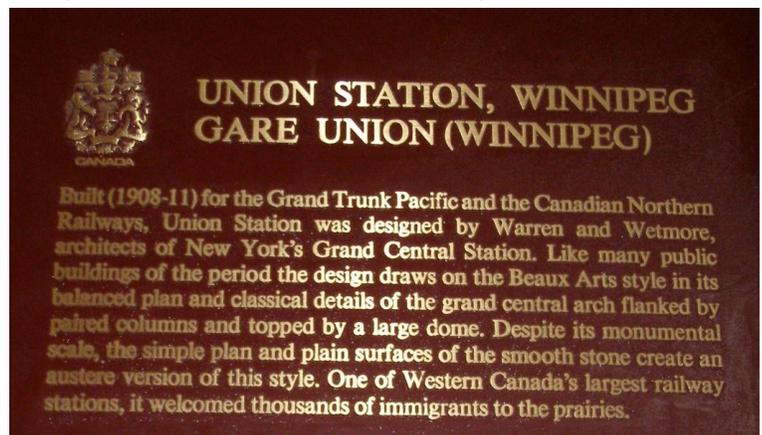
This excursion (to Portage & Main) produced its share of "human kindness" in that twice, WITHOUT ASKING, we were provided assistance, once by a well-dressed middle age white male, once by a Woman of colour from India.

All passengers appear to be enjoying the trip and that is good!! Rob and Sally from Seattle, Washington began their journey in NS, spent 4 days there; train to Quebec City, 3 day stop; on to Montreal, stop there, on to Toronto for another 3 days, and now heading for Vancouver before returning to Seattle. Sally was a retired lawyer, Rob a working English professor. This couple, without a doubt, had travelled further and longer than any other passenger!!

The Train Crew changed at Winnipeg; this crew with a home base of Vancouver has a much higher proportion of French Speaking members. I may have mentioned earlier that indeed there is a contingent of French speaking passengers; I am going to guess 10.

We have just crossed the border into SK; time is 2010 07 26 15:00, turned the clock back one hour.

I cannot but reflect on the similarity between what has happened in the Ottawa Valley vis-à-vis the total transformation of the many towns we identified in



Up The Opeongo! Towns with hotels, train stations, churches and schools and associated housing GONE! About the only thing left in many is the Church. On this Journey across Canada, we have witnessed a similar but no less significant transformation of the Railroad and those towns that supported it! For one of the best examples see the article on HORNEPAYNE! The Union Station in Winnipeg is another shining example. The Station is now occupied by the Dept. Of Citizenship and Immigration and the Dept. of The Environment > both Regional Offices of the Federal Govt. Depts. The Railroad is moving huge amounts of freight as witnessed by the many trains we constantly wait for. Melville SK is another prime example of a huge RR Station allowed to decay! Think of the associated “decay” within the society unless of course alternative employment has been found.



Pic to the left is of the abandoned Melville RR Stn.

We arrived in Edmonton about 05:30 and at that time a Panorama Car was added to the Train, added immediately in front of our car, Car #113. See pic below right. The Panorama was not as efficient from the point of view of seeing ahead! On the plus side one could

adjust the chairs and greater comfort was realized. This additional observation car was available from Edmonton through to Vancouver, i.e. on the approach to the Rockies and through them. We arrived in Jasper at 13:00 hrs. on Tuesday, July 27<sup>th</sup>. The Stop in Jasper was only 45 Minutes when most people could have used more time enjoyably. Lois bought a pair of ¾ length capris



AND we located the spot where several years ago, circa the 90s, we had taken her pic. We took the “same pic” on this trip. (left)

Just a little about the makeup of our Train, i.e. the demographics of the riders. In 1<sup>st</sup> Class we had 52 on the



leg to Jasper; some left here but a greater number boarded. Of the 52, approximately 30 were Americans; 20 were Canadians, 1 from Switzerland, 1 from Australia and 2 from the UK. At least one half of the 20 Canucks were from Quebec. The 1<sup>st</sup> Class Passengers ate in the Dining Car next to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dome Car > there was a Dome Car further up the Train and also a Dome Car closer to the back of the Train. (See note re addition of a “near dome” Car.) We, Lois and I were in Car 113 which as explained was immediately behind the added Panorama Car. At the very back of the Train was a “Park Car” so named because when CPR began the “Canadian Dome Car” concept, they commissioned the Group of Seven to paint murals and one was placed in the back Car. The Cars in which the murals were placed were named after Canada’s National Parks >> thus the term **“Park Cars”**. The Bar was, and is located in the Park Car. Comfortable chairs formed a semi-circle around about 270degrees of this Car. There was a 2<sup>nd</sup> Dining Car in the immediate area.



There was a different demographic near the very front of the Train.

Our Dinner Table Guests last evening, Monday night (we opted for the 2<sup>nd</sup> seating so we begin Dinner about 19:15. Joining us at our table were an English Professor from Washington State and his wife who had just retired from a law practice. Rob and Sally had travelled extensively, lived in Ireland for

1 year while Rob had lectured and conducted research for a book about to be published. Needless to say we had a most enjoyable Dinner with each of us listening as much as we talked!! They presented us with a book they had purchased, and read, in Nova Scotia; *NO GREAT MISCHIEF* by Alistair MacLeod. Both were admirers of Canada. They were keenly interested in Galloway Cattle and even expressed an interest in Shuffleboard, stating they wished me to send them the contact for Washington State!! Great Dinner, c/w small glass of Red Wine!

Speaking of Americans: Our other 4 American friends detrained in Jasper to begin the southerly leg of their journey. They were picking up a car and travelling toward the US. They had a long journey ahead of them!! Before they parted, we wished them well and they reciprocated!! The Prof’s name is: Leslie Hester, his wife Margaret and they live in Starkville, Mississippi. The other gentleman’s first name was Felix and he and his wife were from Virginia.

We had Brunch to-day and will not dine until Dinner at 17:15. Getting hungry!! Enjoyed another fine Dinner, this time complimented by Red Wine, actually we also had Red Wine the previous night as well. Following Dinner we sat in the Dome Car for some time prior to retiring. Given that we opted for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sitting of Dinner, that is the seating beginning about 19:30, it was about 21:00 before Dinner ended.

Before moving to the final day of the Journey I must tell you about the Octogenarians from Sudbury, ON. Ralph and Evelyn had been married 62 Years and thoroughly enjoyed travelling and the company of each other. They had brought their granddaughter along to assist "Gramm"; a good deal of love and understanding was evident. Ralph and Evelyn were remaining only 1 day in Vancouver before returning BY TRAIN to Sudbury!!

Now to Wednesday, July 28<sup>th</sup>. I was up at 05:10 and went to the Shower at the end of the Hall. We were first in to Breakfast at 06:30 and returned first to the Observation Car and then to the Panorama Car to experience the Run into the City of Vancouver. We arrived early, about 09:00 and took a Cab to the Sea Plane Company, Harbour Air. As the Cell Phone had not been "in service", Lois checked her E-mail, and then I. It was at that time, circa 10:30 that we first learned that Al McConnell had experienced a heart attack and had been admitted to hospital in Victoria. Lois phoned the number Michelle had sent us with the notice and we discovered that Al would be having a Triple By-Pass Operation on Tuesday, July 3<sup>rd</sup>. Lois talked with Al this evening (2010-07-28-19:00) and he seems comfortable and in capable hands.



Our flight from the Harbour to Comox was uneventful in the Reliable Beaver. Five Passengers and the Pilot made the flight which lasted about 50 Minutes. Our cruising speed was 90 mph; our cruising altitude 2,500 ft. Vi met us at the Pier and drove us to their home!

**PHASE ONE OF OUR ADVENTURE HAS ENDED!! LIFE IS GOOD! 2010-07-28-19:30.**

