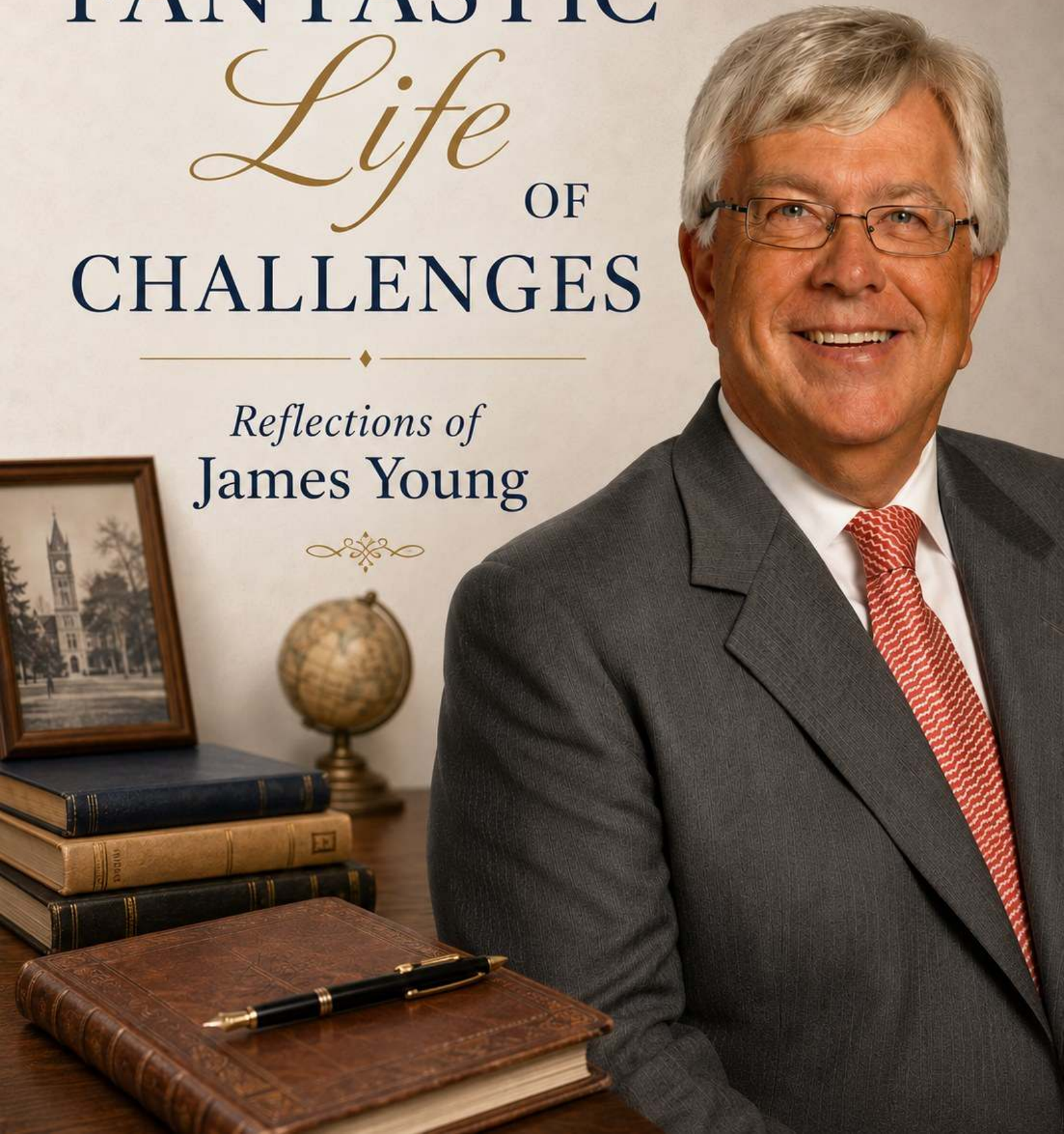


— A —
FANTASTIC
Life OF
CHALLENGES

— ♦ —
Reflections of
James Young



Dedication



This book is dedicated to my family, present and future.

I have enjoyed a fantastic life full of interesting challenges. This book chronicles some of the challenges and how I responded to them. My hope is that others can read these thoughts and apply them in their lives.

This book is also dedicated to Eileen, the love of my life. Without her constant support, I would not have experienced the success and happiness I have been fortunate to have.

Table of Contents

Dedication	1
Developing My Personality	5
Life as a Medical Student	19
The Right Place At The Right Time	32
Small Town Practice	44
Doctor Death	60
Beyond Coroner	78
Swiss Air	115
An Exciting Challenge but Also a Close Call	130
9/11	152
Terrorism Continues	172
Weather and Humans	198
Deaths in Complex Countries	220
SARS	249
The Love of My Life	285

Developing My Personality



At the time I am writing this, I could truly say that I have lived a very happy and fulfilled life. That is not to say that there haven't been some challenges along the way, but I was taught at an early age to face these challenges, overcome them and turn negatives into positives.

I was raised in a middle-class home with my brother, Steve, and two sisters, Mary and Patty, in the East End of Toronto. My father was a salesman, and my mother, Betty, stayed at home to look after the children, as was common in those days. My father, William, had been significantly affected by the Great Depression. His parents had immigrated from Macedonia and were attempting to establish themselves in Canadian society when the depression occurred. Both my grandfather, who was a salesman and spoke broken English, and my grandmother, who was a seamstress and also spoke broken English,

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

were unable to get full-time employment. In order to have enough money to live, my father needed to stop school after high school and work to support the family. My father's brother was sent out west to live with an aunt and uncle in order to ease the financial pressure. My father always regretted not being able to further his education, and he made it clear, my entire life, that he expected me to take advantage of the gifts I was given, including furthering my education. Both of my parents were readers, and both enjoyed music. The appreciation of these was a gift that I have enjoyed my whole life.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



Playing as a young boy

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



My parents Bill and Betty Young

I attended church from an early age and at a young age embraced the Christian faith. I have always tried to live my life using Christian principles. My faith is very important to me and has strongly influenced decisions I have made in life.

I remember my childhood as a happy time. We did not have a lot of money, and something like a restaurant meal was a big treat reserved for occasions such as my father

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

getting a raise. My public school, Earl Beatty, was just around the corner, and I had a friend who lived right across from the school. He had an uncle who worked at the comic book factory and gave my friend boxes full of comic books. We spent hours going through the boxes and trading comics with other kids. Riding bikes was important, and we knew the way to get into the Dan Valley long before the highway was built. We would ride along the trails and stop and explore various areas and then climb the steep hill out of the valley. I'm not sure my parents ever knew that we had discovered this Toronto treasure. Winters in Toronto were much colder than they now are, and outdoor non-artificial ice surfaces in backyards were common. Two of my best friends had rinks at their houses. We played home and away games practically every day after school and rotated which rink we played on. One rink represented Maple Leaf Gardens, and one rink was the Montreal Forum. We had a hockey bag full of Leaf and Canadiens jerseys, and we reached in the bag to choose a sweater for which team we were playing on each day. Unfortunately, some days I had to pretend to be a Montréal Canadien. One of the rinks had a steep hill in the middle, but somehow my friend's father managed to get ice to cover it. It meant that you started a rush at the top of the hill and ended it at the bottom

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

or vice versa. A shot taken on the way up the hill tended to rise and be high. This resulted in me being hit in the nose with a puck while playing goal. That resulted in one eye being swollen shut and a broken nose, all on my birthday. Those injuries, at my mother's insistence, ended my goalkeeping career. Fortunately, the Leafs somehow won most days, and Foster Hewitt was calling out our names as we streaked up and down the ice.

At the end of the summer, just before the start of grade one, a very important purchase was made by my family. My Aunt Belva's brother, Milt, was developing a new area on Georgian Bay called Wendake Beach. Beach lots of 50 feet cost over \$1000, but lots back from the beach were much more modestly priced. My dad and my uncle Jack bought five lots, which constituted all of a hill, with two of the lots purchased by my father for \$200 and \$300. My mother paid for the lots by sending \$10 to Uncle Milt every time my father got paid. By the next summer, the cottage had been built, and we started the tradition of spending the whole summer holiday out of school at Wendake Beach. Summers, we spent swimming in the bay, playing baseball, playing hide-and-go-seek, and going to the creek to catch tadpoles. My only two cousins, Mark and Judy, lived next door, and Mary and I would play all summer with them. Eventually, I developed

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

an interest in girls but discovered that Wendake Beach seemed to be the only beach in the world with no girls my age. This meant that I needed to broaden my horizon and try to discover the girls in Midland. The Elmvale and Midland drive-ins were favourite places for dates.

The cottage was a well-built but simple and small structure. The pine walls only came up eight feet, and then there was space to the ceiling. This would allow me to lie in the top of the bunk bed in my room and throw spitballs over the walls into my sister Mary's room. She didn't seem to appreciate the efforts I was making. The cottage was only a summer cottage at first and for many years had no insulation in the walls. We only had cold water for the first several summers, and when it was time to wash, my mother gave us a bar of soap and sent us down to the lake. We did not have a refrigerator but rather an icebox. The ice truck would come up the hill every two or three days and deliver a great big block of ice that sat in the bottom of the icebox. Fridays were washing day using the old ringer washer that sat by the back door. My mother would heat kettles of water and carry them out to the back. My mother loved to watch, and she never seemed to mind the fact that she was using this old ringer washer. The banks by the side of the cottage were just sand in those days, and my dad had strict rules

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

concerning the banks. He was concerned that they would erode and the cottage would fall down the hill, so the rule was that there was no running up and down any of the banks, and when emptying the washing machine, the water had to be very carefully poured by the edge so that it did not cause erosion. Over time the banks filled in, and we occasionally snuck up and down the banks while playing hide-and-seek.



The family cottage

Georgian Bay quickly became my special place. I lived in Toronto and went to school in Toronto, but the summers were the special time. One summer I even got a job in

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

the area. I lived with a family in Midland and installed aluminium siding. I was terrible at it, as I am with most things mechanical, and one time forgot to nail the bottom board on the wall. My boss was less than pleased when he told me I had to take the entire wall down, nail the bottom board and put it all up again. To make matters worse, I was living at his house, so it was a bit of a frosty evening, even though it was summer. My girlfriend that summer lived across the street and worked at the Dairy Queen. Milkshakes were never as good as that summer. One summer, my brother Steve bought an old car with running boards and called it Tony and Company. We used to ride along Wendake Road, standing on the running boards until my parents caught us and ended the practice.

Public school seemed to go by very quickly. I was always interested in school and did well. Some might have described me as a nerd, and perhaps I was, but I was a happy nerd. My grades were always very good and I found it quite easy. I was always very driven to do better and learn more, but in those days, there was no enrichment program. In grade 5, the teacher would put all of the week's work on the blackboard on Monday morning. You would then work at your own pace but were required to have that minimum work finished by the end of the week. I would go home after school Monday and try and

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

complete everything that was on the board for the week. Starting Tuesday morning, I could do the enrichment work the rest of the week, which I found much more interesting. I played basketball for the school team and hockey for the house league but was not particularly good at either. I did, however, develop a lifelong interest in sports, which ultimately paid my way through medical school. At the end of grade 8, I achieved my goal of being named the top student in the school. It has always been important to me to succeed at what I try and be the best at something that I can.

I thoroughly enjoyed high school and learned to use much that I learned in later life. In grade 9, I attended Riverdale Collegiate. It was a long-established school with a good academic record. It was quite a distance from my house at Coxwell and Danforth and was a bus and streetcar ride or a moderate ride on my bike. Most days, other than winter storms, I rode my bike. My major memory from this year came during fall exams. As soon as my geography exam ended, there was an announcement to all of the school that President Kennedy had been assassinated in Dallas, Texas. The television stations covered only this story over the next several days. On the Sunday morning, I was up a ladder, hanging a winter storm window, when my mother called out that someone had just assassinated Lee Harvey

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

Oswald, the suspected assassin of Kennedy. For many years afterwards, there was strong debate in the United States over the issue of whether Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone or as part of a conspiracy. In fact, many years later at meetings at the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, there were still papers debating this point.

High school changed significantly in grade 10. A new school, Monarch Park, had been built, and students were moved from Riverdale and Malvern high schools to the new Monarch Park. This school had many unique features, which were a first for a school in Toronto, including a large football field with stands, a track behind the school, an outdoor ice rink next door and a school that was air-conditioned. The school also had two double gyms and a very large Olympic-size swimming pool. As well, the school had a much larger school library and a lecture room big enough to hold three classes next to the library. The teachers had been specially chosen for the school, and most were young and very progressive. Much of the teaching was done in lecture format. For example, three classes would be given a lecture on an English topic. Over the next few days classroom work would supplement that lecture. One group of students would review the lecture material again, one group would do some review and some enrichment work related to the lecture and the third group

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

would do only enrichment work related to the lecture. The lecture system and streaming kept high school interesting for me, just as I had devised my own system of getting some enrichment in grade 5. This format was used to teach English, history, geography and some science. By grades 11 and 12 some students were chosen to give lectures to the full group on selected topics. I was one of the chosen students, and it was the first time I had a chance to lecture in public. This experience proved invaluable in my later career, as I often gave speeches and lectures to groups. The lecture system certainly got the students ready for university. There was virtually no transition for us because we had already been taught through a lecture system for years.

The sports culture at Monarch Park was also exceptional. As with all the other teachers, the coaching staff had been carefully selected. The head of the physical education department left the school after a few years and went on to coach the Toronto Maple Leafs hockey team. The track and field coach eventually coached the University of Toronto and another teacher was a specialist in gymnastics. I was part of the cross-country team and the wrestling team. We won Ontario high school championships in both sports, and in fact, one year, Monarch Park won half the Ontario high school

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

championships in all sports.

High school was also the time when I learned to begin to organize my time. My marks were in the 90s and I played sports, but I also needed money, so I worked. I got a job cleaning the chemistry and biology labs after classes, including putting away equipment, cleaning glassware and setting out the equipment and glassware for the next day's classes. If a school team was playing football or basketball, I would go down towards the end of the game and gather information about the game and phone the result to the three Toronto newspapers. After these two jobs, I went to a drugstore to stock the shelves and then to another store across the street and did the same. After that, I did deliveries on my bicycle for the drugstore. Homework was the final job of the day. In grade 13 my schedule would not allow time to take biology. I had decided to go into medicine and felt I should get a biology credit. It turned out the best way to do this was to go to night school one night a week, and so that year I continued all my jobs and went to night school as well as taking full credits in the day.

I graduated from Monarch Park with marks in the mid-90s, which got me admission to the premed course at the University of Toronto, which had been my goal. I also

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

won the Green and Gold award as the top male student in the school. My name is still stencilled onto the wall of the school outside the auditorium.

These musings about public and high school are intended to show how school prepared me for university and later life by teaching the value of hard work, time management, seeking new challenges and setting goals. I also learned from a favourite guidance counsellor that if you are given special gifts, you have an obligation to use them to help others less fortunate.

Life as a Medical Student



Sometime toward the middle of high school I made my career choice. I had been thinking about both law and medicine and settled on medicine. I eventually learned that many of my classmates had gone through the same decision process. In my case, I never completely got the legal idea out of my mind and eventually ended up in a medical-legal career as a coroner and even wrote some chapters in legal texts and lectured regularly to lawyers.

At the time I was choosing a university, only the University of Toronto still had a pre-med program. This program allowed direct admission into the Faculty of Medicine, and after two years of specific pre-medical training, if your marks were high enough, you were admitted directly into the four-year medical course. Choosing this route meant that you skipped getting an undergraduate degree and went straight to an MD. I had scholarship offers from Queens, Western, and McMaster University, but choosing the University of Toronto had

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

the advantages of graduating from medicine much faster and being able to live at home. I would have liked to have lived in residence, although in those days it was not as usual as it is now, but I was paying for my entire university education from my earnings, and so staying in Toronto made more sense. My parents could not afford to send two or three of us to university at the same time, and it seemed logical, therefore, that I continue to work and pay my own way. When I was starting university, I received a job offer from The Globe & Mail to help produce the high school sports page roundup several days a week. In another chapter, I will detail the important role The Globe & Mail played in supporting my university needs and teaching me life lessons that helped me the rest of my career. I have never regretted the decision to attend the University of Toronto Faculty of Medicine, as the school is considered the preeminent place to learn medicine in Canada.

The two years of pre-med were geared specifically towards a medical career. For example, the physics that was taught was the physics of radiation, which would later be used in regard to x-rays and cancer treatment. All the students in the course had graduated from high school with marks better than 90%. Just to knock our egos down a peg, some of the courses were extremely difficult.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

The calculus course required us to attend lectures, go to a seminar each week, and then complete the homework questions. The homework would be graded, and students received one mark out of 10 for writing their name and one mark for handing in the assignment. The other eight marks were determined by the quality of the answers that were given. Most weeks most of us got either two or three marks for our efforts. Finally, mid-course, someone discovered that there was an answer book available if we sent away to England. This was done, and we began to be able to at least partly answer some of the questions. Unfortunately, we discovered that the professor knew about the answer book and realized that numerous steps in answering the questions were left out of the book. He was able to determine exactly when in the year all the students discovered the math aid. It was humbling to get marks that were 20 or 30% when you're used to high marks, but at the end of the year all of the marks were put on a bell curve, and everyone passed. The professor achieved exactly what he intended, and I will never forget the huge challenge that course posed to all of us. During the pre-med course, the assistant dean of medicine would frequently come to our lectures to warn us that we were probably the worst pre-med class ever in the history of the University of Toronto and likely many of us would not be admitted to

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

medicine. One time, the class had pulled a prank on our chemistry professor, and the class received an especially stern warning that we would never amount to anything or ever call ourselves doctor. One of our classmates later went on to become the Dean of Medicine and the President of the University of Toronto. So much for the warnings.

Despite the warnings, after two years, we were admitted to the four-year medical course. First-year medicine proved to be a huge challenge and a life-changing event. First-year medicine, until the end of January, consisted of anatomy, neuroanatomy, embryology, and histology. These courses were very intense and required massive amounts of memory work. Each also had its own unique set of challenges. The embryology professor could draw very detailed illustrations of humans evolving in utero, using both hands and multiple colours of chalk. The problem was that those of us listening to the lecture could not necessarily draw and were using pencil crayons, switching at a furious rate. Neuroanatomy was taught by the doctor who had written the textbook. The subject was very complicated, and he would talk in detail about the various pathways that connected parts of the brain. We would then go to the lab on Friday afternoons and dissect the brain to find these pathways. The brains were preserved in very toxic chemicals, which would never

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

be allowed now. It was hard to work on the dissection without leaving the room to get some fresh air and stop the irritation of your eyes. Histology was the study of tissue under the microscope. Again, this course was taught by the professor who had written the textbook. It too was very complicated but made much easier in the labs by the teaching assistant, Harry Whitaker, who had a straightforward and relatively simple way of describing what you were seeing under the microscope. He was also the first person in the university who actually referred to each of the students as doctor. No one going through medicine ever forgot this, and eventually, Harry was voted the top teacher in the medical school.

Most of the time during this part of the training was spent in anatomy lectures and in the lab doing the dissection of the human body. There were four persons assigned to each body, and there was a detailed dissection manual written by Dr. Grant, who was the Professor Emeritus of Anatomy at the University of Toronto. This was a step-by-step guide of what to do before any internet existed. To help in learning what you were seeing, there was an anatomy atlas also written by Dr. Grant and illustrated by an artist from the University of Toronto. The atlas was world famous. There was also a museum in the anatomy department, and if you took your atlas, you could open it at a page and

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

find the same detailed dissection preserved as an exhibit in the museum. It would look exactly the same as it did in the book. Some of the anatomy examination was done by a test called the bell ringer. Specimens were placed on a table with tags attached to muscles, arteries, or bones. The student was to identify what was tagged and to write the results on their test paper. You had a very limited time to do this before a bell rang, and you moved to the next table to start the whole process again. This type of testing did not bring out the best in me. I could not see the point of it, and I had trouble identifying the tag areas. Eventually, I had to take a supplementary exam in order to pass this part of the course. The need for a supplementary examination was a temporary defeat to be overcome by someone not used to failure. A very good life lesson. Anatomy was hard to learn, and part of my defence was to complain that I could not understand why it was going to be relevant to my day-by-day practice of medicine. With time, I came to realize that this negative view was just silly venting and that anatomy was a foundation on which to build a medical career. Ironically, when I became the Chief Coroner of Ontario, one of the other titles that went with that job was General Inspector of Anatomy for Ontario. That job requires that I administer the Anatomy Act and ensure proper procedures are followed in procuring bodies

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

to the schools and that students maintain proper dignity at all times when working with the donated bodies. I would visit each of the schools' anatomy departments in the province on a yearly basis and lecture to the medical students in each school. As well, both of my parents donated their bodies to schools of anatomy. My mother maintained that this was the only way that she was going to get to university.

The second term, after January, was the study of the physiology of the body. We studied the body system by system, and this gave us the firm foundation we needed in order to practice medicine. This term also proved to be life-changing. One Sunday in early February, my girlfriend at the time and I were visiting the cottage and decided to toboggan. There was a large hill known as Drunk Man's Paradise, which was ideal as a long toboggan run. Keith Beacock was driving, and I was on the back. We hit a bump, and I was thrown off, with my right leg jamming itself into the snow. I blacked out, and I woke up with my foot next to my right hip. I had torn all of the ligaments of my right knee except the lateral collateral ligament on the outside of the knee. The local doctor, John MacKenzie, who I eventually shared call with in Elmvale, sent me to St. Mike's Hospital in Toronto for repair. In those days, wires were used to hold a knee together,

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

rather than the ligaments that are now used. It took many months to recover from this injury, including a cast for an extended period of time, crutches, and ultimately physiotherapy. This injury on its own changed my life because I had ongoing problems with that knee, including multiple surgeries and ultimately a knee replacement. The even more significant result of the fall was that it resulted in me meeting, and ultimately marrying, my nurse from the orthopedic floor, Cathie Murrell. The third result from the injury was that I missed a significant part of the second half of year one and decided that it was best to repeat first-year medicine. That turned out to be a good decision, as it significantly improved my understanding of anatomy and gave me a chance to learn the physiology I would need throughout my career. It was, however, another time that I had to face a defeat and learn to overcome it.

Second- and third-year medicine involved lectures and also increasing numbers of hours spent in hospital learning to diagnose and treat patients. This suited me much more than the memory work involved in first-year. Fourth-year medicine was called the clinical clerkship, and mine was spent at St. Mike's Hospital. I chose that hospital because it served a wide variety of socioeconomic patients in the downtown core of Toronto.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

It was more of a community hospital than a high-pressure academic hospital, and I felt it would better prepare me for a family practice. We were also required to continue to pay tuition, which came to \$800. Cathie continued her work as an RN, and I continued my part-time work with the Globe & Mail. Between the two of us, we did well enough financially to buy our first house. It was a semi-detached house in the east end of Toronto on a street called Linsmore Crescent. The even bigger event of that year was the birth of my son, Kevin, in December at St. Mike's Hospital. I still remember the day well, and I almost missed the birth because I had gone to grand rounds. The interim labour had progressed faster than I had planned for. Fortunately, I got there just in time to see Kevin born and hold him for the first time.

The clinical years of medical school were much more interesting to me, and I flourished during this time. When we graduated at the end of the clerkship year, I had finally made it on the Dean of Medicine's Honours List. As well, in my last two years of medical school, I became the first student to chair a student-faculty committee. It was the awards committee that gave out the scholarships to medical students.

After the clerkship year, I decided to do my internship at

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

Scarborough General Hospital. I had worked one summer during my training at Scarborough General. I knew that an internship year would allow me to get significant hands-on training in areas that would be important to me in the future. For example, I did nearly 150 deliveries, learned a lot about anesthesia, and saw community pediatrics firsthand. After the year of internship, I knew I would be in practice, probably on my own, and I would need to be able to deliver babies, manage children's illnesses, and possibly give anaesthetics. There were 12 interns at Scarborough General, and I was named the chief intern. It was my job to assist in scheduling everyone's rotations, work out the on-call schedule, communicate with hospital administration, and pass messages to my fellow interns. We got paid for the first time during our internship. The wages were \$1200 for the year, but we were also required to continue to pay tuition of \$800. It was difficult to live on a net income of \$400 from this job, and Cathie for part of this time was on maternity leave and receiving reduced income. Between these sources of income and what I could make still working at the Global & Mail, we somehow scraped by.

The internship year turned out to be terrific training. All 12 interns worked Monday through Friday, 8 AM till whenever in the early evening you were finished

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

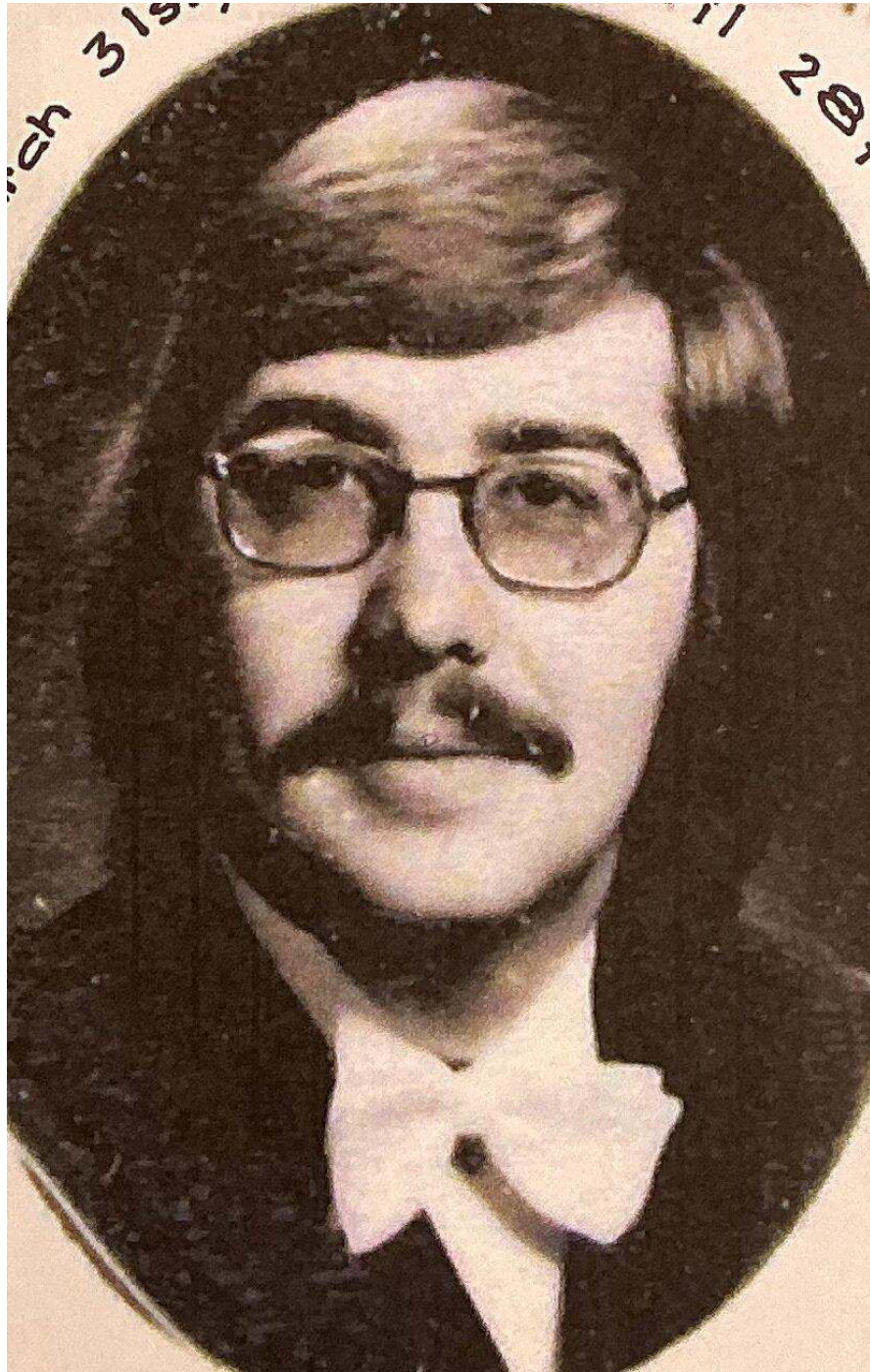
admitting new patients. Then, four of the 12 interns continued and worked overnight, and those four were often the only four doctors in the hospital. One of us was in charge of medicine, one did obstetrics, one did pediatrics, and one did surgery and psychiatry. Whatever problems occurred in the area we were covering, the interns were called first. I tried to solve the problem without calling the staff doctors. If necessary, of course the staff doctors did come in and see the sick patient. There is no better way to learn than being placed in a position of sink or swim. In those days, there was no legislated maximum time that an intern could work. Therefore, on weekends, if you were on call, you went to the hospital early Saturday morning, worked all weekend and Monday before finally going home Monday evening. During that time, hopefully, there would be some times when you were not busy and you could try to grab some sleep. You certainly learned to get to sleep quickly and soundly but wake up and be alert if the phone rang. That training also proved to be invaluable when I went into family practice in a rural area.

The university years, including medical school and internship, went by very quickly. It was a very demanding time, but also a very positive time. I was licensed to practice my profession, I was married, and we had started

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

our family. We had very little money, but somehow I had managed to buy a house. As my father often said, "No one ever died from hard work," and now because of hard work, I had an exciting future ahead of me.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



Graduation. A bad hair period

The Right Place At The Right Time



Sometimes, significant career directions are determined by having been in the right place at the right time. My writing career at the Globe & Mail is such a case in point. In grade 10, at my new school, Monarch Park, I happened to be in the gym after school, and the head of physical education asked me if I wanted to be Monarch's high school sports reporter. This entailed gathering details of football and basketball games and ultimately track and field meets and phoning the newspapers with the results. I just did this for all three Toronto papers, the Globe & Mail, the Toronto Star, and the Toronto Telegram. My sister Mary, actually, was meant to be the Telegram After Four reporter, but she had no interest in sports, and I bought the rights to be the sports reporter for the school from her. By the end of the first season, I was being asked by the newspapers to attend playoff games, some of which did not involve my school, and report the results back to

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

them.

When I started university, in my pre-med course, Ed Waring of the Globe & Mail asked me whether I would like to come down to the newspaper three days a week after school and help him sort the information from the various student sports reporters. From these phone calls, we would pick what sounded like the best story and make it the lead. The other games were summarized and put into their proper divisions. At the end of this process, we had between a half and a full page of the sports section, often with a picture included. Other than writing essays at school, this was the first time I had ever been a writer, and I had very little idea what to do. Jim Vipond, the sports editor, pulled me aside early one day to give me some writing advice. He pointed to a pile of newspapers sitting on a stand and explained that these represented the last months' sports sections. He suggested that whenever I had a spare moment, I go over to the pile and begin to read and analyze how the stories were structured. He suggested I pay particular attention to articles written by Rex McLeod, Gordie Walker, and Dick Beddoes. These men were all famous sports writers, and here I was, a young man just entering university, and I was working with them day by day.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

Ed Waring was a very interesting reporter. He was a small-in-stature Irishman who had an esophageal stricture that made eating food difficult. He only ate at night after he got home, and through the day he drank Red Cap beer. Besides writing about high school sports, he was also the soccer reporter. He loved the soccer league that played at Stanley Park in Toronto. And he did his best to promote the league. To create interest, he often embellished stories of riots at the soccer games. These stories got tamed through editing at the paper. Normally, a reporter inventing events would have been fired by a newspaper, but Ed Waring had an important unofficial job with the paper as well. He had been a reporter in Toronto for a very long time, and he knew everyone. If the newsroom was wondering where to contact the mayor, a counsellor, a judge, a senior police officer, or anyone else, they would ask Ed where they could be found, and he invariably knew their habits and could locate them.

In the fall of the first year, I was at the Global & Mail. The sports editor, Jim Vipond, approached me and asked if I would like to start covering some events on the weekends. My first assignment was a Bramalea Satellites football game. I went to the game in the evening and then drove down to the newspaper and spent the next several hours trying to figure out how to write a story that would be

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

acceptable. The story ran in the newspaper, and it was my first byline. The next time I was in helping with the high school page, Jim Vipond would call me into his office and critique stories I had written about the weekend sports. Gradually my writing must have improved, and when summer came, I was taken off high school sports permanently and hired for the summer full-time.

By the start of my second year of pre-med, I was working full-time and going to school full-time. On Friday night I would be on the rewrite desk. In this job, you sit with a set of headphones on, and part-time reporters, called stringers, would phone in stories of events that they were covering. Most were not particularly good writers, so it was the rewrite person's job to listen as they dictated but also add to and change the story into Globe & Mail format. On the weekend, I would be sent to cover a variety of sporting events, and through the week I would either cover a game or do a shift on rewrite. I was assigned stories on a wide variety of sports. I was thrilled to be sent to a Leaf or Argonaut game but also covered things like horse racing, track and field, soccer, baseball, underwater hockey, sailing, golf, and lawn bowling.

The Globe & Mail arranged for me to have a pass to Maple Leaf Gardens. I reported on some of the Leaf games, often

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

doing what was described as a sidebar. This meant the reporters, such as Rex McLeod, would write the game story, and I was assigned to finding an interesting side story to complement the game story. This usually meant going down to the dressing room and chatting with the players. The pass also meant I could attend any event at Maple Leaf Gardens, including concerts. For a poor student, this was unbelievable.

For a couple of years, I was given the ski beat. I had a pass for all of the ski resorts in Ontario, and on the weekend I would decide which one I would visit and review. I would arrive unannounced at the resort, introduce myself to the manager, and then spend the day skiing and testing the cafeteria. Then, I would write a review. It was a dream job.

Sometimes the social and the work side of the job intersected. On Saturday I would play baseball with the softball team known as the Globe Retractions. We played in a league against the other newspapers. One summer we decided to challenge the Buffalo Evening News to a game. It was to be an away game for us, so we had to decide how to get there. Ultimately, it was decided to go by boat. We chartered a boat and headed across the lake early in the morning. Everyone seemed to get

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

thirsty quite soon after leaving and broke out the beer. We stopped for an unscheduled swim halfway across the lake in an attempt to sober up part of the team. We arrived in Jamestown, New York, and played the Buffalo team on a very hot afternoon. We lost badly. We then had a celebration dinner with the Buffalo players and got back on our boat to cross the lake. US customs boarded the boat and asked a lot of questions as to who we were and where we were going. Some of the team used the occasion and their lack of sobriety to give less than adequate answers. It took considerable time until they allowed us to go on our way. The next morning, I was sound asleep when I got a call from the sports editor. He explained that a woman was currently swimming across the lake, and I should quickly get down to the dock and board the boat that had been chartered to go out and cover her swim. Looking for a swimmer on a lake the size of Lake Ontario is like looking for a needle in a haystack. We ended up crossing the entire lake and landing again in Jamestown. Unfortunately, US customs recognized me from the night before, although I had not been one of the people giving them a hard time. I explained about the baseball team trip to them, and peace was made. The swimmer had given up her swim, and I interviewed her on the dock in Jamestown. I've only crossed Lake Ontario twice in my life, and the

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

two times were just one day apart.

Jim Vipond became a mentor and a friend to me. He had a cottage at Kawaja Beach and always went up to it on Friday night. During the summer, I was often working a Monday to Friday schedule, and I would have a chance to go to the cottage myself for the weekend. On Friday, the final edition of the Globe would be ready for print around midnight. We would leave the newspaper office through the back door along the alley called Pearl Street and walk one more block to the Toronto Press Club. Because I was a student, the press club gave me a free membership. We would have a single beer, and Jim would drive me to my cottage on the way to his. The press club was a very interesting place. It was inhabited by a real cast of characters. Paul Rimstead, who wrote for the Telegram and later the Sun, was a regular. He wrote a column every day about his somewhat chaotic life, including owning the racehorse he purchased called Annabelle the Wonder Horse. When we went on our trip to Jamestown, we had borrowed Paul from another team to be our pitcher for the day. That was not a success. Another character who frequented the press club was Ted Reeve. He had been a well-known athlete in Toronto, and, in fact, the arena that I played hockey at as a child was named after him. By this time he was writing a daily column for the Telegram.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

The column consisted of short sentences about a specific topic, followed by three periods and another short set of sentences, etc. The column was created every day at the press club. He would arrive at the club at about 12:30 and sit in his usual seat. Over the next several hours, a series of cab drivers would arrive with pieces of paper that were delivered to Ted. These papers contained the gist of his column. He would read the papers and arrange them in whatever order he thought appropriate, then bundle them together, call a cab, and send them with the driver down to the Telegram as tomorrow's column. Having done his day's work and having finished several beers, he then called in another cab and went home. The Press Club was also a favourite place for politicians, lawyers, and movers and stackers. One night, Prince Phillip visited for several hours. He mixed with everyone and was much more relaxed than when seen in formal settings.

I got to meet many interesting people through the Globe & Mail. Sports stars like Pelé and Arnold Palmer and hockey players from all the teams. I also got vacations through the Globe & Mail. Jim Vipond would ask me when my reading week was and then assign me something to cover, which just happened to be in a sunny location like Florida. He would tell me to send back two or three stories spread over the week and to make sure that I used my full expense

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

account.

I, inadvertently, wrote a front-page story one summer. Jim Vipond had a friend who was the president of the Balmy Beach Lawn Bowling Club. They held a tournament every summer, and someone from the office was assigned to write stories about it. The year I was assigned, I asked the other writers what you could do to make the stories interesting. They replied that generally, you could write one story about the groundskeeper and another day about the oldest lawn bowler, but after that, you're on your own. The president of the club must've had a lot of friends because all three newspapers showed up to cover the tournament. We all were given comfortable chairs from which to view the excitement, and throughout the day they brought us refreshment. The Toronto Star and Telegram reporters thought they had a good story one day, phoned it in, and then left. Minutes after they left, there was some real excitement. There was a bank robbery, just a block away, and the bank manager was one of the guys who was lawn bowling at the time. He had to leave at once, and a substitute bowler took his place. The other bowler won the game and tournament for the team on his last shot. I wrote the story, and it happened to be a slow news day, so they decided to put it on the front page. A few days later, I saw the other reporters, who said they nearly got fired because

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

they had missed that story and submitted something that the editor was not thrilled with. Another example of being in the right place at the right time.

I was working at the Globe at the time of the famous Woodstock music festival. Some promoters in Ontario decided to hold their own Woodstock. They rented Mossport Racetrack and announced they were holding a weekend of motorcycle races. The races, in reality, were the secondary reason for the weekend. The concerts were the true purpose. Word got around the music community, and thousands descended on Mossport. The police did not have time to fully prepare for the weekend, and so their undercover officers did not look like or behave like the concertgoers. Clothing that weekend appeared optional, so this further defined who were the police. Some motorcycle races did take place between the concerts, but security was lax, and much of the time the concertgoers were driving around the racetrack. The police eventually decided to largely ignore anything inside the perimeter and basically surround the area and deal with problems on the way out. The whole weekend became a big story, and the young sports reporter/medical student was writing the front-page story.

Jim Vipond was always absent-minded and rarely got

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

the schedule completed before the day that everyone was due to work. Over time, he became more forgetful and began to lose his car wherever it was parked in Toronto. Fortunately, the police knew who he was and usually were able to find it quickly. Eventually, it became obvious that he was suffering from dementia, and it was time for him to retire. By this point in time, I was practicing in Elmvale and became his doctor. His wife died soon after, and he remarried. His personal finances were a mess. I called a good friend of his, and together we raised a fund to look after his needs for the remainder of his life. It was sad to see a friend deteriorate like this, but it was an honour to be able to return some of the generosity he had always shown me.

An \$800 tuition was not a huge sum compared to tuition these days, but it did represent a lot of money at that time, and I still had to have enough money to live. The Globe & Mail was my financial saviour. I worked full-time the first years of pre-med and medical school and then part-time until I was finishing my internship. The newspaper reviewed my pay every year and increased it every year. There were set amounts that a first-year writer, second-year writer, etc., should earn. The newspaper always paid me more than whatever bracket I was actually in. Not too many people in my medical class had a house while still

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

going to school. I did, thanks to the Globe & Mail.

The newspaper job was a necessary financial support for me. It was also great fun and taught me critical lessons that I used the rest of my working life. I needed to meet new people, put them at ease, and then get information from them. The newspaper business revolves around deadlines, and often stories had to be written in very short periods of time. Medicine has some similarities. You interview patients, get the story, and quickly decide what is wrong with them and what the treatment will be. With this job, I was operating in the real world with senior people. I needed to be mature and responsible. What a great job when you got all this training, enjoyed the work, and got paid well for it. Not bad for a guy that the sports department reporters said was the worst speller they had ever worked with.

Small Town Practice



The major decision to be made in the last year of medical school was deciding what type of medicine you want to practice. I considered obstetrics or pediatrics but in the end decided that I wanted a wide variety of challenges, and so a rural family practice might best suit me. I thought the best preparation for this type of medical practice was the internship at Scarborough General, a community hospital, where the interns got a chance to do a significant amount of hands-on practice. Once interning began, the next significant decision was what rural area I would practice in. The answer to that question was fairly easy: somewhere on or near Georgian Bay. Initially, I picked Midland and discussed practicing with Bill Kettle, but he was locked into a lease for more years, which would have meant that I had to rent a larger space than I needed and pay for it until Bill could come and practice with me. He suggested I talk to Doug Patchel and John MacKenzie in Elmvale. They both had very large and established

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

practices, and at the same time, many people were starting to move permanently into the beach areas. They were happy to have me share call, and the arrangement would be that one of the three of us would work each Wednesday and weekend and do call every third night through the week. On call usually meant seeing patients in our offices but also looking after each other's patients in the hospital on the weekends and Wednesdays. Penetanguishene Hospital was about 20 miles from Elmvale, and so many days and nights this meant multiple trips from town to the hospital if patients were very ill or women were in labour. Our phones were arranged so that the office line rang directly into our houses the nights we were on call. This was convenient for me but disruptive to the household.

Once I had decided to move to Elmvale, I needed to decide the physical site for my office. I looked around town at available space, but none seemed to fit my needs. I did find a small lot on Stone Street that was right next to the town parking lot. It was large enough to put an office on, was zoned to allow an office to be built, and even though it was small, because it was next to the parking lot, I did not have to plan for parking spaces. Even the price was not a significant hurdle, at \$10,000. A nurse friend at Scarborough General was married to a Royal Bank manager. I went to see him and arranged a loan to

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

not only buy the land but also build the building. I believe the building cost about \$40,000 to build and equip. Next, I sold my house in Toronto and bought a house in Elmvale that bordered on the Wye River. The office was built during the second half of my internship and was ready as soon as my internship was completed.



The Elmvale office on Stone Street fifty years later and with a second floor

My practice grew extremely quickly and was pretty well full within one year. I was the new and young doctor in town, and so I attracted most of the younger families. This meant I was doing about 75 deliveries per year. It also meant I was doing a great deal of pediatrics, the other

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

area of medicine I had considered entering. In those days, the fee schedule for obstetrics included all prenatal care, the delivery, and postnatal care. The fee for the entire pregnancy was about \$200. When a woman was in labour, this was often for an extended period of time and required me to go back-and-forth to the hospital several times, sometimes having to cancel offices or drive to the hospital through the night in bad weather. I tried to always deliver my own patients and even planned my holidays around due dates. I enjoyed the obstetrics, but it was both time-consuming and fatiguing. If a woman called me to say she was in labour and she lived around my office, I would ask her to first come to the office so that I could examine her and see what stage of her labour she was in. I would then send her to the hospital and monitor her progress but try to get to the hospital well before the delivery. This worked most of the time, but not always. Twice women came to the office at night in well-established labour and ready to deliver. Both times there was not time to call an ambulance and transfer her to the hospital, and so both these babies were delivered in my office safely. Another time a patient arrived in labour, but it was clear that the baby was in serious distress. An ambulance was called and I decided to try to transfer her to the hospital because the baby would likely require significant resuscitation. I

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

rode in the back of the ambulance with her, very worried about both her and the baby. Just as we were coming into Penetanguishene, the baby popped out. I looked up for a second and realized we were just passing between the two angel statues that were a gift from France. They are on the road just going into Penetanguishene. We were at the hospital a minute or so later, and I was able to rush into the emergency department and properly resuscitate the baby. Mother and baby did well.

Another significant night involved a man showing up at my office bleeding significantly from an abdominal wound. He gave me a story of accidentally cutting himself, but my strong belief was that he had been stabbed, probably by a broken beer bottle. I was able to get the bleeding stopped and sutured. The man became a patient, but he never did admit to me what actually happened. His wife also became a patient, and she developed a very large kidney stone, which was affecting her kidneys to a large extent. I booked her to see a Toronto surgeon, but prior to the surgery she came to see me and said she had a premonition that she was going to die from the surgery. The day of the surgery, I got a call from the surgeon that she had arrested on the table and died. It was a sobering reminder to listen to the patient.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

My practice days usually began with a trip to the hospital to do rounds on my patients. Penetanguishene General Hospital was a GP hospital, and so we managed our own patients with consultation from the internist or one of the two surgeons. This included patients who were in the ICU. Several times a week, I would be involved in a surgical procedure. This involvement would be either as the surgical assistant or the anaesthetist. In those days, most small rural hospitals did not have anaesthetists, and so interested GPs would undertake some further training and serve as the hospitals' anaesthetists. Doug Patchel, who I shared call with, had graduated from the University of Toronto during the war in an accelerated program. When he graduated, he was too young to be licensed, and so he spent an extra few months doing some general surgery. In those days, he still did tonsillectomies on any of his patients, and he taught me how to do the operation. One of my young patients required a tonsillectomy, and I performed the surgery with Doug looking on. I was so nervous that the patient would bleed afterwards that I never did another tonsillectomy and sent all my cases to an ENT specialist. Doug also did appendectomies. One afternoon all of the surgeons were away, and one of his patients had an acute appendix. All three of us closed our office, went to the hospital, and did the appendectomy

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

with Doug, the surgeon; John, the anaesthetist; and me, the assistant. This was rural medicine at that time.

After a morning at the hospital, I often did house calls on the way back to Elmvale. House calls were clearly a time-consuming way to practice medicine, but in rural areas they were necessary. Not everyone could get to the office, and visiting them at home provided very useful information as to both why they may be sick and how to get them better. One house call I remember particularly well. A farmer patient requested that I come to his farm to visit his brother. When I got to the farm, the man explained that his brother was a midget and had been hidden on the farm from the time he was a young child. He had been homeschooled, had not seen a doctor from a young age, and was unknown to anyone in the community. I examined him and determined that he had heart failure and needed hospitalization. It was very traumatic for the man to leave the farm for the first time in his living memory and to enter a hospital. He, of course, had no medical coverage because no one knew he existed. The hospital arranged for government coverage, and with much care from the medical staff, he did quite well during the hospitalization and from then on was seen in the community.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

Besides my practice, I also got involved in committees at the hospital. After about three years, I was elected president of the medical staff, and this gave me a seat on the board of directors for the hospital. This was the first nonprofit board I ever was part of, and ultimately it was one of many boards through my career. While the president of the medical staff, I complained one day to my friend Doris Sherriff that the hospital was too strict about doctors signing charts. This complaint came immediately after I'd been temporarily suspended for not signing my charts. Reluctantly, I did sign because I had patients in the hospital and I needed to be able to look after them. Years later, when giving a radio interview, I stressed the need for doctors to do comprehensive charting and sign off on their charts. By this point in my career, I was wearing my coroner hat. Doris happened to hear the interview and immediately phoned me to remind me of my past comments. Around this time, I was also asked to become a coroner. Normally, this invitation would come much later in a career, but they were short of coroners in the area and asked if I would consider it. I did, and it launched a whole new career for me eventually. My first case wants to attend the scene where a man had committed suicide in a small cabin with a shotgun to the head. That was a rapid introduction to the grisly side of

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

death. Soon after, I had my first murder investigation. A body was found in the woods near Horseshoe Valley Ski Resort. It was a hot summer's day, and I have never seen so many mosquitoes or flies in my life. I worked with the OPP on the case, but no one was charged at the time. Many years later, after we had DNA testing available, testing was done on some autopsy samples, and a profile of the murderer was obtained. A man who had been suspected of being the murderer was now in jail, and a warrant was obtained, requiring him to give a DNA sample. The sample matched the sample from the autopsy, and the man was charged with first-degree murder. I was called to give evidence at the preliminary trial. By this time, I was the chief coroner of Ontario and had been instrumental in establishing the DNA lab at the Centre of Forensic Sciences. And getting the funding to establish this lab, we had made the argument to the government that DNA would result in people pleading guilty in cases without a trial and thus result in better justice and lower costs in the justice system. In this case, the case went to preliminary trial, and I gave evidence about finding the body and ordering the autopsy. It was most interesting to read notes on the case that I had written some 20 years before and realize how much it changed in the interim. The preliminary trial resulted in the man being bound over

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

for trial. After the preliminary result, he pleaded guilty to the murder without the full trial. It was the first time in Canada that this happened, but it was the result that we had told the government would occur if DNA were funded properly. On my way out of court at the trial, the family of the woman who had been murdered stopped me. They thanked me profusely and said how great it was to live in a country where the murder of someone was remembered, investigated, and resolved, even if it took twenty years. My last case as a local coroner was very sad. A man had taken his two children fishing on a small lake near Midland, and we think one of the children or both fell out of the boat. The father probably went in after them and died as well as the two children despite trying to rescue them.

My saddest case as a coroner bridged my time as a local doctor and my time as a full-time coroner. Soon after I left Elmvale, there was a house fire in Elmvale, and three people were found dead in the house after the fire was extinguished. The elderly woman, who owned the house, was found downstairs, and examination revealed she had sustained serious head wounds before the fire. I felt that the fire had been set to cover up the beating, and she was likely unconscious when the fire was set. The obvious suspect was a young man who lived next door and was

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

well known to police. It turned out that he had gone to see the older women to try and borrow money. When she refused, he beat her and then set the fire to cover up. What he did not know was that she was babysitting two young boys that night. They both died in the fire of carbon monoxide poisoning. When the bodies arrived in Toronto, where I was now the Regional Supervising Coroner, I went down to the morgue. There on two tables were these two young boys, whom I had delivered, looking as though they were still alive, because carbon monoxide poisoning gives a cherry red colour to the skin that makes the person look like they are still alive. What a tragedy, and how upsetting that case was for me.

Elmvale was a wonderful small town to live in. The people were very welcoming, although I was still the new doctor. I would have remained with that title for many more years, but I left after seven years. My career as a coroner and public safety official meant I was often in the news after I left. That publicity meant I was now slightly famous and so not the new doctor now, but rather I was the doctor from Elmvale.

My personal life also changed significantly during the Elmvale years. Kevin was six months old when we moved to Elmvale. Over the next few years, once he learned

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

to walk, I would take him on weekend rounds, and he would walk around the hospital with a stethoscope around his neck, which nearly reached the floor. The patients loved his visits, and I often wondered how much influence these rounds had on his ultimate decision to be a doctor. Kevin was born in December, and a year later, in March, the twins, Robin and Bryan, were born. They had been undiagnosed as twins before the day of their delivery. There was only one of the new medical ultrasound machines in all of Ontario, so diagnosis was much different, and X-rays on pregnant women were to be avoided. Commonly the diagnosis of twins was made by hearing two heartbeats. We had wondered about twins, but in all of Cathie's prenatal visits only one heartbeat could be heard. This, in retrospect, was because the twins were lying one on top of the other. The day the twins were born, Cathie went into very active labour and we barely made it down the highway to Barrie. The fact that there were twins was quickly diagnosed because of two heartbeats, but there was no time to call another doctor in to help with the delivery and resuscitation. The solution was for me to scrub into the delivery, and, in fact, I did both hold the children first and also resuscitate them. That was certainly an experience. Now having a 14-month-old and newborn twins necessitated getting some help into the home. A

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

full-time nanny, Betty Ferris, was hired, and between the kids and a new practice, we were very busy. Things did not remain static for long. Four months later, Cathie was pregnant again, and in April, Andrew was born. We now had four young children, all born in the last 27 months. Unfortunately, it all took its toll, and Cathie decided that her future would be with a different person.

This was certainly a difficult time in my life and a big bump in the road. I had a busy practice to maintain, which included keeping people alive and well, and I had four young children with whom to build a life together and to raise to be productive adults. I realized I had to maintain a healthy mental state, and I did not have the luxury of sitting around feeling sorry about my lot in life. I determined that during this period I would not drink or use sleeping pills, and I would adjust my life to get on with the task before me. At the same time when I was facing my challenges, Henry, who owned the Chinese restaurant, had just separated from his wife. She had run away with the cook. That part was okay with Henry, but they had taken the shoebox with them that had the undeclared money in it. Henry would phone the office during the day and ask if I was coming to dinner that night. If I did not have the kids at night, I often did go to the back door of the restaurant, and Henry would let me in. He would

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

ask me if I wanted Chinese food or steak that night, and we would sit in the kitchen. He would lament the loss of his shoebox. After dinner I would offer to pay, but Henry always said no and that I had done a good job with the therapy that day. I think the therapy did me a lot of good as well, and I never had to learn to cook. A little more than a year later my life significantly changed back for the better when I married Eileen. That story, and the ensuing years, are a separate chapter.

Eileen settled well into Elmvale as the new Mrs. Young, and she did some home dialysis and worked in my office in the afternoons. The rule we operated under was that she could disagree about anything she wanted, and we would debate and settle it, but in the office, it was my license and name on the door, so debate was to be severely limited. The patients quickly loved the new Mrs. Young, and she was a huge asset to the practice. Her nursing skills were first-rate, other than one day. Two new patients with similar names came in one after the other. One had an abdominal problem, and one had a sore throat. She mixed them up and gave a gown to the sore throat woman and told her to strip down. She did but did seem perplexed when I went in and introduced myself. The error was recognized, she remained a patient, and the College of Physicians and Surgeons was not notified. The other

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

patient turned out to have cancer, and it was operated on and cured. A close call.

About a year after Eileen and I were married, I raised the idea with Eileen that I was not sure a rural practice was going to be my life's work. I liked the hospital work in the mornings and the house calls, but I did not find the afternoon office offered enough challenge and variety. I could not see myself maintaining a rural practice for another thirty or more years, and so I was thinking about what to do next. The answer soon came, and we were on our way to Toronto for new adventures.

I learned and matured a lot in my seven years in Elmvale. When you start in your practice, you are suddenly on your own. The training wheels are off, and you make the decisions. You quickly come to realize that especially in a small town, everyone is watching you and will determine your reputation. You cannot afford a disaster even if it is not your fault. Once you have established your reputation, people are much more forgiving, but not necessarily at first. I had made it. I had used the skills I learned in medical school and at the Globe and Mail to gather information, make decisions, and then go back later to see if those decisions seemed to work or change direction if necessary. I would use these same skills and continue to

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

hone them as my career continued to evolve in ways I could not even dream about.

Doctor Death



When I realized that rural family medicine was not going to be my life's work, I had a difficult decision to make. I considered entering a specialty medical area such as obstetrics or pediatrics, but I also thought about going back to school and doing a law degree. Also factoring into my decision was the fact that at this point in my life, I had a wife and four children. As often happens, the solution suddenly just appeared. Ross Bennett had just replaced Beatty Cotnam as the Chief Coroner of Ontario, and Peter King had moved from being the regional coroner for Metropolitan Toronto to the deputy chief coroner position.

It was not the sudden availability of the job as Regional Coroner for Metropolitan Toronto that attracted me so much as the fascinating nature of the job and the long-term prospects it offered. The motto of the coroner's office in Ontario is "We speak for the dead to protect the living." All sudden and unexpected deaths in Ontario are

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

investigated by the office of the chief coroner. A coroner attends the scene and has the right of entry, search, and seizure in relation to the body. These are very broad but necessary powers in order to ensure that the death of no one is overlooked, concealed, or ignored. The coroner orders an autopsy if it is felt to be necessary, orders any other necessary tests, and works with police assistance to do any other investigation that might be necessary. At the end of the investigation, the coroner determines who died, where they died, when they died, the cause of death, and the manner of death. Answering these questions can be both difficult and controversial. If, for example, multiple people in a family all die in a single event, determining who dies first can be very important in deciding who inherits the estate, particularly in cases that involve blended families. The determination of cause of death plays an important role in cases such as hospital deaths, where the quality of care can be an issue.

Manner of death is the determination of whether the death was from natural causes, homicide, accident, suicide, or is undetermined. Of these, suicide is often the most controversial. Many families I dealt with over the years much preferred that a death be recorded as either natural or homicide rather than a suicide. In fact, in one case that I was directly involved in, the Ontario Court of Appeal

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

ruled that the burden of proof in order to call a death a suicide is higher than the burden of proof for any of the other manners of death.

In Ontario, when I joined the coroner's office, we investigated 30,000 deaths per year. In each case, a local coroner would be notified by police, a hospital, or a nursing home, and they would attend the scene. If the case appeared to be difficult or controversial, the local coroner was expected to contact their regional coroner and discuss the appropriate course of action. There were eight regional coroners in the province. I was appointed the regional coroner for Metropolitan Toronto. This was by far the largest region and managed 40% of the provincial total. At the time of my appointment, I had been a local coroner for about five years, so this was a very big step for me. My first phone call in my new job demonstrated to me what a big step it was. A very senior Toronto local coroner, Don Bunt, called just as I sat down at my desk for the first time to tell me that the former Premier of Ontario had just been found dead at his apartment. He had suffered a serious stroke some months before, became depressed, and committed suicide. Don explained this to me and asked, "What would you like me to do?" My reply was, "What were you thinking of doing?" He explained his course of action, and I quickly agreed. Don turned

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

out to be a very important mentor to me. Years later, one of the television stations decided that they wanted to follow a coroner around for a day. I chose Don Bunt, and he agreed to the filming. The story turned out better than we could've imagined when, after following Don and investigating deaths, the cameras next followed him to the hospital where he visited his newborn grandson.

At the time I made the decision to join the Office of the Chief Coroner, my father expressed his concern. He wondered why I would leave my busy practice in an area where I loved living in order to investigate death. He also pointed out that the salary for my coroner's position was about 40% of what I was making as a family doctor. In the end, this financial discrepancy was made even worse because wage and price controls came in soon after I joined the coroner's office, and I did not get a raise for nearly 5 years. However, I did not join the Office of the Chief Coroner in order to make money. I joined because I believed that this challenging work could make a difference. Death investigation provides important answers to families and aids significantly in working through the grieving process. The facts from investigations also played an important role in settling issues in civil and criminal matters. Coroner investigations also result in recommendations. The

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

recommendations are non-binding but carry significant weight in the court of public opinion. These recommendations can be made after an investigation or may be made by a jury following an inquest.

At the time I joined the Office of the Chief Coroner, we held about 50 inquests a year. Certain circumstances, such as a death in custody or a death in the workplace, required a mandatory inquest. The mandatory inquests constituted about half of the cases. The discretionary inquests were called following discussion between the regional coroners, the deputy chief coroner, and the chief coroner. They tended to be much longer and much more detailed hearings. If there appeared to be a recurring problem resulting in deaths, we would look for a good representative case that would illustrate the problem and result in workable recommendations to prevent similar deaths in the future. For example, we had several deaths of children who were being supervised by various children's aid societies. At that time, the emphasis was on keeping the family together. We believed that the emphasis should be on the safety of the child first and keeping the family together as a secondary function. We also felt that there were gaps in the training and resources available for the children's aid workers. The inquests we held tried to address these shortcomings, and they did

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

successfully address these issues. We also held a series of inquests concerning the bail and parole system in Ontario. These resulted in a tightening of the system and the introduction of the dangerous offender category.

A police officer or officers would be assigned to investigate a death that was going to inquest. They would produce a brief, which would include the exhibits for the inquest and the will-say statements of all of the witnesses. A crown attorney would be assigned to the case as the coroner's council. The coroner was the presiding officer at the inquest. The issues at an inquest are often complex, and there are often legal arguments. We trained the coroners to deal with these issues and to make rulings. These rulings were subject to review by the courts, so it was important that the coroners understand how to rule. I conducted many inquests, with some as long as a couple of months. In complex cases, there would be many parties with standing, represented by their own lawyers, some of whom were among the best-known lawyers in Ontario. Several times I had to adjourn inquests for a period of time while parties were standing and found new counsel because their lawyer had been appointed a judge while serving on the inquest. Once someone is named a judge, they must immediately cease any legal work they are currently doing. In one controversial case, in which

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

I presided, this happened when one of the lawyers was named to the Supreme Court of Canada.

Inquests produced many recommendations every year and resulted in significant changes in healthcare, workplace safety, the justice system, and everyday life. The role of presiding coroner was fascinating but difficult. The issues were complex. There were many legal challenges, and often the issues were emotional. Court would usually sit for about five hours a day. This might seem like a short workday, but it was very intense work for everyone, including the jury, to concentrate for even that long. My mother came to watch one of my inquests once. She told me before she came that she did not intend to stand up when I entered the room, as was required. She felt as the mother of the coroner that she had the right to not stand. When the time came, I noted that she did do as required, although I don't know what I would've done if she had not stood.

One of the most controversial inquests I conducted looked into the death of a baby born at home on the Toronto Islands in the care of a midwife. At the time in Ontario, family doctors were stopping doing obstetrics as part of their practice for a number of reasons, including the time it took, the disruption to their practice, the concern they

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

had about bad outcomes, and the inadequate fee structure. Midwives were being self-trained without a supervisory body to evaluate their practice. They were also promoting home deliveries, and there were no rules guiding the safety of this change. It was obvious that if the trend continued and doctors were delivering fewer babies, then midwives would be delivering more, and with no supervised training. When my office reviewed the case, it was clear that there were issues surrounding the care. The midwives had waited to try and transfer the mother to a hospital and then had logistical problems getting an ambulance and ferry to get the mother and baby to the mainland. The midwives involved and their supporters did everything they could think of to stop the inquest. They criticized the fact that a male doctor would be the presiding officer, and they approached the Premier to have him overrule the holding of the inquest at all. His reply was that he did not have the jurisdiction to overrule the coroner because the Coroners Act ensured independence. The morning the inquest began, there were protests outside of the Coroner's Court.

Once we began the inquest, it was clear that there was going to be an attempt to disrupt the proceedings. Multiple women had brought their young babies, who would cry and get fussy, which would then result in the

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

mothers breastfeeding the children in the court. During a break, I sent a note to the jury asking whether they were finding the activities in the court to be disruptive to their deliberations. I quickly got a note back indicating that they did. At the start of court, after the recess, I read the note into the court record and indicated that I do not intend to make a ruling at this time, but perhaps those with children in the courtroom might want to decide to allow the jury to do their job without the disruption. The children disappeared, and the inquest continued, but not without its challenges. We often used experts in inquests, and in this particular case, there was an obstetrician, Knox Ritchie, who had just immigrated from Ireland and had written a chapter in a textbook about midwifery and home deliveries. He agreed to be the expert in the case, and when we were qualifying him as an expert, the midwives' lawyer challenged him strongly. I let the challenge go on for a period of time and then indicated I was ready to make a ruling that Dr. Ritchie was indeed qualified to be an expert in the case. Later he complained to me that he hadn't realized that his qualifications would be challenged in this manner, and if he had, he might not have agreed to do the case. I replied that I had assumed there would be the challenge, but I knew better than to tell him in advance because I needed him as an expert. After that case, we

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

became lifelong friends until his death.

One day there was a particularly contentious debate about the admissibility of some evidence. I listened to all the arguments and made a ruling. I had no sooner finished the ruling than the lawyer for the family stood up and argued all of the same points again. I made the same ruling again, and she began the re-argument a third time. I then interrupted her and made the point that in this court, unlike in an argument at home, here I had the last word. The next day was a quiet day for news, as this particular ruling was highlighted in a story including my final statement. Eileen was less than amused by my analogy, and it cost me a new outfit. Eventually, we got through all the evidence and the submissions to the jury. The midwives discovered, to their surprise, that in fact, we were advocating that a college of midwifery be established so there would be supervision of training and practice. They had assumed, wrongly, that we were going to recommend the banning of midwifery. The jury did as we requested, and the College of Midwifery was established along with standards for the profession. Knox and I were eventually invited to address the new college. Many of our medical colleagues were less than enthralled with the idea of the new college, but I never heard any of those who criticized express a better solution to the

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

person-power problem.

I was the regional coroner for metropolitan Toronto for five years. By the end of this time, we were short some regional coroners, and I was managing the York, Peel, Durham, and Niagara areas as well as Toronto. Peter King decided to retire as the Deputy Chief Coroner, and I was directly appointed to the position. Two years after that, Ross Bennett decided to retire, and again I was directly appointed to the position of Chief Coroner of Ontario. I was now responsible for the 30,000 investigations per year that were conducted by the nearly 300 local medical coroners. As well, there were approximately 200 pathologists who conducted autopsies for the Office of the Chief Coroner. We also had five full-time forensic pathologists who worked at our office in Toronto. To ensure consistency in our investigations, the office embarked on a project to produce a coroner's manual that outlined proper procedures in conducting death investigations and presiding at inquests. This manual was a continuing work in progress and was supplemented by yearly courses that we ran to train the coroners and pathologists.

As chief coroner, it was my responsibility to liaise with the government in order to ensure funding for the office

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

and assure the government of the quality of our investigations. As previously mentioned, the Coroners Act insured independence of the office. Never in my 20+ years in the Office of the Chief Coroner did any government official interfere in the operations or decision-making. The Solicitor General and senior staff in the ministry would be informed in advance of contentious decisions we had made, but they never attempted to overrule them. In fact, many times, I would see the premier, and he would comment on an inquest that was currently underway. One such time we were holding an inquest into a major car accident on the 400 highway near Windsor. The evidence included the latest findings on photo radar. The premier had ended photo radar the day he took office, as a political promise. He commented that he was aware of all the evidence in the Windsor case, and there would probably be a recommendation to reinstitute photo radar. He promised he would look at all the recommendation seriously and implement anything he could except a reintroduction of photo radar. We decided that on this issue we would agree to disagree.

In addition to being the chief coroner within a year of being appointed to the job, I was asked to temporarily become the Assistant Deputy Minister for Public Safety in the Ministry of the Solicitor General. This meant that I

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

was reporting to myself but then onto the Deputy Minister for matters such as budget and overall performance. It also gave me responsibility for a number of other agencies that made up the Public Safety division of the ministry. That turned out to be a 16-year commitment and is another chapter in the story. This job added to the variety in my days but did not add to my finances. Since the chief coroner's job was the higher-paying job, that pay was what I received, and I got nothing for the second appointment. Doctors' pay in government was way behind private practice. In my entire 26 years in the Ontario government, I only got five raises, and only the last raise increased my pay from what I had been making in private practice when I left. Fortunately, I did not join the government to get rich, and it is nice to have a pension in retirement.

An important part of my job as Chief Coroner was to not only liaise with the government but also with the public and organizations. Our investigations were resulting in hundreds of recommendations every year, so it was important that the lessons learned be disseminated. As with many things, the more you do something, the more you get asked to do something. People also used to say that I never saw a microphone that I did not like. I gave keynote addresses and lectures to medical groups, trade groups, governments outside of Ontario, and anyone

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

asking me to speak. Many of these lectures were to large groups of hundreds of people, and they were around the world. I enjoyed public speaking, but each of these talks took preparation. I never knew when my schedule might be disrupted by a new emergency, and so I needed to prepare each talk well in advance, in case I had no time in the days before the talk. I would think about my topic as soon as someone asked me to speak and then within days start preparing my slides. This suited me fine because I have always done things at the time, rather than at the last minute. I would review my slides the day before a talk and make any last-minute changes. I almost always produced slides for my talks and took my cues from them. I very seldom, if ever, wrote out a talk and just read it.

I also thought it was important to give back to your profession through work in organizations. I accepted cross appointments with the University of Toronto and was an assistant professor in both the pathology and forensic science programs. Of the professional organizations I belonged to, I became president of several. The Toronto Medical Legal Society, the International Coroners Association, and the American Academy of Forensic Sciences were three that I led.

The AAFS is the largest multidisciplinary forensic

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

organization in the world, with six to seven thousand members. It takes about 15 years to work through the various committees and elected positions before becoming president for a year. During your term, the president picks a location for the annual six-day meeting and a topic for the year. I chose ethics in forensic science, and as part of what I did my year, we reviewed and rewrote the AAFS Ethics Code. I choose San Antonio for the meeting in February. It was warm and scenic along the Riverwalk. The conference had about 2500 attendees. The president is given the largest suite in the hotel and a fully stocked bar. The trade show connected to the meeting brings in large revenues, so the AAFS has a substantial budget for the meeting. We were encouraged to entertain members who had served on committees throughout the year and international guests in the suite, and did we ever. Eileen was Mrs. Hostess, and we held luncheons, an ice cream social, and multiple other gatherings. The president also gets to hold a large party with a theme on Thursday night. A large banquet room is booked, and food, drinks, and entertainment are provided. Naturally we picked a country and western theme since the meeting was in Texas. The food was southwest food like wings, and the entertainment was a square dance for everyone. We were exhausted at the end of the week, but what a party. As well as an

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

enduring gift, our first grandchild, Joshua, was born that week.

During my time in the Office of the Chief Coroner and after, I was involved in investigating a number of international incidents. These included 9/11, the Bali bombing, the Swiss Air airline crash, the death of the elected president of Nigeria, and a controversial death in Kazakhstan. I will detail these in separate chapters.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



Farewell Dinner Honouring

Dr. James G. Young

October 14, 2004

*Montecassino Banquet Hall
3710 Chesswood Drive
Downsview, Ontario*

A final bow as Chief Coroner before I moved on

My time in the Office of the Chief Coroner, and specifically as the Chief, was my favourite job in my

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

working career. Each day posed new challenges, and the work was never repetitious. The job did not pay well, but I did not go into it for the money. I loved going to work every day, and I think we made a difference in the lives of many Ontarians. With time, my father understood my motivation and the tremendous good that could be done from investigating death and agreed with my career decision. My good friend, Wayne Frechette, used to introduce me at head tables as Dr. Death, and I see that as a compliment.

Beyond Coroner



I had barely begun my new role of Chief Coroner of Ontario when I was asked to take over the Public Safety Division of the Ministry of the Solicitor General on a short-term interim basis. About a year later, I asked when my time might expire and was told that a decision had been made that the additional job should be mine permanently. The title at the time was Assistant Deputy Solicitor General for Public Safety. After 9/11, when counterterrorism was added to my portfolio, my title changed to Commissioner of Public Safety and Security, and I was promoted to Deputy Minister status.

The Public Safety Division consisted of the Office of the Chief Coroner, the Centre of Forensic Sciences, the Ontario Fire Marshal, Emergency Measures Ontario, and animal welfare. My role, in addition to the full running of the coroner's system, was to coordinate these agencies and their budgets with each other, advance new legislation affecting them, liaise with the elected officials, and ensure

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

the quality delivery of services from the agencies to the public.

The Centre of Forensic Sciences, obviously, worked closely with the coroners but also with the police and courts. The Centre operates labs in Toronto and Sault Ste. Marie and is a full-service lab that does cases related to all the forensic disciplines, including DNA, biology, chemistry, toxicology, photography, computer science, and handwriting analysis. The lab has a well-earned world reputation for excellence. It does all the forensic work in Ontario, which is about 40% of the Canadian total. The RCMP lab system does about 40%, and the Quebec lab about 20%.

The Ontario Fire Marshal administered all acts related to fire, including setting standards for fire departments in the province and investigating potentially controversial fires. Some of these fires involved loss of life, so there was a natural overlap with coroners and forensics, who analyzed accelerants, and police. In Ontario, because of sheer size and different population densities, there are three types of fire departments. There are departments made up of all full-time firemen in larger cities. In small centres, such as Midland, there were composite departments, made up of a few full-time firemen, who were supplemented by

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

volunteers. The largest number of fire departments were the totally volunteer departments that served rural areas and small communities. Larger full-time departments had their own training facilities, but smaller and volunteer departments went to Fire College in Gravenhurst to be trained. The college was on a gorgeous property on Lake Muskoka. I often lectured there and visited the college as often as I could. The property was so nice that the politicians at Queens Park wanted to sell the land and redevelop it into housing. They were very disappointed when I pointed out that we had conducted burns on the property as part of training, and these burns had contaminated the soil and would cost more to clean up than the property was worth. While I was supervising fire, the province decided to modernize and combine all the fire acts into one. This is easier said than done. Municipalities, fire chiefs, and unions all have different views of what the standards should not only be, but also what can be afforded. After many months of herding cats, we finally got general agreement, and a new act was passed.

The animal welfare part of my portfolio was the administration of the OSPCA Act. Historically, governments developed legislation to protect animals before the creation of children's aid societies. One year,

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

there was a well-publicized and serious animal abuse case. More people that year wrote to the Ontario government about that case than any other issue by a large margin. I was once in a cabinet meeting about some potentially controversial changes to the OSPCA Act. Debate started around the table between ministers, who held contradictory views. The debate went on and on with no resolution. Finally, the Premier reminded everyone that the time for the cabinet meeting was nearly up and no decision had been made, nor had any other government business been settled. Finally, the meeting moved on, and it was years before the issue discussed that day was settled.

The need to actively assess the threat of terrorism arose after 9/11. Suddenly, it was necessary to assess the risk to critical infrastructure in much more detail. Responsibility for this review fell to EMO. It also became necessary to advise the premier on an ongoing basis of the risks that the province was facing. This was a role that I was given. This meant that I needed to meet regularly with CSIS, the RCMP, the Canadian military, and our own OPP. I needed to assess any threats from Al-Qaeda, other terrorist groups, or homegrown terrorists acting on their own. In order to do this job, I needed high-level security clearance. I found that most of the intelligence I learned

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

served to confirm the threats that I already thought existed, but I learned only minimally more.

Emergency Measures Ontario has the mandate of preparing for and ultimately managing any emergencies that arise in Ontario. Most emergencies would involve a significant number of the ministries of government, and so it was necessary to coordinate the response. This coordination extended to other levels of government, other provinces, and potentially companies. Half of the budget that EMO received in a year came from the nuclear industry because half of Ontario's electricity is produced at the three nuclear facilities. These facilities are tightly regulated, but should something go wrong, they pose a significant risk to the citizens of Ontario. For this reason, we constantly worked on our nuclear preparedness and yearly carried out a detailed practice exercise.

EMO operates the Provincial Operations Centre, from where emergencies are managed. Every Ontario ministry, the federal government, and any other governments or groups centrally involved in the emergency all have a designated area in the ops centre. Each would coordinate back to their home agency and bring forward to the POC issues that needed to be solved and report any progress in the field. Several times a day, the senior management

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

of the POC would meet to discuss these issues that have been brought forward. In addition to being the overall spokesperson for the emergency, it was my role to chair these meetings and keep the decisions moving. The key is that the meetings must be short and result in decisions being made and not just discussed. In a true emergency, you cannot spend all your time discussing things and be afraid to make decisions. Once a decision is made, you can always go back and review it and change things going forward. This approach parallels what doctors do every day. Symptoms are elicited from the patient, tests and examinations suggest a diagnosis, and a course of treatment is started. This is reassessed on an ongoing basis and adjusted depending on results.

EMO had an obvious role in managing SARS and events surrounding 9/11. I will deal with my role and thoughts surrounding both of these in separate chapters. Y2K, the ice storm, and the power blackout all were challenges for EMO.

Computer specialists and emergency planners from around the world raised the alarm about a potential disaster the minute the new century began on January 1, 2000. The problem was the way computers were originally designed. Only two digits were assigned to the year. The

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

concern was that when the year was now 00, the computer might misinterpret this and fail to function properly. Billions of dollars were spent around the world to upgrade systems to prevent this and to plan just in case problems arose. On New Year's Eve all staff were required in the POC. We provided great food but no alcohol and sat and waited for midnight. As everyone knows, nothing of any consequence occurred. Many people criticized all the preparation that had taken place as unnecessary. However, I believe they were wrong. If everyone had ignored the risk and the worst-case scenario had taken place, the same people would've been highly critical. Rarely does the public appreciate planning that prevents a problem from occurring. This kind of planning is called mitigation. One of the greatest examples of it is the waterways that were built around Winnipeg to prevent the ongoing flooding from the Red River in the spring. When they were built, they were referred to by many people as Duff's Folly. Duff Roblin had been the premier of Manitoba and was the person who spearheaded the construction. This project has saved many lives and resulted in billions of dollars of savings in property loss or damage. On Y2K night, the only thing of significance that happened was an earthquake on Lake Ontario, which potentially could have affected the Pickering and Durham nuclear reactors. It did

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

not.

Budgeting for the Ontario government began early in a new year. In January 1998, the process was underway, and it was not going well. Deep cuts were being contemplated. At the best of times, I found budget planning boring but also frightening. I was therefore not terribly upset when I was pulled out of a budget meeting because of a problem in eastern Ontario. There had been a huge ice storm, including Ottawa and a good part of Quebec. Trees had toppled, driving was impossible, and most importantly, power lines, poles, and towers were down. Kingston, for example, thought they were going to have to rebuild their entire power system within the city. Ottawa had only one of their three main lines that supplied the city. Further bad weather was predicted, and the concern was that the one remaining line would go down as well. When a line went down, multiple towers went down with it, and rebuilding takes significant time. When the storm occurred, EMO had only one employee in the region. We quickly dispatched three more field officers. The plan had been for EMO to manage our part of the emergency from the POC in Toronto. Like all good plans, it was only good until the emergency really began, and then it was time to start modifying it. The Premier was in Ottawa and did a news conference with the regional chair. The two men did

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

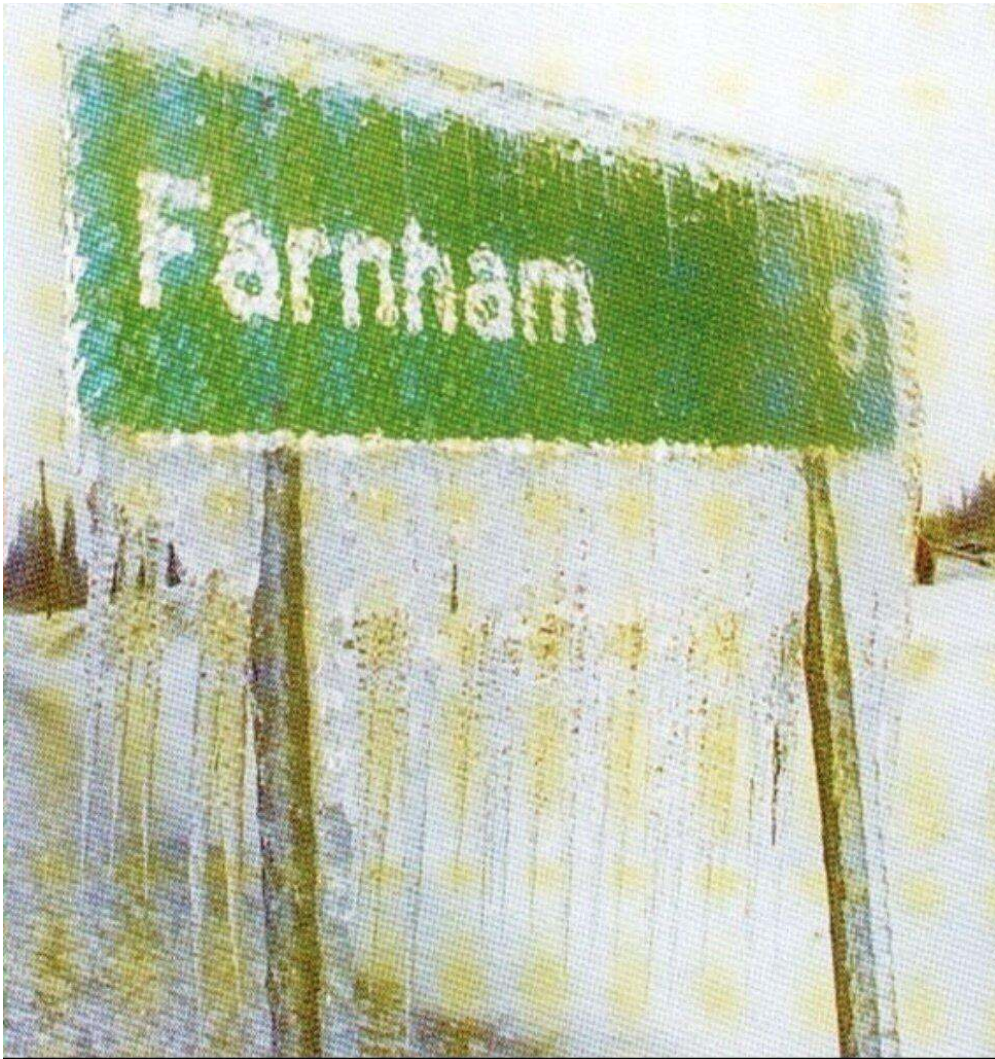
not particularly get along, and the Premier did not like the direction that the regional chair was taking. I watched the news conference on TV and sensed the tension between the two. As soon as the news conference ended, I got a call from the Premier with instructions to get to eastern Ontario as quickly as possible to manage the ice storm from there.

Landing in Ottawa and coming in from the airport, it was a strange sight. Everything was covered in thick ice, and in the woods there were significant numbers of trees fallen from the weight of the ice. I dealt with the Ottawa issues first and then turned my attention to the rest of the region. Part of the strategy was to get the focus away from Ottawa and the regional chair and onto the rest of Eastern Ontario. To help accomplish this, I had the use of a military helicopter. It was sitting on a plaza next to a high-rise office tower. I would get into the helicopter, and it would go straight up past the windows of the workers who were at their desks and then fly within feet of the Peace Tower at the Parliament buildings. Every time this happened, I used to think that if this was the United States and we were flying over the Capitol Building, we would be shot down. I would arrive at my meeting by helicopter and talk with local officials about what their significant issues were at this point in time. After this

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

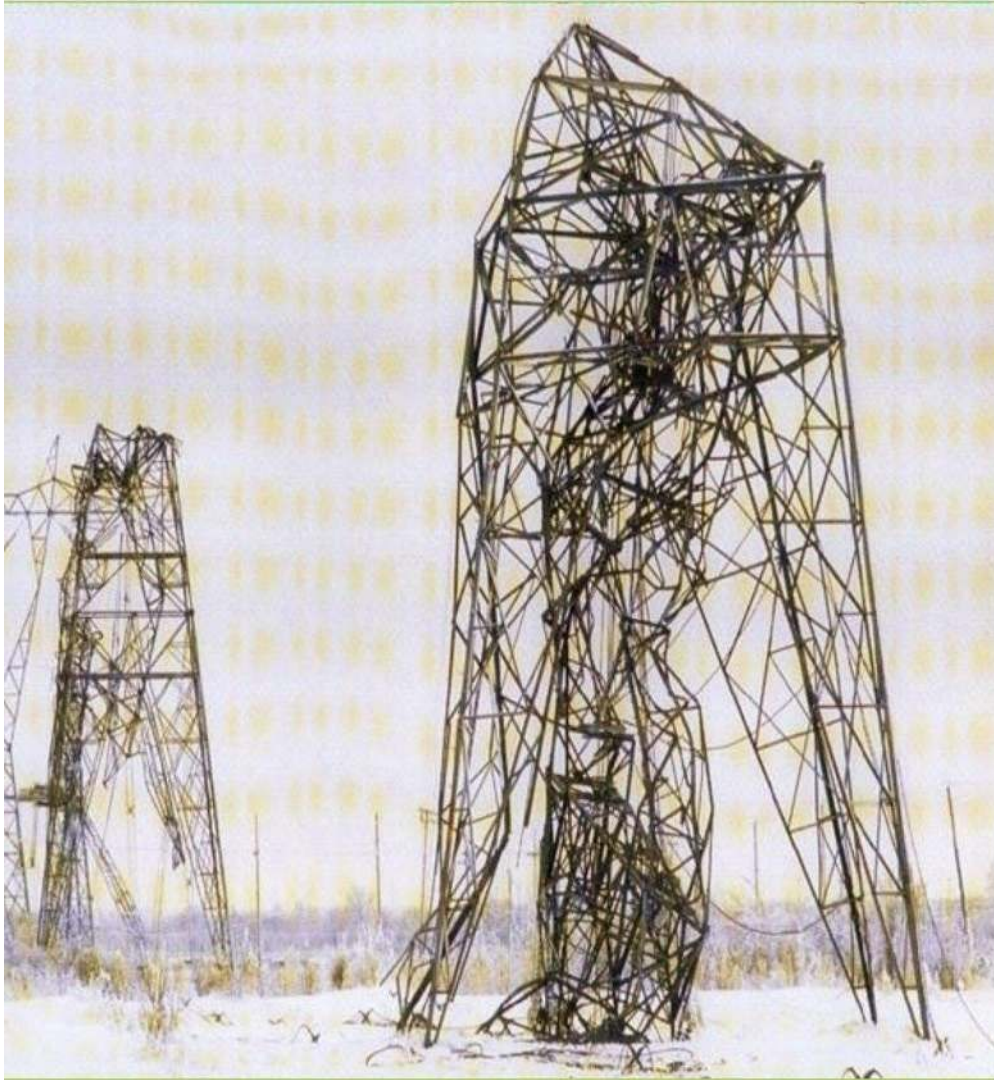
meeting, a number of cabinet ministers would arrive, and I would meet with them and suggest what actions the Ontario government might take in order to improve the local situation. The ministers were not only receptive, but they also had the ability to approve the actions that needed to be taken. This meant that decisions were made in a timely manner and local priorities were being addressed. Once approval was obtained, the ministers and the local politicians would meet, and a press conference would be arranged. Invariably the local politicians would praise the quick action of the province, which certainly pleased the Premier. I think we successfully managed the ice storm, despite having only a few people actually on the ground, and the idea of budget cuts was dropped.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



An example of the thickness of the ice

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



Electricity had to be rerouted until these towers could be rebuilt

A few years later, I was on holiday at the cottage when I got a phone call that the electricity was out for most of the province. Only the most western part of Ontario had power because this area was on a different grid. The United States media were already reporting that this blackout, which also affected large parts of the United States, was the result of a problem in Ontario. We had

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

no evidence that this was the case and, in fact, believed that it was not. This accusation complicated management because we normally had to deal with the blackout and how to end it, but now we also had to deal with the negative publicity. The electricity grids are very interconnected between Canada and the United States. All of the eastern part of North America except Quebec is on one grid. Western North America is a separate grid except for Texas, which has its own. There are very strict standards for the operation of the grid, so it was a significant question as to what had gone wrong on this hot summer's day. It is also interesting to note that Texas is known to not operate its electrical system to the same standards and in recent years has had several very serious blackouts. Within a short period of time, it had become obvious that the source of the blackout was a small utility in Ohio. The utility had failed its maintenance of overhead wires, and branches on these wires had caused power fluctuations. Instead of shutting their system down, as required, they allowed these fluctuations to increase to the point that they triggered the massive blackout. One of my early jobs in the blackout was to try to set the record straight at a press conference along with the premier.

The next order of business was to figure out how to get the blackout ended. We had no actual damage to

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

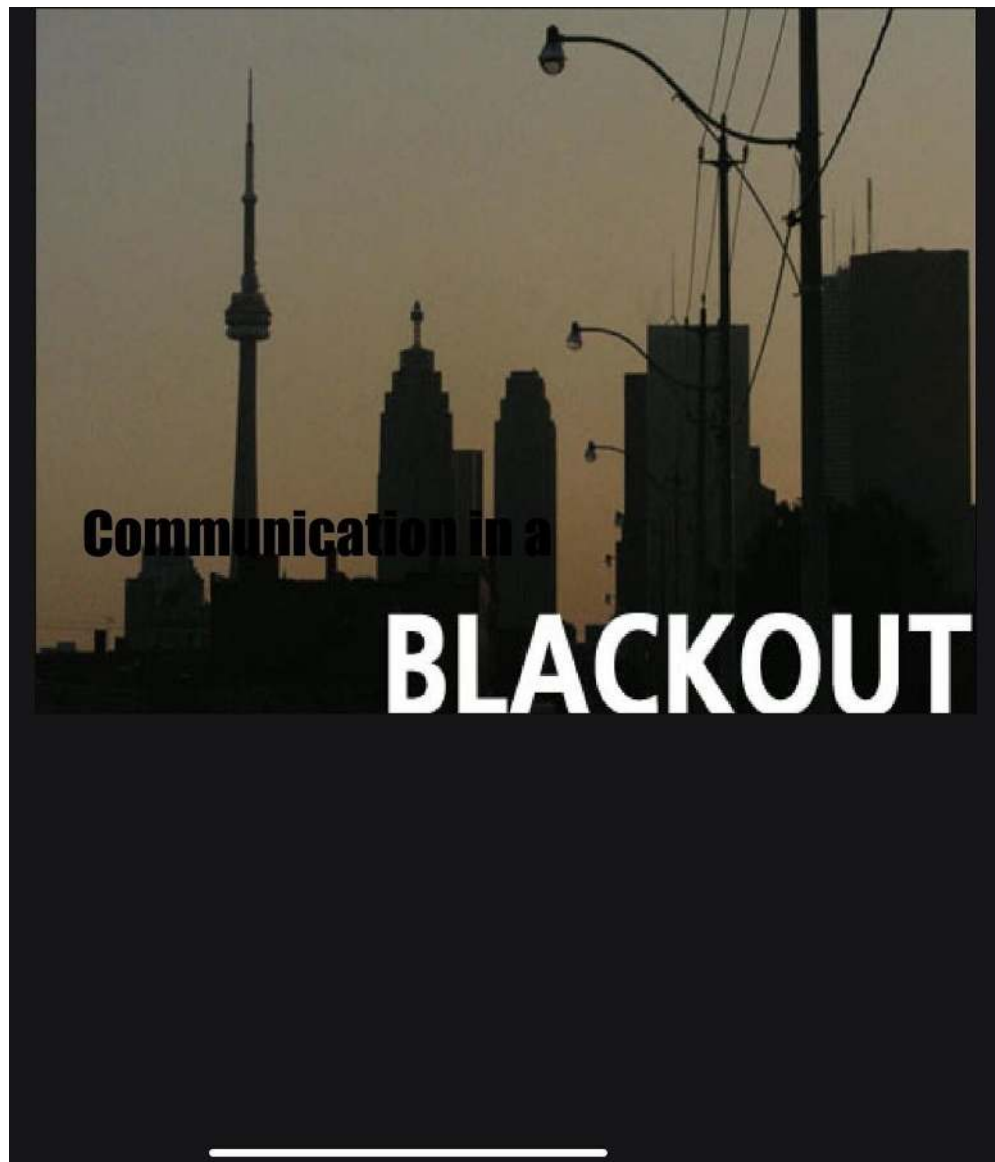
our electrical delivery system, and so it might seem that once the offending area was isolated, our power would return. It was not that simple. We generate more than 50% of our electrical power from nuclear reactors. When the blackout occurred, the safety regulations called for the nuclear reactors to be shut down. Once this process has started, it takes a week to fully restore the output of the nuclear reactors. In the interim, if industries, businesses, and people all return to their normal electrical use, the stress on the system will trigger further blackouts. The amount of electricity consumed must be very close to the amount that is being produced, and so we needed to control consumption carefully. This was done by holding press conferences on a regular basis and informing the public whether it was safe for them to use air conditioning and appliances. When we asked for a drop in consumption, it was amazing to see that within minutes the overall consumption in the province would fall significantly.

Public consumption is about a third of the electrical needs, with industry requiring greater than a third and the remainder being used by business. Industries were not keen on stopping production, but we asked for their cooperation. When they hesitated, which did occur occasionally, we made it clear that the power could be cut to their factories if necessary, and we would argue about

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

the legality of that later in court. We did not have to make good on our threat as they saw the light. One of the harder activities to stop was the casinos. They had generators and thought they could continue to operate. We said the optics were wrong despite them having the generators and ordered them closed. The same was true with the CNE. We thought the optics were wrong for them to be open when people did not have air conditioning in their homes and industries were closed. We delayed the opening of the CNE until we were sure the power was fully restored.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



Toronto in darkness

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



Highlights indicate states or provinces in North America that were affected by power outage

To get to the city from the cottage at the beginning of the blackout, I figured the highways would be jammed, and I needed a reliable way to travel. I asked for the OPP helicopter to come and get me. After landing at the Huronia Airport, we went on to Orangeville to pick up the premier, who was at his nomination meeting. From there we flew downtown and landed at the Jarvis Collegiate parking lot, and the police took us to the POC. I worked all night and all the next day and went home in the evening to get some rest.

I was awakened by my pager and realized it was Eileen calling me. I had no cell in those days; we had no power

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

in the condo yet, and so I got dressed and went walking to find a pay phone. Several blocks away I found the phone, but I had to line up for many minutes to use it, and then I needed my credit card to phone long distance. I finally got through, and it was a very noisy reception I got. Clearly a party was going on. The neighbourhood had been worried about food spoiling, so they decided to cook it all and have a big party. Apparently they thought the liquor would spoil as well, because they seemed to have decided to drink as much of it as possible. Eileen finally came to the phone and at first seemed to not recall she had paged me but then said she just wanted to say hello. After a brief conversation I said my goodbye, walked home, and went to bed. I got thinking about my credit card for some reason, and after checking, realized I had probably dropped it. I got dressed again and walked back to the pay phone. I could not find the card despite a thorough search of the entire route. That left no choice but to go back to the POC where there was a phone and cancel the card. That done, I went back home and to bed. Worst of all, I am told I missed one of the best parties ever.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



A mini cabinet meeting with Premier Eves allowing me to run the session

Within weeks of the blackout, a mini emergency occurred. A meatpacking plant was caught processing dead carcasses, and there was the possibility that tainted meat had been distributed. The meat inspectors and the OPP had been conducting an investigation for some time when news of the problem became public. Immediately questions arose as to why the investigation took so long and why the packing plant had not been shut down because of the health scare.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

At various times, including one six-month period, I would also fill in as the acting deputy Solicitor General and deputy minister of Correctional Services. This included responsibility for policing services, the OPP, and the provincial jails. When the meatpacking story broke, I got a call to go immediately to a meeting in the premier's boardroom. I figured my involvement was because of the OPP, and so I phoned the OPP Commissioner to get more information on the investigation. When I arrived at the meeting, it was very obvious that the political staff of the premier were very upset about the way the investigation had been handled. An earlier meeting that morning had done nothing to reassure them. After some discussion and some ideas around the table, the premier's chief of staff asked me what I thought should be done. I gave my views, and she commented that she and the premier totally agreed with me, and therefore I would now be in total charge of this matter. The ministers and public servants would take all their lead from me. This was very unusual for ministers to be told to take all their instructions from a civil servant. I went to them after the meeting to apologize and assure them I did not know this was going to happen. They assured me they were fine with my leadership and would take my directions.

Next I was told that the premier wanted to talk to me. I

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

went to the meeting in his office. He explained that by law he had to call an election within a few weeks. We had just finished dealing with SARS and the blackout, and now this tainted meat investigation was front and centre. He wanted to know how long it would take to determine if there was any real health risk. I suggested perhaps a couple of weeks. He said that was too long. I explained that it took time to do the necessary tests, and if a test was positive, then that led to another test. This was not like the old TV show Name That Tune, where you bid how many notes it would take to identify a song. However, I thought perhaps within a week we would have a good idea. We then went to the Premier's other office to do a press conference. It started with the Premier making a few general remarks, then announcing I would now be in charge of this matter. I had just been in charge of SARS and the blackout, so one of the reports asked if I now was in charge of the province. By this time, the Premier had moved out from behind his desk and was leaving the room. Off camera he answered the question by saying, "It would seem these days that he more or less is." About that time I realized I was sitting at the Premier's desk with him not in the picture, but photos of his family clearly in view. Over the next week, the premier phoned me frequently, sometimes at home, to check on progress. He called the

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

election the day after I assured him we had found no danger to the public. Despite this, he lost the election.



Just before an election call, the tainted meat issue arises

One case that overlapped my various duties was the Bernardo murders. Paul Bernardo was a rapist in Toronto. He was one of many suspects, and a DNA sample had been obtained from him. The DNA lab at the Centre of Forensic Sciences was just being established at that time, and the testing method that was used had to be done in weekly steps and was cumbersome. DNA samples, for testing, were flooding the lab beyond capacity, and when the Toronto rapes stopped, the samples from these rapes were put aside for later testing. It turned out that the reason that the rapes had stopped in Toronto was that Paul Bernardo

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

and his wife, Carla Homolka, had moved to the Niagara region, where they continued to be involved in rapes but also in murders. On a Christmas Eve, Carla and Paul drugged and raped Carla's sister, Tammy. She aspirated from the drug she was given and died. The coroner who investigated the case failed to adequately explain some of the autopsy findings, including a burned area around the mouth caused by a cloth soaked in an anaesthetic agent. The case was ruled an accident.

After this, the pair kidnapped two young schoolgirls, raped them, and murdered them. These cases were unsolved and obviously high profile when the DNA result came back from the delayed testing, with the profile of the Toronto rapist. The profile was out of Paul Bernardo. It was immediately recognized that Bernardo had moved to the Niagara region and was the prime suspect in the Kristen French and Leslie Mahaffey murders. We immediately also pulled the file on Tammy Homolka's death and realized that the accidental finding was probably not correct. The pair was subsequently arrested, and the trial resulted in convictions for both. Carla's defence was that she was forced to assist Bernardo and that he was the perpetrator. She testified against him at the trial and received a lesser sentence.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

Following the completion of the trial, it was obvious that a thorough review of all aspects of the case needed to take place. The Office of the Chief Coroner, the Centre of Forensic Sciences, the Toronto Police Department, and the Niagara Regional Police all had obvious areas to study and improve. I felt we should be proactive, and so along with Doug Lucas, the previous long-term director of the Centre of Forensic Sciences, and Wayne Frechette, the OPP chief superintendent in charge of investigations, we decided to study this case and other multiple murder cases in order to produce a report. At this time recognizing serial murder and linking the cases together for investigation was a problem in many jurisdictions. We reviewed the Green River murders in Washington state, met with the FBI behavioural profilers, and went to England to study the modern Ripper murders. It was the English trip that provided the best model for future directions in Ontario. The modern Ripper murders were a series of murders of prostitutes, all conducted by the same person. The investigators had some leads, such as similar license plates spotted in the same areas as the murders and bank notes that could be traced back to wage payments at certain factories. In these investigations, the same person showed up multiple times, but they had so many interviews, data, and files, with no way to cross-

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

reference them, that although the perpetrator showed up several times, the connection was not made. He was eventually arrested, somewhat by chance, when an alert police officer noticed Burberry tools in his car.

The solution in Britain was to develop a case manager system. This computer system was used to record all interviews and all evidence. It searched for recurring names or circumstances, recorded all the information from the case, and generated lists of things that needed to be done as part of the investigation. The other big feature was that if the information was entered the same way and cases were discovered or thought to be linked, then they could be put together in the computer system and similarities found. The key to making a system work was that everyone needed to use it in the same way. The case in Britain and the case in Ontario both involved multiple police forces. If some use the system and others do not, or people enter data in different ways, the necessary links between the cases might well be missed. At the end of our review, the three of us recommended that Ontario buy a case manager system and develop courses to teach the system and its need for consistency to police forces across the province.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



A trip to London, England, to look at major case management

Before formally recommending this to the government, we took two steps. The first was to hold a conference

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

at Fire College and invite senior homicide investigators from around the province. We outlined our review and our potential recommendations and asked for their buy-in. This was successful, and they saw the potential of such a system. The next step was to satisfy the public need to know that we had seriously studied the deficiencies in the Bernardo investigation and were prepared to recommend improvements for the future. My suggestion to the solicitor general and the attorney general was that a review be carried out by a respected judge. I thought I had just the right person in mind for the job. Justice Archie Campbell, who had been the deputy attorney general, had conducted multiple murder trials and was respected by the justice system and the public. The government agreed, and Justice Campbell was appointed to head a commission. Police, crown attorneys, scientists, and coroners were all interviewed as part of the commission, and we submitted our report, which we then called the Fire College report. Justice Campbell issued a final report that noted the proactive and serious review that agencies had taken, and he adopted the Fire College report as a major part of his recommendations. The province agreed to fund these recommendations, which resulted in the Major Case Computer Program being purchased and training put in place for all of the police departments in the province.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

I was very proud of the proactive approach we took in this case. We recognized the serious problems in the investigation of this novel case, admitted to them, and found solutions to try to avoid similar problems in the future.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



Implementation of our case management system won awards

The thousands of cases involving coroners, police, and forensic sciences are all unique to each other. By applying the principles we teach, the vast majority are successfully

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

managed. However, this is not always the case, and when we fail, we need to admit to problems, review, and learn for the future. In addition to the Bernardo case, the murder of Christine Jessop is another example.

Christine Jessop was a young girl who lived in Queensville, near Newmarket. She disappeared after school one day in the fall, and no trace of her could be found for many months. On New Year's Eve, I got a phone call that a body, probably Christine, had been found at a dump site. I ordered the body to Toronto for autopsy and asked that the Chief Forensic Pathologist of Ontario conduct the autopsy. This death occurred in the early days of DNA. A shirt that Christine was wearing had a stain that was believed to be semen. DNA testing was undertaken, but no profile could be developed.

The investigation quickly centred on the young man who lived next door to the Jessops, Guy Paul Morin. He was a solitary individual and did not seem to have an adequate alibi for the day that Christine disappeared. He was subsequently arrested, and police placed an undercover officer with him in the jail. That officer reported that Guy Paul confessed to the murder while in the jail cell. At trial, evidence was presented of hair fibre analysis done at the Centre of Forensic Sciences. This evidence linked

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

hair and fibre samples from Christine to samples found in the Morin car. Guy Paul's lawyer for the trial was a high-profile Toronto councillor who managed to secure an acquittal.

The crown appealed the acquittal on the basis of errors that the defence lawyer had made in his final address to the jury. The appeal was successful, and a new trial was ordered. The second trial involved a different but also well-known Toronto defence lawyer. The verdict this time was guilty, and Guy Paul Moran began to serve a sentence of life imprisonment. He continued to insist that he was not guilty, and the case was never completely settled, despite the fact that he lost his appeals and still was incarcerated. Over the years DNA testing progressed, and profiles could be developed from much smaller samples. A decision was made to retest the stain on the garment, and this time a profile was obtained. It did not match Paul Moran. This meant that either someone other than Moran had committed the sexual assault on their own or Moran was an accomplice to someone whose DNA had now been profiled. It was not likely that two people were involved, nor was there any evidence to support this theory. This led to the conclusion that Guy Paul Moran had been wrongly convicted. Several years later, the DNA profile was finally matched to a workmate of Christine's

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

father who had visited the house on occasion. This proved once and for all that Guy Paul Morin had been wrongfully convicted.

Quite correctly, this finding led to a commission that looked into what went wrong. At the time of the investigation and the trials, I was still the regional coroner for Metropolitan Toronto, or the deputy chief coroner. During those times I did not have any responsibility for the Centre of Forensic Sciences. By the time of the commission, I was in charge of public safety and spent a lot of time reviewing the actions of the centre in the case and preparing recommendations for the commission. Before giving evidence, I met with Guy Paul Moran and apologized for the role that the Centre of Forensic Sciences had played in his wrongful conviction. I then began my evidence with a public apology on behalf of the centre. The evidence regarding hair and fibre had been overstated at the trial. As a result of the commission, significant changes were made in the wording used to write reports, in training, in reviewing reports, in monitoring, in court evidence, and in overall communication within the lab. The commission also heard a lot of evidence about the jailhouse confession and the lack of reliability that should be attached to such statements. It turned out that at the time of the statement,

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

Guy Paul Moran was suffering from mental illness, and what he said could not be relied upon.

In the period immediately after the commission, results from the Centre of Forensic Sciences were challenged more in the courts. We expected this and prepared for it with quality assurance measures and added review and auditing of final reports. The review of a Thunder Bay murder case produced a question between the scientist doing the case and his supervisor who reviewed it. The reviewer felt the proposed conclusion might be overstated. After much discussion, including with senior management of the Centre, the final report was slightly modified to everyone's satisfaction. This discussion caused a delay in releasing the report. The crown and defence received it the week before the trial was to start.

At the trial, when the scientist was giving his evidence, the defence lawyer, who was known as a flamboyant local legend, questioned the scientist about the delay. After hearing the evidence, he alleged that the review was inappropriate, the scientist was being interfered with, and this was a corrupt act. He continued that this interference came from the highest level, the Assistant Deputy Solicitor General. That happened to be me. He refused to be calmed regarding the issue and disrupted the court to

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

such an extent that a mistrial was declared. This seemed to be the result he was aiming for. He next phoned the justice reporter for the Toronto Star newspaper and reported that a mistrial had been declared in the murder trial because of my interference in the case. The reporter later claimed that she tried to reach me for comment, but when she was unsuccessful, the paper ran the story anyway.

The story caused a flurry. We were working hard to reclaim the reputation of the Centre of Forensic Sciences, but now allegedly we were causing mistrials because of my corruption, according to this lawyer. The day the story came out, I was waiting in a hallway in the Windsor courthouse to give evidence in a murder trial. I had several conversations from a payphone with our ministry lawyers and a couple of conversations with the Premier's office. They made it very clear that if there was any truth to the Star story, then I should resign immediately before I was fired. They could then announce this result at the beginning of the afternoon sitting of the legislature and save the government embarrassment. I explained the peripheral role I had played in the case. I was aware of the discussion about the report and agreed with the process that had been followed, but I played no role in the actual scientific conclusion. This explanation was accepted, and my demise was not to be.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

The ministry lawyers then sent a letter on my behalf to the Toronto Star, explaining what actually happened and making the point that I was not, as their article suggested, corrupt, nor did I cause the mistrial. We wanted a retraction. The Star refused and stood by the accuracy of their story, so I filed a lawsuit for libel and slander against the newspaper. Libel and slander suits are rare and difficult to prove in Canada. However, my personal reputation was at stake, and so I persisted. After discovery, I assumed the paper would have the facts and offer to settle. At that point all I wanted was an apology and retraction. They refused, and we headed eventually to trial. The trial lasted one week. I won the trial and was awarded \$100,000 in damages. The Star then appealed the ruling, and we headed to the Court of Appeal for a three-day hearing. The court upheld the ruling of libel and upheld the monetary award. My legal fees for the case were in excess of \$500,000. If I lost, I did not have to pay these because the case was done on a contingency basis, but I would personally have been required to pay the Toronto Star lawyers, which would have been more than my lawyers' fees. The case took three years to run its course. I often wondered where we would get the money to pay these lawyers if I lost. However, I would then remind myself that I was in the right and it was

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

my reputation that needed to be defended. By that point I had spent more than 20 years building a reputation and advancing in the government, and yet this one story potentially could end all of that. The case is now often taught to journalism students. If I had it to do again, I would take the same path. The \$100,000 award was a nice bonus, and it was tax-free.

I was honoured to be appointed to the positions I held. My work certainly was interesting and challenging. I loved going to work. Making a difference was rewarding enough. However, when issues are very public, recognition and honours can result from successes. I was given many awards and was very pleased that they were in very different fields such as forensic medicine, emergency management, and government administration. The Ontario College of Physicians and Surgeons gave me an award for management of SARS that had only been awarded once before. The highest award in the Ontario government is an Amethyst Award. I was given two of these. My personal favourite was the Order of Ontario. It was of interest to me when I was awarded it that the initials O.Ont go before any other degrees when formally signing.

I learned a lot by being exposed to all the additional areas beyond the Office of the Chief Coroner. I sat on the senior

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

management team of the Solicitor General for 15 years and was exposed to policy, budgets, human resources, and government issues in general. It was a long way from a one-man family practice in Elmvale to having multiple offices and schedulers and flipping from topic to topic every day depending on what was in the news. I think I learned a lot from each of my various portfolios and found myself applying lessons learned from each to the other areas. It would have been impossible to do any of these jobs, let alone all of them, without the support of a lot of very dedicated and very competent people who worked with me. I always considered that these various positions were loaned to you for a period of time, and my job was to do some good and leave the job stronger for the next person. When I retired from the Ontario government, the Premier and several cabinet ministers were at the reception. My message to them was, "Thanks for trusting me with these responsibilities, and please recognize the people in the background who I am representing and did the job."

Swiss Air



Eileen and I have long had a soft spot in our hearts for Nova Scotia. For many years we visited the area around Chester on the Labour Day weekend. Chris and Maryanne Feindel owned a seaside house in Chester Basin. Along with Catherine and Wayne Frechette, we would drive down on Thursday before the long weekend and tour around towns, art galleries, shops, and restaurants till the next Tuesday. One year we entered the province when everyone else was leaving. A hurricane was scheduled to come through on Sunday, but we figured that a little weather should not ruin our fun. Saturday was a beautiful sailing day, and it was hard to imagine bad weather was coming soon. On Sunday, the full force of the hurricane arrived with wind and rain, followed by a tranquil, sunny, and calm period when the eye of the storm passed over us. Next came the backside of the storm, with even more wind and rain. The power went out, but we thought we were fine with our candles and stored pots of water. Later, we

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

discovered that power had been restored nearby, and we headed to a restaurant. Returning home, we were pleased to see our power was restored as well. Entering the house, however, we realized we had been using the stove before the power went out and had forgotten to shut it off. The pot was red hot, but the inevitable fire had not yet started. The house survived for next year's visit.

The hurricane was not the only disaster I faced in Nova Scotia. On September 2, 1998, Swissair Flight 111 crashed into Margaret's Bay in the Atlantic Ocean, 9 kilometres southwest of Peggy's Cove. The flight had left New York and was headed to Geneva when smoke was reported in the passenger cabin. The nearest airport with a runway long enough to land the plane was in Halifax.

The pilot decided to circle the area to dump fuel in order to make the landing safer. Unfortunately, as he circled, the fire got worse, and the plane crashed. International law establishes that it is the responsibility of the country where a crash occurs to investigate the cause of the crash and identify the deceased. In this case the flight was going from the United States to Switzerland, and there were no Canadians on board, but it still was up to Canada to take charge. Any air crash is difficult to investigate, but one where everyone was from a different country was

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

a major challenge. No medical records, fingerprints, or DNA samples from the passengers were readily available. As well, all the relatives would be flying into Halifax and needed answers. All these challenges, plus more, such as the lack of forensic capacity in the province, made this a job that was too big for a small province to handle on its own. John Butt, the Chief Medical Examiner, called me hours after the crash and asked for help. The Ontario government was always willing to assist another province, and within hours, I was on my way to Nova Scotia, taking the last seat on one of the only flights being allowed into Halifax after the crash.

Peggy's Cove, Nova Scotia



Peggy's Cove in quieter times

By the time I arrived, the decision had been made to use a large hangar at the Shearwater Air Force Base as a temporary morgue. Wood partitions were being built to separate the different work areas and create autopsy suites. Only one whole body had been recovered. It was a female passenger sitting at the back of the plane. It turned out that she would be the only whole body recovered in the entire investigation. At this point, boats were in the area of the crash to try and recover floating body parts, and the beaches were being searched on an ongoing basis. Clearly, the majority of the recovery was going to have to

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

be done from the ocean floor. The crash site was spread out, and much of it was in very deep water. Therefore, using divers was not an option. Dredging would have to be the major recovery method. This posed many problems, including the logistics of dredging in such deep water, moving the recovery material to shore from the boats by helicopter, and ultimately separating the human remains from the material collected from the plane.



The temporary morgue

Identification in mass disasters is done using many different methods, some more definitive and reliable than others. Having relatives identify their loved ones does not

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

work well when bodies are badly mutilated, as was the case here, and when bodies have spent an extended period of time in water. Identifying bodies by unique clothing or scars and tattoos can give presumptive identification but when possible should be confirmed by other methods. X-rays, showing old, healed fractures, can be useful, and we sought to obtain these from families. Dental records are also a reliable way to establish identity, and again we sought these from families. Fingerprints are used when available. We found that fingerprints were fairly commonly obtainable from US citizens because of work requirements or military service. Significantly fewer European passengers had fingerprints anywhere on record.

It became obvious to us very quickly that we would recover very large numbers of human remains, varying between large and small parts of the body. This meant that traditional methods of identification might work in a few cases, but in the vast majority of cases, they offered little or no assistance. The best hope for identification was the newly developing science of DNA profiling. At my first briefing after arriving in Halifax, I asked how many DNA samples have been taken so far. The answer I got was several thousand. DNA was advancing in 1998 but was still very labour-intensive, slow, and limited in availability. The Centre of Forensic Sciences, the RCMP

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

labs, and the Quebec forensic laboratory all were having trouble keeping up with their criminal cases, which the Bernardo case illustrated. Performing hundreds of thousands of DNA tests on Swiss air passengers was well beyond our capacity.

When I left the evening planning meeting and went to bed, I was having trouble sleeping because of my concern about this issue. I was well aware of our DNA limits because of my role as the assistant deputy minister of public safety. Over the next hours, I devised a testing protocol for DNA for the Swiss Air crash. I proposed categorizing each human remain under one of five categories. The first category was whole body, of which there was only one at that time and only that same one eventually. The second category was those remains that were all or part of a head. The third category was large body remains, such as a torso or arms and legs. The fourth category was intermediate-sized specimens, and the fifth category was small human remains. The next morning at our meeting, I proposed that all the samples be saved and documented, but only categories one, two, and three should be DNA sampled. This was agreed to, and in the end approximately 1000 samples were DNA tested. In order to do this testing, we needed the sample that we had recovered from the crash, but we also needed DNA

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

samples from all of the passengers and airline staff who had presumably died in the crash. We asked families to send us hairbrushes, razors, toothbrushes, or anything else that might have DNA on it. Along with obtaining dental x-rays, x-rays, medical records, and fingerprints, all from people who resided outside of Canada, the job of obtaining the DNA took a lot of effort to obtain and test. We split the samples between the three labs and therefore were able to obtain results within a couple of months of the crash. Using this protocol, we produced 228 different profiles, and there were 229 persons aboard the plane. We recognized that two of the passengers were set identical twins who would have the same DNA profile. Fortunately, we had two body samples with identical DNA from the same part of the body. Therefore, these had to be the twins. Because of a scar, we were able to verify the identity of each of the twins. I am not aware of anywhere in the world where DNA had been used so successfully to identify everyone in a mass disaster. I am very pleased that I could not sleep the first night and spent my time developing the protocol. We were also able to identify some persons by dental records and fingerprints, and each of these identifications completely agreed with our DNA profile identification.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



DNA samples being taken

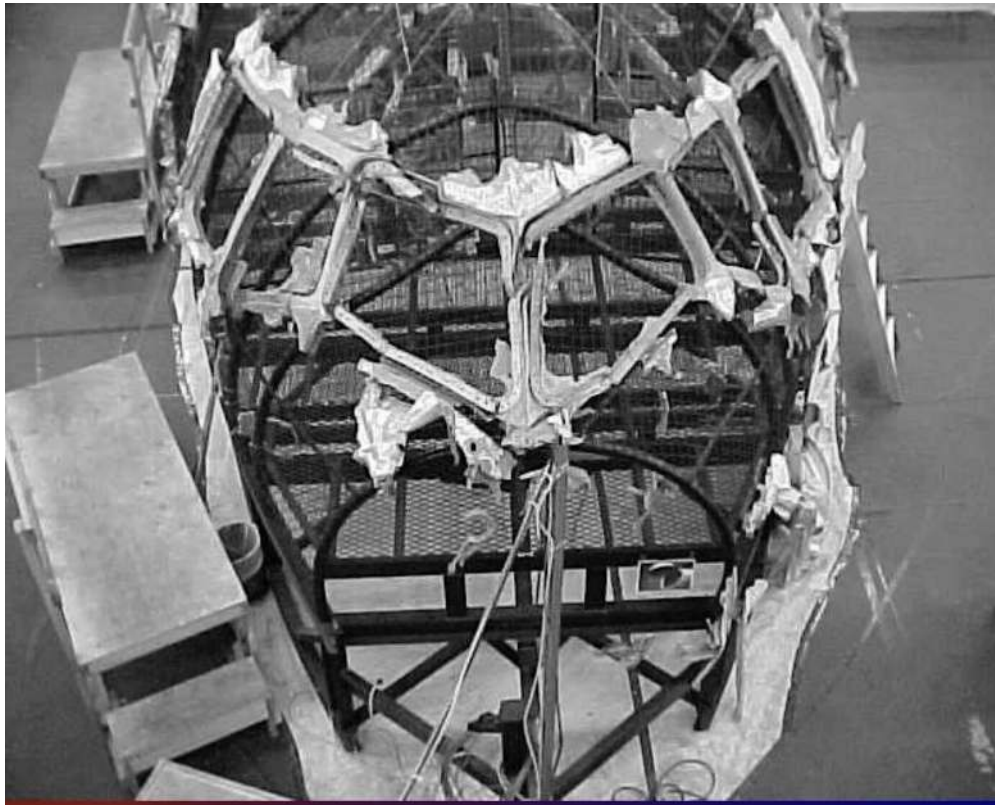
To be able to assist the investigation properly, I needed to have the legal power to make decisions. Normally, it takes months to become licensed to practice medicine in a province. Because of the circumstances, this was time that we did not have. I signed an application early in the morning, and a couple of hours later I could practice medicine in Nova Scotia, and I was the Deputy Chief Medical Examiner of Nova Scotia, as well as the Chief Coroner of Ontario. They didn't even charge me for my

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

license.

Some months before the Swiss air crash, there was an air crash near New York City. The FAA believed that the crash was caused by something mechanical in nature, but the FBI believed it was terrorist-related. The two agencies fought out their difference of opinion in public, and this undermined both of their investigations in the eyes of the public and, most importantly, the families. We were very mindful of this during the Swiss Air investigation and were careful to work closely with the RCMP, the federal transportation investigators, and the identification teams to speak with one voice and avoid public controversy.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



Retrieved pieces of the plane attached to a frame to help establish a cause of the crash

The families were all billeted in one hotel so that their privacy could be better insured. A meeting was held with them each day, and the progress and problems with the investigation were fully explained. The families got all of the news of the investigation before it was made public, and this proved to be very important in maintaining their cooperation and support. One issue in particular comes to mind in this regard. Early on, we recognized the limits in identifying large numbers of recovered remains plus the fact that we could not recover all human remains from the ocean floor. Therefore, it became obvious that

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

there would need to be mass burials both at sea and on land. This was potentially a difficult issue for some families, but with careful explanation, all the families came to accept this solution and supported it. Ultimately, a mass burial site with a monument was established on the shore, near Peggy's Cove. A memorial service was held in a village near Peggy's Cove one evening. Many of the families, along with international diplomats and senior Canadian politicians, including the Prime Minister, were present. Talking with these families and hearing stories about the loved ones they had lost made the scientific work we had been engaged in over the past weeks much more personal and much more emotional.

Once the identification of human remains had been successfully completed, the family was contacted and asked for input into how the remains of their loved one would be returned. Sometimes the remains were large, like a torso, but often they would be moderate to small remains. They were given two choices. They could wait until all the 1000 or so samples had been DNA tested and therefore all known samples of their relative recovered, or they could have what had been identified up to now returned. If further testing identified more matches, then a further return would take place. As well, we asked whether they wished a full casket despite the size of any

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

remains or whether they wished a smaller wooden box of appropriate size. There was a full mix of what families decided.

The work of identifying those killed in the crash was very difficult for many who volunteered to help. Nova Scotia had very limited forensic personnel. To help with this need, we brought forensic pathologists, pathology assistants, and forensic dentists from Ontario. We rotated our staff through so that no one was away from home too long, but everyone could gain the experience of dealing with a mass disaster. When people came to help, we watched very closely for signs that they were struggling with the work. Some came and lasted only a few hours before they acknowledged that they could not continue. Some did well for a period of time but then started reporting that they were not sleeping well and were having trouble coming to the morgue on a daily basis. Both these groups of people were thanked for what they had done and were reassured that it was more than understandable that they could not carry on in this environment. The third group, largely made up of the forensic veterans that we had brought from Ontario, were able to do the work and manage their emotions. They did this work on a daily basis, and most had been doing it for years, so they seem to have the coping mechanisms that allowed them

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

to continue. We did not, however, leave this entirely to chance. We brought in a trailer and psychologists who would meet in private with anyone who felt the need to discuss any issue. As well, we brought in another trailer, which served as the lounge to get people out of the morgue area for their breaks. In fact, we insisted that people take regular breaks and that these not be taken anywhere near the hangar. We also noticed the people seemed to be slow getting started in the morning and figured out that they were missing their coffee. Tim Horton's coffee and pastries were made available every morning for all those working. Another important occupational health and safety measure was to schedule just enough people to get the work done and not so many people that it left people standing around. This was necessary because the recovery process on the water went differently day to day. Sometimes recovery went smoothly, but other times very little would be delivered to the hangar by helicopter. Scheduling people for short shifts and days off and just having enough people to do the job all proved to be important mental health considerations.

Swiss Air 111 was carrying a lot of diamonds and money between New York and Geneva. The mini subs that were set down to survey the crash site showed the eerie sight of large amounts of money floating in the water hundreds of

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

feet below the surface. The diamonds were thought to be in cases on the ocean floor. Very little of this treasure was recovered. Treasure seekers hoped to mount expeditions to recover these valuables, but the area, because of the mass grave, was declared off-bounds for any such action.

An exact replica of the front part of the plane's frame was built, and the accident investigators placed every piece of the aircraft fuselage in the correct place. The full investigation took until 2003, when the final report stated that the crash occurred because of faulty wiring that ignited the insulation above the cockpit. It was noted that the recommendation to change the type of insulation had been made in an earlier report.

Mass disasters are very difficult and complex investigations. Large teams of experts are needed, and the work is often done in temporary facilities away from home. The work is closely followed by the press, and families and workers need a lot of support. Each mass disaster is unique, but lessons on management can be learned for the future. Swiss Air was a case in point. I learned many things that helped in future challenges.

An Exciting Challenge but Also a Close Call



Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa. It is divided in half by the Niger River, with the north being predominantly Muslim and the south being Christian. Its major resource is oil. The country was formed following the First World War as part of the 1919 Paris Accord. Since its formation, the country has changed back-and-forth between dictatorships and democracy, and as with many developing countries, corruption is a big issue.

In the 1990s, the country was going through a dictatorship phase. General Abacha, the dictator from 1993-1998 was particularly repressive. The lack of civil rights was such a large issue that Nigeria was removed from the Commonwealth of Nations. Canada had led much of the opposition to Abacha, and we closed our high commission, leaving us without political representation in the country. On June 8, 1998, Abacha held a state dinner

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

for the visiting Yasser Arafat. The next morning, he was found dead in bed. The rumour surrounding the cause of his death was that he had brought prostitutes from France to Nigeria and that one of the prostitutes had poisoned him after the state dinner. Very little investigation and no autopsy were carried out. The general was a Muslim, and that religion encourages quick burial and discourages autopsies. However, the intrigue over the cause of his death remained and was widely discussed.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



General Abacha

General Abubakar became president the next day. He proved to be a much more benevolent dictator and, in fact, promised a transition back into democracy. To make the transition, he needed to decide what to do about a

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

politician named Chief Abiola. General Abacha had allowed an election early in 1998, which he had rigged and expected to win easily. Chief Abiola was a rich businessman and did much better in the election, particularly in the Christian part of the country, than was expected. Abacha's response was to throw Abiola into jail and declare himself the winner of the election anyway. Now that Abacha was dead, the new leader had to decide what to do about Chief Abiola.

Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, was allowed to visit Chief Abiola in jail in order to plan for his eventual release. The next high-ranking visitors were Thomas Pickering, the under Secretary of State of the United States of America, and Susan Rice, a high-ranking member of the State Department. Chief Abiola was late being brought to them for an interview in the jail, and when he did arrive, he apologized for the delay and said that he was not feeling well. He asked for and was given a cup of tea by Ambassador Pickering. Moments later, he collapsed and died. The general public was aware that Abiola was about to be released from jail. They viewed his release as a sort of parallel to the release of Nelson Mandela earlier in South Africa. South Africa established a truth and reconciliation commission following Mandela's release, and Nigerians were hopeful

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

of a similar commission in their country. Chief Abiola's death sparked rumours that he must've been murdered either by the United States or by the Nigerian government in order to prevent his release. These rumours led to demonstrations in the streets, which were increasing day by day, as were the deaths associated with these riots. There was significant concern that these riots would pit Muslims against Christians and possibly result in a civil war. Earlier in Nigeria's recent past, there had been such a civil war called the Biafra War, and it had resulted in 1 million deaths.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



Chief Abiola

The United Nations, the United States government, and the Nigerian government needed accurate answers as to why Chief Abiola had died. Together, they decided the best way to get those answers was to send an independent

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

team to investigate the death. On 11 July 1998, Eileen and I were having dinner in a restaurant with Chris and Maryann Feindel when I received a call from Gar Pardy, who introduced himself as a senior diplomat at Foreign Affairs Canada. He briefly told me the story of Chief Abiola and asked if I would head an international team to investigate the death. The hope was that an independent investigation would satisfy all the various parties and restore peace to the country. I asked when I might be leaving on such a mission, and his reply was, "Early tomorrow morning; I hope your passport is valid."

The next day I flew to Amsterdam and then on to Lagos, Nigeria. Foreign Affairs had sent me material to read along the way and a letter from the Prime Minister, introducing me to the Nigerian government. Since Canada no longer had any diplomatic personnel in the country, I was told that I would liaise with the British and with the Americans, and they would look after anything I needed. I would meet the other members of my team for the first time once I got to Nigeria. I vividly remember landing in Lagos because the runway was so bumpy, and I wondered if they were going to get the plane stopped. Once the doors to the plane opened, armed soldiers got onto the plane, walked to my seat, asked for my passport, and then took me off to another area of the airport. It occurred

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

to me at that point that perhaps I had made a mistake agreeing to this venture and maybe I was on my way to jail.

Eventually my guards and I arrived at a lounge, and a distinguished-looking man introduced himself as the US ambassador to Nigeria. He gave me details of the worsening situation and told me we would work from a guarded guest house rather than the US Embassy. We were to assume all phone lines and possibly all rooms in the guest house were bugged and that we would likely be closely monitored. He indicated that we should only think about our investigation because the British and Americans would be watching our safety closely. In fact, when we went out to, for example, interview someone, there would be our cars, then the Nigerian secret police, then the US and British.

Leaving the airport in the limo with the US Ambassador, two interesting things occurred. We were on a highway, and the cars were going around what appeared to be a deceased person. No one stopped to investigate. The ambassador told me this was because if you touched the body, then you had legally claimed it and had to bury it. Eventually, if not claimed, then government employees would retrieve the body and dump it into the ocean as

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

a burial at sea. It should have been rush hour when we were driving, yet the road was almost empty. "Why?" I asked. The reply was that everyone is frightened by the riots, worried about escalation, and waiting for you guys to investigate and to determine what is next. It suddenly occurred to me that if we determined that Chief Abiola was poisoned, then there would be further riots and death. If we determined he was not poisoned, then some would claim a cover-up and riot in the streets with further deaths. Up until that moment I had never realized that your legs could buckle even if you were sitting in a car. Our job was to stop a civil war with no clear path as to how to do it.

At the guesthouse I met the other members of the team for the first time. One was a senior forensic pathologist from London, one was a senior pathologist from Indianapolis, and the third doctor was a US military pathologist. He has also brought his pathology assistant to assist with the autopsy. I quickly realized that all had been carefully selected, and I could assign specific tasks to each of us based on our expertise. The London pathologist was an autopsy expert and would be the lead at the autopsy with the rest assisting. The Indianapolis pathologist had a great interest and experience in poisons. His role would be to review the history, the interviews, and the autopsy for indications of poisoning and to advise what drug testing

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

should be done. The third pathologist was younger and less experienced but was a Muslim. His role was to help me liaise with the family and government and ensure we did not offend religiously or culturally. My role was to take the lead in dealing with the family and with governments, to develop a consensus report of our conclusions, and to transmit these results to families, governments, and the public. Fortunately, everyone agreed with their role, and we were able to function as a team right from the beginning.

The team started our task by reviewing all the medical records from Chief Abiola's doctor and from the prison. We interviewed guards and people who saw Abiola that day by phone. Thomas Pickering and Susan Rice had returned to the United States, but I spoke to both at length by phone. We made arrangements to conduct an autopsy at a hospital and sent the military pathologist to fly in the presidential plane to the city where the death occurred and bring the body to Lagos. This rather routine task turned out to be more complex than planned for. The hearse that was to transport the body to the hospital ran out of gas, and it took considerable time to find gas. Once at the airport, it was discovered that the casket was too big for the presidential plane, and a different plane had to be found. After a several-hour delay, a big enough plane was

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

found.

The team was waiting for the body at the airport, and the plan was to pull the plane up at the back of the airport and load the body into one of two hearses we had stationed there. The hearse without the body would then pull around first with a police guard and drive away, hopefully followed by the press. The second hearse could then leave a few minutes later without fanfare. The problem was that there ended up being a police guard on both hearses, and the real one was escorted to the hospital with lights and sirens blasting and the press following. Not a successful ruse.

When we got to the hospital, the problems continued. The operating theatre we were going to use for the autopsy was on the second floor, and there was no elevator. The casket had to be carried up the stairs. Once on the correct floor, the casket was put on a stretcher, but the stretcher would not go through the door, so Chief Abiola had to be taken out of the casket. Finally we got the Chief, who was a very large man, to the operating room for the autopsy.

Before starting the autopsy we still had some major logistical issues to work out. Both the family and the Nigerian government wanted multiple observers to be

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

present during the autopsy, and neither group trusted the other. The more people in the room, the more chance people would not agree on what they had seen. I therefore proposed only one observer each from the two groups. As well, I explained that we would take only one set of autopsy histology specimens, which would be analyzed in Britain, and one set of toxicology samples, which would be analyzed at the Centre of Forensic Sciences in Toronto. Both parties disagreed with this and insisted they both be given a full set of samples to do their own analysis. In my mind this could easily result in three different sets of results, two of which I felt could be suspect. I explained to both parties that we understood their desire to do their own testing, but in the end it could result in no agreed-upon result. I suggested this was a make-or-break item for the team. One observer each and one set of samples was my bottom line. If they would not agree, we would go home without any further investigation and not comment to the press about why we were leaving. I proposed giving the family and government a few minutes to consider all this and left to explain all this with the team. When I did, the team immediately agreed and asked if we should start packing up. I pointed out to them that we were in a foreign country run by a dictator, in a hospital surrounded by troops. I suggested, perhaps, I had attempted a bluff.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

A few minutes later the government officials came and got me and said both sides would agree to my conditions. The pathologist who was going to attend on behalf of the government quietly pulled me aside. I asked why they had agreed. He replied that he had done his pathology training at McMaster and he had promised the others that Canadians could be trusted to do things properly and honestly. The autopsy then began and went very smoothly. We were under a severe time restraint, and it was now about two thirty am. We had to release the body for burial before sunrise. The team had decided that during the autopsy there would be none of the normal conversation between us, because anything said could be misinterpreted. As the autopsy progressed, the British pathologist carefully pointed out normal and abnormal findings but without the discussion of what they meant. I had indicated that after the autopsy was completed, our team would meet and reach any conclusions we could. We would then meet individually with the family and government to inform them and follow this with a press conference. Both the family and the government said they did not trust the other to not misinterpret what we concluded, so they wanted to be told together.

Our team meeting after the autopsy took about an hour, and we all agreed on the conclusion. Normally you would

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

consider this as only a tentative conclusion since we did not have any toxicology or histology results. However, we did not have the luxury of time, as this was an ongoing crisis. The rioting had stopped the day we arrived, but it was only a temporary pause if we did not announce results. We all agreed that none of the circumstances surrounding the death suggested a poisoning. Although we would not have toxicology results for a couple of weeks, we made it clear that we did not expect any change in our conclusions once we had these results. In fact, the negative results we expected would further confirm our conclusions. From our chart review, our interviews, and the autopsy, we believed the histology would also not bring any surprises or change our conclusions. During the autopsy it was pointed out to everyone that the heart was enlarged and typical of some degree of heart failure. The circumstances described that day strongly suggested Chief Abiola had suffered a heart attack and cardiac arrest and was predisposed to this by previous cardiac failure. The others on the team were very pleased that we had a cause of death to announce that should satisfy everyone. I was not so confident.

The family and the government both had their own agendas, and this result would not please both. I explained first to the team and later to the families and government

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

that this death was somewhat more complex than our original observations. I explained that when we investigate deaths in Ontario, we carefully pay attention to the circumstances surrounding the death, not just the cause of death. In this case we all agreed with the cause of death. The circumstances suggested that Chief Abiola had cardiac problems, including mild heart failure, before he was incarcerated. Our review suggested his medical care in jail was minimal and that lack of care likely played a role in his cardiac arrest. The family immediately understood, and this meant the government could be blamed for the death in some way. The team said to me, "We agree with that assessment, and clearly it satisfies the family but will not be good news for the government." Here is where years of holding senior positions in government helped. I realized that when something serious goes wrong, governments always like to blame the government before them for the failure. When explaining our full findings, including the circumstances of poor medical care, to the government, I hardly had the words out of my mouth before they realized this was General Abacha's and the previous government's problem and the General was dead.

The family and the government were now satisfied with our results, but we still had the public to convince. The

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

public cremation of the body had taken place soon after dawn, and there was now an uneasy calm while the public awaited our conclusions. A press conference was called for late morning. Our security officials reassured us that if the rioting started around the hotel, where the press conference was to be held, they would get us to safety either by a boat hidden in a nearby canal or by helicopter to a ship waiting off the coast. All very reassuring. The team had agreed that I would make the prepared statement and answer all questions. We were concerned that if more than one person spoke, any different phrases used or different technical terms might be misinterpreted and give critics looking for issues something to complain about. Just before the press conference was to begin, the US ambassador told me that one of the many wives of Chief Abiola was jockeying for power and so intended to disrupt the news conference and disagree with our conclusions. At this point, this wife did not even know our conclusions. I found out the wife was sitting near the back, on my right side. For the entire press conference, which lasted nearly an hour, I never looked back into that area or answered any questions from that zone. It was a long hour, but it went well.



The press conference satisfies the family, government, and public

As soon as the press conference ended, Chief Abiola's son invited the team to the family home. When we arrived, they were very gracious and offered food and drink. As we sat and discussed matters, two TVs were on. One was tuned to CNN and one to BBC. Everyone was half listening to the reports, and it was obvious that they were positive. Here we were in a house in Lagos, Nigeria,

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

assessing whether our investigation was enough to permanently end the riots and risk of a civil war, and this result in part depended on foreign press.

After the visit to the family, we were invited to the British High Commissioner's house for dinner. We were crossing a bridge when our UN car was stopped by some men, or rather young boys, in uniforms. They told us to get out of the car, and a gun was put to my head. This creates an out-of-body experience. I looked at the young man holding the gun and hoped he was having a good day. I was immediately concerned that these men had seen the press conference, disagreed with our conclusions, and would dispense their early justice. At the same time my whole life went through my mind. I thought maybe it was not such a good idea to come to Nigeria. I thought of Eileen, the boys, and the life we had enjoyed together. I worried about how that would all change now. I felt like all this was happening with me watching from above the scene, like watching a movie. Even as I write this story over 25 years later, I still get the same feeling and see the entire scene vividly. After what seemed like hours but was just minutes, our driver was able to explain who we were and what we had just done. The guns were put away, we were allowed back in the car, and we went on our way without having to pay the bribe that the men had been

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

seeking. When we got to the High Commissioner's house a few minutes later, he asked us if we would like a drink. My reply was to give us each a bottle of gin with a straw.



We are buying local currency from the High Commission staff to go to the market the next day

The next day, we decided to go to a market recommended by the High Commissioner to buy some souvenirs to remember our visit by. As we were driving through the streets, people were standing reading newspapers, which clearly had pictures of Chief Abiola and me. As the car went by them, some recognized the white men in the UN vehicle must be the investigative team. When we got to the market, everything in the busy stalls stopped. All the shopkeepers formed a line, and we went down the line

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

shaking their hands. Several said words to the effect of, "Thank you for coming to our country and saving it." It made the entire trip, even with the gun incident, worth it. We then went around the market to see the goods. The High Commissioner had told us how to haggle for price, so that was what I was doing for something I was interested in purchasing. The shopkeeper said he could not possibly sell it for my suggested price. I replied that he had just praised me for saving his country. He replied that that was then and this was now. This is the price. Having firmly established the bottom line, I bought the item.



The trip to the market

We left Nigeria the day France won the World Cup of

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

Football. It turned out that the newsreel that showed on the plane covered the win, but the other big story on the newsreel was our investigation. People on the plane recognized me, and this continued in the airport in Amsterdam. As I walked to my next plane, multiple people stopped me to ask about the adventure I had just been on.

Exactly one week after the initial phone call from Gar Pardy, I sat in the same restaurant in Toronto again with Eileen and Chris and Maryanne Feindel and told them the story of what I had been doing for the week. About a month later, Gar Pardy phoned again and asked me to lunch in Ottawa. The lunch was to be held in the dining room of the Foreign Affairs headquarters in Ottawa. I was to be a guest of honour along with someone he wanted me to meet, Chief Obasanjo. The Chief was planning to run for President in the upcoming election. Gar indicated he probably would win and help restore democracy to Nigeria. The Chief questioned me at length during lunch and thanked me for my efforts. He returned home to win his election and headed the government for the next eight years. During this time Nigeria was invited to rejoin the Commonwealth.

This investigation remains my favourite international case

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

that I participated in. It was my first international case, and the team accomplished our goal of providing answers that saved lives. As often happens, further cases flowed from our success in Nigeria.

9/11



There was early evidence of increased terrorist activity worldwide before 9/11, but it did not really permeate public consciousness. In the days before 9/11, Eileen and I had been in Nova Scotia with Chris and Maryann Feindel. Chris was holding a conference for his Harvard MBA class and asked me to speak at the Saturday night dinner. I had chosen as my topic Managing Emergencies and talked about the Ice Storm and Swiss Air. The US guests left the next day, and the four of us stayed over and enjoyed a warm, sunny, idyllic day touring Nova Scotia. Arriving home, I went to the office early to start and catch up on my work. I was in my Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) office when staff came in to tell me to turn on the TV because a plane had just flown into one of the World Trade Centre buildings. Eileen and I had been in New York the year before and had gone for a drink to the top of the World Trade Centre. The memory of the area immediately came into mind.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



The towers collapsing

I listened to the speculation as to what happened as I thought about the area, but not for long because very soon a second plane hit the second tower. This immediately changed the event from a possible accidental plane crash into a terrorist attack. I called the Provincial Operations

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

Centre to ensure that they were calling in the ministry representatives and were in fully operational mode. Minutes later I got a call from the Premier's office requesting that I come over to brief the Premier immediately. It was a short walk from my ADM office to the legislature, where the premier would be in his office, but I had lots to think about as I walked.

On the way, the POC emailed me any new information they had. There was no waiting to see the Premier that day. He asked me what I knew and what we should do. At that point, I basically only knew what I had seen on television. I stated that I believed this was a terrorist attack. He asked if we should close the government and send everyone home, as it was being reported the US government was doing. I replied that I thought that this was a mistake because at this point the events were still unfolding and we did not know who we might need. My suggestion instead was to send all non-mission-critical employees home. In other words, management and support staff vital to the day-by-day running of a ministry, particularly in an emergency, should stay, and others who dealt with matters such as HR or finance should go home.

As these early decisions were being made, the plane crashed into the Pentagon and the other plane into the

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

field in Pennsylvania. All air traffic was told to land immediately, and no takeoffs other than military were allowed. However, I had just learned that not all planes had yet been accounted for. I made the Premier aware of this concern and the possibility that the attacks on New York and Washington could be the beginning of an even larger set of international attacks that might include Ontario cities such as Toronto and Ottawa. In the recent past, there had already been an attack on an Ottawa foreign embassy. By this time we were also aware that the Americans had totally closed the US-Canada border.

Premier Harris asked that I work with his staff to draft a statement for him, and we would convene a press conference. This was quickly done. As we were walking to the press room, the Premier was talking to his wife to ensure his family was accounted for. After that call, he asked me if I needed time to call my wife and ensure the family's safety. I did not need to at that time. The plan was for the Premier to read his statement and then turn all questions over to me. I asked what limits he wanted me to stay within and how long I should answer questions. His reply was to do what I thought was right. I then asked, in jest, if it would be ok to announce further funding to EMO. He replied that whoever was appointed the next day to take my place would straighten it all up. The press

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

conference went well, and we were able to reassure the public to some degree. I got a lot of questions about the closing of the border, the financial implications of the closure, and when it would reopen. None of this was in any way within my expertise, but I stumbled through the best I could.

In the months after this, however, I learned a great deal about border crossings and border security. The Ambassador Bridge between Windsor and Detroit was particularly critical. Billions of dollars in trade flows over the bridge every day, and it is the busiest link between two countries in the world. One of the very early actions in the immediate post-9/11 time was to do a threat assessment on the bridge and immediately start construction to make it more terror resistant. In the months and years after this, I went to several meetings involving Canada, the United States, Michigan, and Ontario discussing the need for a second bridge in the area in order to improve the security of our economies and deal with volume issues because of enhanced inspections. The Ambassador Bridge is privately owned, and the owner vigorously opposed the construction of a second bridge, to the extent that he went to jail for a period for refusing to cooperate. The negotiations to build the second bridge were complex and subject to a lot of politics. In the end, the Gordie Howe

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

Bridge was finally built and scheduled to open in 2025. The Canadian government paid for all of it, and tolls from its use will repay the loan.

The next day after 9/11, Gar Pardy phoned and told me that the Government of Canada was certain that Canadians had died in the collapse of the twin towers, but they were having no success in gaining any cooperation from officials in New York City. He asked if I would go to New York and work out of the Canadian consulate in the Rockefeller Centre to figure out how many Canadians had died and to help identify them if possible. All planes were still grounded at this time, but the Canadian government got permission for the Ontario Provincial Police plane to take me to an airport outside of New York City.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



The dust around the site lingered for months. Much of the recovery process failed to take into account the occupational health risks to the rescuers

I asked one of my Deputy Chief Coroners to accompany me, and we left that evening for New York. When we got to the city, we were taken down to the site. It looked like a wasteland with rubble everywhere and still smoke in the air. We saw the iconic wall that was partially left standing and appeared in many pictures, including when President Bush visited the scene. Later we stopped at a fire station and talked with the firemen. They were in shock. They were called to the scene before the collapse, and a number of their fellow firefighters from their station were killed. I did not sleep well that night.

After a briefing from the Consul General, we set out to

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

try and establish contacts within the 9/11 team. I knew Michael Baden, the New York State senior forensic pathologist, very well. We had worked as consultants on cases together and had given lectures on panels. I contacted him but did not make much progress. He related to me that New York City made up 50% of the population of New York State. Therefore, the city saw no reason to work with or listen to any advice from the state. In essence, they shut the state out. Plan B was to go directly to the Medical Examiner's Office in New York City. I decided to attend the office in person rather than try to reach the Chief. It took a lot of talking to get past the guards at the door and to talk with anyone from the office. That person from the office met me in a boardroom with the express intent of brushing me off. The woman turned out to be a receptionist in her normal day job, who had been told to get rid of anyone wanting to help or asking questions. The fact that I had identification indicating I was representing Canada meant nothing to her. Plan C was to try to make contact with the Chief Medical Examiner through contacts at the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, of which I was the Vice President of at that time. This worked, and I finally had a phone call and subsequent meeting with the Chief.

In that meeting, I wanted to establish a communication

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

pipeline that I would be able to use to serve Canadian interests. I pointed out that people from many countries were at the World Trade Centre that day and countries would be anxious to identify their citizens. I indicated that I did not think that countries wanted to interfere with their work, but we could lighten the load. I suggested that the foreign countries could meet as a group and deal with families directly, including obtaining medical and dental records and DNA material for testing by the US. Managing the needs of families can be very time-consuming, and we could do that for the Americans. They agreed to my plan. Canada organized the non-US countries, and we met at the United Nations to organize our part. This gave us the direct pipeline into the investigation without getting into the politics.

At the beginning of the time in New York, there were long lists of missing and possibly dead Canadians. Any day, there are several hundred thousand Canadians in the United States. Gradually, families heard from relatives who reported back that they were fine, and our lists became more manageable. A few missing persons on our lists aroused suspicion, and investigations were undertaken. One missing person turned out to not be where his wife thought he was but was in New York with another woman. A divorce followed. Another person had

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

most certainly died because he was going to the World Trade Centre that morning, according to his partner. That was disproven when the man used his credit card days after 9/11.

As the lists got shorter, we settled on a number of Canadians killed at 24. Two of these people were dual citizens, so we had to ensure that they were not double counted in the final death totals. In fact, it seemed to me that some politics was being played in the numbers of deaths being reported. We were eliminating people at a relatively fast rate, and yet the total missing and presumed dead was not falling much day by day. Numbers like 5000-6000 persons persisted for the first weeks rather than the 2996 who actually died. This inflated number was also fed by the approach taken to body recovery. No persons were rescued alive after the first day, yet the operation continued in the rescue phase rather than the recovery phase for at least the first week.

This distinction is important because it affects how the operation is conducted, including the occupational and safety aspects of the operation. The rescue continued 24 hours a day with people working 18-plus-hour shifts and having to be literally dragged away from the site, emotionally spent. Declaring a recovery instead of a

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

rescue should change the management and approach at the site. Speed is no longer the driver; safety is. Working shifts that are too long, in smoky conditions, and without proper respiratory protection is bad practice. The risk of post-traumatic stress disorder increases dramatically when there is limited focus on the persons doing the rescue and recovery. Swiss Air had taught me these lessons, but in their grief and anger, American managers were not terribly interested in applying these principles. I was back in New York for the one-year memorial service of 9/11. On that visit the Solicitor General and I visited the New York City Fire Chief. I asked him about the occupational health and safety results so far from those that worked at the site. He reported that only 50% of firemen had returned to work; alcohol abuse, drug abuse, divorce, and PSD were all well up. Over the years since, the statistics on these problems have gotten even worse, and health issues such as cancer of the bladder and lung and emphysema have appeared.

We worked very closely with our Canadian families to share information, gather documents and samples, and learn about the lives the people had lived. High temperature is the enemy of DNA, and so from the beginning, we recognized that the intense fires would cremate bodies and destroy DNA. We thought that less

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

than 50% of bodies would ever be found or identified, and that number has proven correct. Some of the Canadians were at a breakfast event at the restaurant on top, and others worked for companies with offices in the towers. Had the terrorism been later in the day, the number of Canadians killed would very likely have been much higher. The consulate arranged a visit to New York by the most senior of Canadian politicians while most of the families were still in New York. The leaders of all the political parties, of the senate, and Prime Minister Chretien all attended. I gave them an update for 15 minutes before they met the families. It was quite something to give a talk to the political leadership of Canada and have them listen.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



A view from ground zero

Next, there was an hour and a half reception when the leaders all met with the families. Some were much better than others at doing this. My job was to take the Prime Minister around and introduce him to families. He talked with each family briefly, as politicians do, and had completed the circuit in 30 minutes or less. He then chatted to me about playing golf with Bill Clinton till I pointed out we still had an hour to go. I suggested we recirculate, and each time we met a family, I would start the conversation in such a way that he could continue it

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

and ask questions. This approach proved more successful.

Rudy Giuliani, New York's mayor, was in office during 9/11. He had been the District Attorney before being mayor and had a reputation as a law and order guy. Before 9/11, his performance as mayor had garnered mixed reviews, and his term was almost over when 9/11 occurred. In the opening days, he took a leadership role and was rewarded for it by high levels of support. As time went by, he overplayed his hand. At one point, he suggested that he stay on as mayor for six months to a year after his term was over in order to finish 9/11. By this time enough people were finished with him that the idea of him staying lasted only a few hours. The Canadian experience with him was less than ideal. The Prime Minister wanted to come to New York in the early days, and he was advised to wait longer. When things had started to stabilize, we suggested to the mayor's office a brief 15-minute or so visit from the Canadian Prime Minister. The reply back was that the mayor was not interested or willing to meet. It took some time to finally arrange a brief meeting. I met Giuliani twice after 9/11. Both times we were lecturing at the same conference. The difference was he was charging mega bucks for doing so, and I was not. Both times, he gave me an autographed copy of his book. Both times, I was very unimpressed by a person who only cared about

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

himself. In the years after, he got involved with Donald Trump in disputing the election Trump lost to Joe Biden. In the process he libelled two election workers, lost a big judgment, and totally destroyed what limited reputation he still had. No surprise.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



The first baseball game at Yankee Stadium after the terrorism. I wrote a short essay about the emotion of the evening which subsequently was included in a friendship book, *Between Friends*, given to the United States by Canada

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

9/11 was a real shock to the world but especially to Americans. It was a very bold attack on the homeland of the most powerful nation in the world. The US responded by tightening all borders, creating the Homeland Security Department, and hunting down terrorists around the world. Because of my new role as Commissioner of Public Safety and Security, I was almost weekly in the United States and in particular Washington. The Canadian government was concerned that the Americans would reflexively pass laws without thinking them through or suddenly close the border and deny Canada goods only made in the US. One such example happened in Washington on a Friday afternoon. The Ontario Solicitor General was giving a luncheon speech encouraging bilateral solutions to security issues. In the afternoon we went to visit Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, which on the next Monday was going to be rolled into the new Homeland Security Department. The Americans asked what we thought of the new explosive rules due to come into force on Monday. We knew nothing of this, nor, as it turned out, did our embassy. It required training and security clearances for any truck driver bringing explosives like nitroglycerin into the US. We asked how many had received the training and clearance, and they went off to check. The answer: none. In fact, the course

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

had not been developed yet. The US gets nearly 100% of its nitroglycerin from Canada, so in this case they would cut off their own supply. The implementation of the law was postponed indefinitely that day.

Educating American politicians was stepped up as well after 9/11. Hillary Clinton, then a US senator from New York, frequently stated in the days after 9/11 that some of the terrorists had come to the United States through Canada. This was not accurate and potentially could lead to serious repercussions in our border negotiations. I had a chance to meet Senator Clinton at the memorial service held at the site of the twin towers. I was one of many Canadians who made sure that we corrected that wrong information. Foreign Affairs arranged for me to meet the House of Representatives member who headed the homeland security committee. I expected this to be a very brief meet and greet. When he arrived for the meeting, he was obviously in a big hurry, and I knew I had a limited period of time to make any points. I began by explaining to him that while Canada was concerned with foreign terrorists, we were now putting more emphasis on finding and dealing with homegrown terrorists. This apparently was not something the United States had begun to think about. Our brief meeting turned into a much longer meeting, including asking me to tag along while

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

he moved over to the Senate Building for a brief meeting, and then we would continue our discussion over lunch. To get to the Senate, we went to the basement of the capitol building and took a small railway that took you from one building to the other. Our lunch discussion went well, and I believe the congressman gained knowledge from it.

I was also asked on several occasions to join the Canadian ambassador to the United States on panel discussions. This would require me to meet with the ambassador before the event to decide what messages we wanted to convey. These preparations would take place in the ambassador's office while sitting on the couch looking at the best view in Washington of the US Capitol building. On a couple of occasions, the embassy arranged a luncheon in which I was featured as the special speaker. US guests that we wish to hear our point of view were invited to the luncheon. Drinks would be served on the balcony that looked over at the capitol building, and then a fine lunch would be served. Most of the Americans invited were very pleased to go to our embassy and enjoy this sought-after view.

While in New York, Mike Baden asked me if I would tape an interview for his television series called Autopsy. I was picked up in a limo and taken to a studio in midtown. The

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

subject was the Bernardo murders. My interview lasted about 1.5 hours. A few months later Mike called to say my case was on TV that night. Apparently a lot of forensic people watched that series because after that night and every time it was on over the next many years, I would hear from people that they had watched it.

9/11 changed much in government on a permanent basis. Unfortunately, the changes and threats did not end with 9/11 because the terrorism continued.

Terrorism Continues



The attack on the World Trade Centre obviously had worldwide effects, but particularly in North America. It was not long, however, before Asia, Australia, and New Zealand were directly affected because of the Bali bombings. On the 12th of October 2002, terrorists from the violent Islamic group Jemaah Islamiyah detonated bombs in the tourist area of Kuta on the Indonesian Island of Bali. At first Bali might have seemed an unusual place for a terrorist attack. Indonesia is the largest, by population, Muslim country in the world. Around the time of this bombing, terrorist attacks had taken place on Muslim islands in Indonesia. Bali is the only area of Indonesia where a non-Muslim religion predominates. 86% of people in Bali practice Balinese Hinduism, which is a mix of Hindu, Buddhist, Javanese, and indigenous beliefs. The island is famous for its arts, including painting, sculpture, and dance, and its beaches. It is traditionally a peaceful place and an island that draws

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

tourists from around the world.

The bombing was thought to be retribution for a non-Muslim lifestyle and particularly aimed at the tourists. A suicide bomber carried a backpack that he detonated. When this caused panic and people running in all directions, a large car bomb planted outside some nightclubs was detonated. 202 people, including 88 Australians, 38 Indonesians, 2 Canadians, and people from 20 other countries, were killed. 209 people were injured.



A police officer examines the bomb site

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



After the second bomb goes off

The Canadian government sent me to Bali to assist in the identification process. By this time, I had helped manage Swiss Air and had spent several months in New York at 9/11. The usual problems of identification were present, including the need to get foreign medical records, get DNA samples from personal items such as toothbrushes and hairbrushes, and deal with families from around the world. This bombing mirrored Swiss Air in that it occurred in a smaller centre with very limited forensic capacity. We had great success using DNA in the Swiss Air crash, and it was hoped it could succeed in Bali as well. After 9/11, the American authorities declared that

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

all potential human remains would be tested for DNA, no matter how many resources it took or how much time it would take. In Swiss Air we tested only significant samples, about 1000 in total. It was clear in Bali that the government wanted this investigation done quickly and the limited resources used carefully. Part of my role was to advise on how to accomplish this using the Swiss Air model.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



A forensic dentist from Australia shows us an identification

A good example of the government approach to deal quickly and normalize fast, I witnessed firsthand. The various forensic personnel from around the world were gathering evidence from the bomb scenes. After a few days, the senior officials made it clear that this part of the investigation needed to end, and the area needed to be

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

returned to the people and rebuilt as quickly as possible. The various experts objected, and the government officials listened, said very little, and certainly did not vigorously argue their point. However, a few hours later, suddenly the barriers separating the forensic site from the interested public mysteriously fell, and people were all over the site, contaminating it. Sample collection stopped immediately, and rebuilding literally began right away.

Australia has a very fine forensic system. Their pathologists are well trained, and their forensic labs are world-class. Given that the largest number of deaths were Australians and they were the closest large forensic centre to Bali, they volunteered to take the lead in the identification process. The problem with this was that the Indonesian government did not completely trust the Australians. It turned out that that was one of the main reasons I was sent to Bali by Canada. They wanted to learn of our DNA experience at Swiss Air firsthand, but they also wanted an intermediary to evaluate what the Australians were proposing to do. I was considered a neutral party. My role was to interview the Australians, understand what they proposed, and then produce a brief report on the feasibility of their plan. Not surprisingly, I agreed with their approach, including sending the DNA to Australia. The local forensic people and government were

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

reassured by my report and agreed. The forensic process was able to identify the two Canadians.

Working with international experts proved to have benefits in future crisis events. I later worked with the British pathologist from the Nigerian case and with American, Australian, and Portuguese experts on cases around the world.

Towards the end of my time in Bali, I had a day off. As often happens, I had met several Canadian ex-pats while attending various meetings and receptions. They kindly took me on a tour of the island and to a fantastic Bali restaurant with waterfalls and a river running through it. These special days ensure that there are some good memories of the location to go along with the carnage that we were dealing with each day.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



The view from my hotel

One day when I got home, I asked Eileen which country in the world she would least want me to go to. She named Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq. I told her I had good news and bad news for her. I was not going to Iran or Iraq, but I was going to Afghanistan in a few days. I had further good news. Since Afghanistan was a war zone, I would have an extra one million dollars of life insurance.

The next day I needed to go to the Afghanistan consulate to apply for my visa. To say they were leisurely in their

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

approach would be an understatement. After checking the application for completeness, they indicated I next needed to pay for the visa. The instruction was to take the paper they gave me and go to the bank across the road, pay for the visa, and return to the consulate with the receipt. I gathered that not everyone in the consulate was trusted. I asked when my visa would be ready, and they replied that, God willing, it would be three days. On the appointed day I returned, and God had been willing, and I got the visa.

The next day I flew to Abu Dhabi. From the main terminal I got into a cab and asked to go to terminal 2, as I had been instructed. The cab driver seemed surprised and told me I did not want to go to terminal 2. I assured him I did, and off he went to the other side of the airport. Terminal 2 serviced all the countries that President Bush described as the Axis of Evil. Flights departed for Iran, Yemen, Eritrea, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan from terminal two. The terminal proved to be a very interesting people-watching place. It was very busy and seemed disorganized. There was not a single airline that I recognized flying from the terminal. I eventually found where my gate was and settled in for the wait. At the time we were to board, there was no sign of any personnel from the airline nor any reason given for a delay. A couple of hours later the airline personnel showed up and

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

pandemonium ensued. Everyone wanted on at once, and everyone had an incredible amount of luggage and other assorted items. Finally we all got on, and to my shock, the plane got off the ground.

Arriving in Kabul, I was met by embassy staff, who were not concerned about the delay and were pleased I had made it the same day as I was expected. When agreeing to go to Afghanistan, I had told Foreign Affairs that I had a sailing trip booked to the British Virgin Islands with the Feindels and Frechettes, and I needed to be back by a certain date. They told me they would do their best to get me home, but time worked differently in Afghanistan. After a quick briefing, we left the airport in an SUV with very big wheels. This was because they were solid rubber, so they could not be shot out. The road we were driving on was often attacked, and a Canadian diplomat had been killed on this road some months before.

There were several layers of security to go through in Kabul before we got to the consulate. My room was in an adjoining building. It had razor wire over the windows, and my helmet and flak jacket were hanging near the bed. If there was any commotion, I was instructed to put both on and get away from the window. A grenade had been lobbed at the building some months before.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



The view from my room in Kabul

I had a couple of jobs to do while I was in Afghanistan. After 9/11, the United States decided to displace the Taliban in Afghanistan and establish a friendly government because they believed the Taliban were hiding al-Qaeda fighters and specifically Osama bin Laden. NATO had agreed with this approach, and a multinational force was established, which was dominated by the US but had representation from many countries. Canada had agreed to take part in this action. Our goals included helping establish a stable democracy, improving literacy, and improving opportunities and education for women. We had soldiers in the country but also diplomats,

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

teachers, and social workers. Fewer than 20% of the population were literate, with the bulk of people unable to read at all. Besides dealing with al-Qaeda, the humanitarian challenges in the country were massive. Afghanistan also had a reputation as a country that could not be permanently conquered. The Soviet Union had tried and failed. It was not actually a country in the normal sense of the word. It was a collection of tribal areas and until very recently had not had a central government or any sense of national identity.

Canadian soldiers operated mostly in the Kandahar area, and while on manoeuvres, they came in contact with and at times arrested suspected Taliban fighters. After initial processing and interrogation by the Canadians, they would be turned over to Afghan authorities. The Afghan jails had a reputation for being overcrowded with dreadful conditions. Prisoners were regularly reported to have been beaten and tortured. The US had decided to establish their own jail called Abu Ghraib. The problem with this approach was that the American running the jail used very aggressive interview techniques, including sleep deprivation, nudity, feigned executions, and waterboarding. Word of these abuses became public and resulted in an international condemnation of the United States. Canada had decided that rather than building and

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

running their own jail, they would spend money improving the existing facilities and teach proper practices to the correction community.

One of my jobs on this trip was to lecture to corrections officials about what constitutes abuse and torture of prisoners. There were a few hurdles to overcome in doing this. As previously mentioned, most of those I would be addressing could not read or write, had little or no knowledge of Western society, and spoke no English. I had translators with me and had prepared slides that were translated and predominantly pictures rather than writing. Invariably when it came time for the Afghans to ask questions, they would raise the point that the Americans abused their prisoners, so why were we saying they could not? I had to explain that Canada is a different country from the United States and our rules are different from theirs. I was explaining this to men who barely knew what a country was and had heard of the United States but not of Canada.

The second part of my job was to assess whether Canada was dealing with prisoners in the most humane way. Prisoners captured by Canadian troops were usually turned over to an Afghan agency that was part of policing. After a short transfer period, the detainees would be taken

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

to jail, awaiting trial. The trials occurred quickly, and by the time of trial, most detainees pleaded guilty and were imprisoned for a further period of time. As well, there was a very haphazard system in place to track prisoners who had been captured by Canada. In essence this meant that once we turned them over, we did not usually know where they were or if they were even alive. The high number pleading guilty certainly suggested coercion, likely by torture and abuse.

This treatment of detainees had become public knowledge and had become a major political liability to the Canadian government, which was a minority government at the time. The Prime Minister at one point prorogued the government rather than face a vote they appeared ready to lose. My job was to interview soldiers from Canada and other countries, Red Cross personnel, and other NGOs who worked in the area of civil rights for prisoners. I was also tasked with inspecting in detail the compound where Canada incarcerated suspected Taliban. At the end of this process I was to submit a written report to the Canadian government.

My work started in Kabul, interviewing Canadian embassy personnel and some Afghanistan officials plus Red Cross personnel. Any meeting outside the embassy

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

required planning. The meetings would be arranged for a range of times, and both the exact time and route would be established the day of the meeting. The embassy vehicle, with the rubber tires, was used, and I was given several pieces of paper with the embassy name and phone number. I was told that it was common to have Afghans stage accidents and then try to get people out of their cars. If this occurred, I was told to slightly open the window and throw out a piece of the paper with the embassy info on it. It was seriously impressed on me to never get out of the car.

After Kabul, I needed to go to Kandahar. It was arranged for me to go in a German Hercules military plane. The seats on this plane were like hammocks attached to the walls of the plane. Your back was to the side wall, and you faced inward to the middle of the plane. The troops all had their rifles with them, and we all wore helmets and flak jackets. As we approached Kandahar Air Base, the plane started to zig and zag and gain and lose altitude. I was told these were evasive tactics to make it harder to shoot the plane down. Suddenly, the plane just dropped out of the sky and banged hard onto the runway. Because of how you were sitting, you could not see out the window and had no idea how far the plane was up in the air. It was quite the landing.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

Kandahar Air Base was a main Air Force base for NATO. Night and day there was the constant noise of bombers taking off on missions and landing again. It was also one of the very dustiest places on earth. When I got home I had to throw away my suitcase because I would never get the dust out. The base was large enough to have several mess areas, some British-run and some American. There also was a small club or mess for Canadian troops. I conducted some interviews at Kandahar, but the bulk of my work would be at the Canadian Provincial Reconstruction Team, or as it was referred to, the PRT. To get to the PRT, which was about 20 or 30 miles from the base, you travelled in a light armoured vehicle. The route and time were determined only minutes before you left. The back door of the vehicle swung open, like an SUV, and you climbed into the body of the vehicle. The driver and his assistant were up higher, and another soldier stood in the body of the vehicle with his head and shoulders above the outside. He was on a platform that swivelled easily, and he carried a very large gun. As we drove, he rotated around, watching for movement in front or to the sides of the vehicle. The roads were often mined, and people would shoot at the military vehicles from the sides. It was considered dangerous to ride in these vehicles because they were such a target. We had a momentary delay before

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

we started to the PRT while someone ran and got a dozen Tim Horton donuts from the location on the base to take to the people at the PRC. It was a fascinating 40-minute trip seeing the countryside, small walled compounds, and women all dressed in full hijab with only a small slit to look out.



Getting dressed to make the trip to the PRT

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



Transportation to the PRT, a light armoured vehicle

The PRT was like a stockade from an old American Western movie. It had offices, sleeping quarters, a mess staffed with a very good Canadian cook, and a ball hockey rink. The food was very good, and you could watch Canada AM while eating dinner because of the 12-hour time change. The accommodation was spartan, but the cot was fairly comfortable. All soldiers carried their rifles at all times, and in the mess they sat on the floor next to them. The washrooms were in a trailer outside the sleeping quarters. You were given a very small penlight to beam only on the ground if you needed to go out to the washroom at night. This was because Taliban fighters

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

would hurl grenades over the stockade walls, in the direction of a light, if they saw one. I didn't get to the washroom at night.

At the PRT, I continued my interview and toured the area where Canadian prisoners were held until their transfer to the police unit. I also finished the rest of my interviews. I concluded that the prisoner area was humane and well designed. The soldiers were open and believable. I concluded that Canada was not torturing. In fact, I heard from soldiers and the Red Cross that once captured, many fighters asked to stay in Canadian custody rather than going into the Afghanistan system. All my investigations of the jail indicated that conditions were overcrowded and less than ideal in the jail, but torture was not occurring on any scale. The Canadian government had paid for major improvements in the physical structure of the jail, and jail personnel received regular education, including from me. Once in the jail, the guards more or less controlled the external part of the jail, and the inmates in the sections set the inside rules. It became obvious that the abuse and torture was occurring when prisoners were transferred to the police before trial. Improvements were made concerning the tracking of detainees, and education was given to police. Canadian soldiers also diminished their number of arrests. If the detainee clearly was Taliban, he

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

would still be arrested, but an enhanced effort was made to follow him through the system. If the captured person was just a potential suspect, they might be warned and let go. I felt that Canada probably should have built and run our own jail and transferred persons directly into the jail. However, by this time, it was too late for this approach, and so improvements such as I detailed were the best we could do. This issue of prisoner capture and transfer has remained a serious political issue in Canada. There is no doubt we should be as humane as possible, but trying to apply Canadian legal standards to the Afghanistan legal system is a tall challenge, particularly when operating in Afghanistan.

Once my investigation was complete, it was time to get home so I could get sailing. I did not actually know if I would make it until I did. The trip home was through Dubai. I boarded a huge C-295 cargo plane along with a platoon of soldiers finishing their tour of duty. Everyone still had helmets, flak jackets, and rifles except me. I was only missing the rifle. The front of the plane had makeshift seating, and the back was a huge cargo area. It was not first class, and no one came with snacks. We started down the runway and suddenly, at full power, rose almost vertically into the sky. This again was to avoid getting shot out of the air. It was impressive the power

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

the plane had on takeoff and how fast it got out of the area. While in flight I was invited up to the cockpit. I was talking with the pilots when they indicated I should watch but not talk for the next few minutes. They explained we were only miles outside of Iran, and if we accidentally ventured in, then it was likely we would be shot out of the air.



A very large but not very fancy plane

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



I was well guarded on the C-295 flight



Upfront with the pilots and very near the Iran border

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

When we landed in Dubai, our passports were taken for processing and disappeared for half a day. We were taken to Camp Mirage, a Canadian military base in the desert. It was called Camp Mirage because it officially didn't exist. Again there were reminders of home, such as a Tim Hortons. The weather was very hot, and when there was a breeze in the desert, it was like opening a blast furnace. Everyone was allowed a trip into the city, but only in civilian clothes, and if questioned, the answer to give was that all of us were tourists. There was a set time to meet to return, but if late, no one could take a cab to this base that did not exist. Rather, we were to phone a number, and someone would come and get us. The troops then went on to Cyprus for a week of decompression before going home to their families. I went to the British Virgin Islands.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



Camp Mirage

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



There is no place like home

I believe Canada tried to improve Afghanistan. We had a military purpose of displacing and hunting for al-Qaeda and the Taliban. We worked just as hard on our social

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

goals as our military ones. They included helping establish a democratic government, improving women's rights and education, and increasing literacy. We invested significant sums of money in our programs but in the end with limited success. As the Soviet Union learned, it was not possible to conquer Afghanistan. Eventually the Taliban reemerged, took over the government, and progress reversed itself.

Weather and Humans



Massive weather events such as tsunamis and hurricanes can result in massive loss of life. If these disasters are managed poorly by humans, the result can be more deaths and more suffering on the part of families. I was involved in several weather events, including the ice storm, the tsunami, and Hurricane Katrina. Each had its successes and failures and certainly involved lessons to be learned.

The Aceh Tsunami was the largest tsunami in recorded history. It occurred on December 26, 2004, and resulted in death and destruction over many thousands of miles and many countries bordering on the Indian Ocean. Countries most affected included India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Somalia. The exact number of dead and injured cannot be determined in part because some whole villages of people were killed and many of the bodies washed out to sea. There was no census in many of the countries, so estimates of deaths are the best that can be done. A

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

conservative estimate of the death toll is 250,000, but I believe it could be double this number. The tsunami started as a result of an earthquake in the Aceh region of Indonesia. The tsunami wave that hit land was more than 10 meters high. The devastation was massive, with most buildings totally destroyed. More than 160,000 persons were declared dead or missing in this region alone. Undoubtedly, many bodies were carried out to sea. This area is very poor and lacks forensic services. Because of its location, it was not a tourist area, and so the disaster involved mainly Indonesians.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



Areas of maximum damage are indicated in yellow

I was called by Foreign Affairs and asked to assist in Thailand. The tsunami had mainly hit three areas, all of which were major tourist areas. Phuket is a large destination area with large hotels and lots of development. The substantial buildings sustained minimal damage from the 4-meter waves, but people in shacks or on the beach were killed. There were 365 deaths, of which 105 were tourists. At the time of the tsunami there was not a robust warning system, and so authorities and tourists had no warning of the waves coming.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

Krabi was a less tourist-developed area where 376 people died, of which 188 were tourists. The devastation was quite unbelievable. Any structures near the ocean were shattered, and boats and cars had been picked up and deposited on the hillside behind the beach. The sheer power of nature was impossible to ignore. Over the next weeks, vegetation as far as a mile from the water died because of exposure to salt water.

Phi Phi Island was the third site of devastation. The village site was on a sandy isthmus between two limestone ridges. The beach is wide and very picturesque. The 4-meter wave washed over the entire isthmus over the short distance across the island. 2213 tourists and 1950 Thai people died. All structures in this area were totally destroyed.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



Many people including a number of Canadians died when the tsunami swept through this semi enclosed space on Phi Phi Island

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



The blue peg shows the height of the tsunami water and the sign is a warning posted after the tsunami

Two additional factors made this disaster harder to manage. The tsunami occurred the day after Christmas,

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

when tourism was at a peak but all embassies were closed and staff were on holidays. To make matters worse, power and phones were disrupted or totally out in the tourist areas.

I flew to Bangkok and met with the ambassador and embassy staff. At that point, with limited communication, it was difficult to know how many Canadians had died. It was believed that most Canadians were on Phi Phi Island. The numbers fluctuated for days as families reported missing relatives and others reported hearing from relatives. For example, it appeared one man had died, as he was in the area when last seen. Two weeks later he called his family in Canada about something else and, in fact, had left the area the day before the tsunami and knew nothing about it. Eventually it was determined that 21 Canadians died in the tsunami.

It was decided that the international group identifying the bodies would stay in Phuket and work from a temporary morgue in Krabi. There was no suitable accommodation in Krabi, so we flew by plane or helicopter each day from Phuket to Krabi. The plane was a very, very old DC6. Once aboard, you walked up a steep angle to the front by holding onto a rope strung from the seats. Once seated, a clipboard was circulated, and you wrote your name down

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

in case of a crash. The predominant smell was airplane fuel, but somehow we got to Krabi and back every day. The first day in Krabi, we asked for driving instructions to the temporary morgue. We were told the general direction and then told to just follow your nose. It worked.

By this time the international team was gathering, and we had to establish a work plan. Some people were assigned to work with families and get DNA items, medical records, and other data. A second group set up and populated the computer program so that matches could be made. Both these groups were going to work from Phuket. During Swiss Air, we did not have a proper computer program and built one as we went along. This time, the program had been written and tested, which helped greatly.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



The red areas show massive damage

Establishing the identification pathology/dental teams turned out somewhat easier than might have been anticipated. Thailand had limited forensic personnel, and the Thai leaders were happy for the help. At the first meeting, I discovered that the pathologist from Britain who was with me in Nigeria had been sent to Thailand, as had the Australians from the Bali bombing, the Israeli teams I had lectured to in Israel the year before, and a group of Americans I had taught just a month before. This group gave us the advantage of being able to influence the approach to be taken.

We decided to split up into teams, which included two

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

pathologists, a forensic dentist, forensic assistants, and others, including police identification officers. Some countries wanted to stay together as just their country, then go and search for their country's victims, and then establish identification. Most of us opposed this approach. It would take too long, it would be confusing, and it would be difficult to maintain standards. Before we got to Krabi, local officials had buried many bodies if they thought they were Thai citizens, and they had released bodies to families to be sent home. It turned out they had made mistakes by working in haste, and some bodies had to be retrieved and families told of the errors. We pointed out that it was too difficult to separate bodies just based on appearance, and some of the bodies already buried might be of Thai ethnicity but living as citizens in other countries.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



Families put pictures of missing relatives on boards hoping for identification

We eventually got agreement to work as international mixed teams and divided into four units. After a few days it became obvious that the Canada/Portuguese/Israeli/US team was completing work at twice the pace of other teams. We had fully integrated our teams with all nationalities working together, and we had established a form of an assembly line. A body passed from table to table to have analysis done, such as dental, fingerprinting, X-ray, and autopsy. The other teams left the body in one place, and teams waited for their turn to do their work. We had a lot of bodies to identify and limited time, so our

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

approach won out.



An International meeting to decide how to proceed

While in Thailand I welcomed some interesting visitors. Prime Minister Martin was attending a meeting in Malaysia and decided to visit the tsunami sites in Thailand first. He and his wife left Canada and arrived early one day. I am sure they both were jet lagged, but they bounded off the plane, met everyone, and sat down for a briefing. The Prime Minister began by asking the Ambassador how his mother was. It seemed an unusual question, but the ambassador seemed in tune with it. There was a particularly difficult, sleep-deprived man whose wife was

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

missing. He was constantly asking for updates and promises about when his wife would be found and identified. When the ambassador could not give him firm commitments, he started complaining loudly to the Canadian press about the inefficient job the embassy was doing. This riled up the ambassador's mother, and she had written a letter to the newspaper defending her little boy. The Prime Minister then asked the ambassador to let him know in advance if his mother was going to write any more letters. We all laughed, and then the meeting went on. We had arranged a tour of different sites for the Prime Minister after the meeting. He was very interested, and when we were nearing the end of our planned tour, he asked if there was anywhere else of interest to see. There was, so we extended the tour. In the evening there was a reception to thank all the staff for their hard work with the Prime Minister and his wife as the guests of honour. I had talked to the Prime Minister a lot during the tour but had not had a chance to talk to Mrs. Martin. At the reception, she approached me and obviously wanted to talk. She told me she loved forensic shows on TV and Law and Order, and she had some questions. We talked and laughed for a long time. I was very impressed by both the Prime Minister and his wife, Shiela. They were real people.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

A couple of weeks into my time in Thailand, the Ontario Premier called me and asked if I had time to take the Westons around to see the tsunami sites. Hillary Weston had been the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, and I knew her from that role. Her husband, Galen, was a very well-known businessman and a well-known philanthropist. They were interested in finding a recovery project to support. I planned a program and arranged a car and driver. When they arrived, Galen Jr. and his fiancé were also along. We toured for many hours, and then I mentioned that we needed to head back for their departure. They replied that they would just call the pilot and change the departure. We continued the tour for quite some time, and I must say I enjoyed their company and interest. A couple of years later I was being awarded the Order of Ontario the same night as Galen. We were seated at the head table with the Lieutenant Governor and the Westons. We had an interesting time remembering Thailand. During the dinner Galen asked Eileen a lot about transplants. Eileen asked Galen about his purchase of Neiman Marcus. When we were saying our good nights, Galen told Eileen he would call her if he ever needed an organ transplant. Eileen replied that perhaps she could call him if she needed a dress. He laughed so hard he nearly fell off his chair.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

While in Thailand, I was able to talk to a number of people who had lived through the tsunami. The stories they told were very similar. They talked about a calm day at the beach. Suddenly the birds and animals got very restless and moved to high ground above the beach. The humans on the beach stayed put. Next the water started retreating out as it does during a low tide but much more and much faster. The humans followed the water out, wondering what was going on. Suddenly the retreat finished, and a wall of water came in. The lucky people were able to grab something and hold on. Some described holding on and then realizing they were at the top of a roof. The lucky ones then waited to be rescued. The animals sensed a problem and went to high ground, while the humans let curiosity get the better of them.

After several weeks in Thailand, the government asked me to go to Sri Lanka. There were no Canadians missing or dead in Sri Lanka, but our embassy sensed the country was struggling with how to manage identifications. They arranged for me to meet senior officials to discuss lessons learned from Swiss Air, 9/11, and Thailand. I found the people I met with receptive to my ideas, and in fact, I was invited back the next year to lecture at a conference they ran. The Sri Lankan civil war was still underway when I was there. The Sri Lankans are very formal, and

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

they insisted on opening every session of the conference with a formal welcome from a Government Minister. The problem was that these individuals had to be closely guarded and could have no pattern to their travel habits. Therefore, they arrived to start the conference day sometime between 9 am and 1 pm, not at the scheduled 8 am. This meant the conference was many hours behind every day.

Hurricane Katrina in August of 2005 is a sad example of a huge natural disaster being made worse by human actions. The 2005 hurricane season was particularly active, and Katrina was the largest of these storms. Winds reached 175 miles per hour, 1392 people died, and \$125 billion of damage resulted. New Orleans was particularly hard hit. The city sits in a bowl and is meant to be protected by levees around the city. There were flaws in the design and poor maintenance of these levees, which resulted in them being breached. 80% of the city was flooded, as well as neighbouring areas, with flooding affecting communication and transportation. People were unable to evacuate and were left with a lack of food, shelter, and other necessities. A decision was made to house people in the Superdome. The problem with this was the Dome did not have adequate showers and washrooms, and sleeping areas and supplies were very slow in arriving to help.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

People died while in the shelters. The crisis lasted for weeks, and afterwards about a third of people who evacuated New Orleans never came back. Canada offered the US assistance in Katrina, including my going to offer some advice based on experience in other disasters. The reply was to just send money.



Flooding in New Orleans from Katrina

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



Entire neighbourhoods under water

Memorial Medical Centre was a large hospital in New Orleans. Prior to Katrina reaching land, officials moved some patients from other hospitals to Memorial, in the belief that it would be less likely to be affected by the hurricane. That assumption proved wrong. The lower levels of the hospital flooded, and all power was lost. The day after the hurricane, hospital workers attempted to move the sickest of the patients from the hospital. Several, as was feared, died during the transfer, but most survived. The next day a transfer was carried out of the healthiest of the patients, and this was successful. On the third day, outside help still had not arrived, and among those still in the hospital was a group of patients from a nursing home who were in the hospital for rehabilitation and for medical

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

testing. Help finally arrived in the afternoon, and workers found 43 persons dead in the hospital, with a cluster of nine deceased on the seventh floor, the nursing home group. An internist had left the hospital earlier in the day when he became convinced that talk of euthanasia seemed to be headed towards action. Toxicology testing was done on the 43, and 23 tested positive for morphine, the fast-acting sedative Versed, or both. Few of these people had been prescribed these drugs, and those that had were not prescribed in the dose that would result in the blood levels seen.

I received a call from the New Orleans coroner, Dr. Frank Minyard. Frank was an obstetrician who had been elected coroner many times. He also headed a well-known band and was a cultural fixture in New Orleans. He was aware that I had been involved in several drug poisoning cases, and he knew of me from the American Academy of Forensic Sciences. Together we put together a team comprising a specialist in internal medicine, a toxicologist, myself, and two forensic pathologists. We met in the coroner's office in New Orleans and were greeted by a mountain of case files. We quickly realized that parts of charts were missing from all but the nine cases from the seventh floor. A careful review was undertaken of the nine, paying close attention to medical

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

conditions they suffered from, nursing notes indicating the state of their conditions, and medications they were given. This information was compared to their toxicology results. All these nine patients died within a three-and-a-half-hour period. During this period a Memorial doctor and two nurses had visited each of these patients.

One of the pathologists thought eight of the nine cases represented homicide. Michael Baden and I believed all nine were homicide. I stated in my report, "All these patients survived the adverse effects of the previous days, and for every patient on the floor to have died in one three-and-a-half-hour period with drug toxicity is beyond coincidence." One of the patients, Mr. Everett, was in stable condition without any hint that death was imminent. He also was not prescribed either morphine or Versed, and yet both were present at high levels in toxicology testing.

The doctor and two nurses who had made rounds that day were subsequently charged with murder in the four clearest of cases. The doctor's lawyer launched a sustained public relations campaign emphasizing the terrible conditions that existed for the three days and suggesting that the trio were heroes for their compassionate care. Their PR included a segment with interviews on 60 Minutes. They suggested that this was a form of

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

acceptable euthanasia. It was not. In legally sanctioned assisted death or euthanasia, the patient makes the request and is counselled on the pros and cons. Relatives are usually informed and involved, and legal documents are signed and retained. None of this occurred here in any of the cases reviewed, nor was euthanasia legal in Louisiana. There were no notes in the charts indicating any discussion of euthanasia.

Palliative care allows for increased doses of strong drugs to make the patient comfortable. However, these increases must be gradual, must be charted, and must never be done with the express purpose of ending life. A bioethicist, who had reviewed these cases, said that in this case all nine cases represented active nonlegal euthanasia and that the administration of the drugs was not consistent with any ethical standards of palliative care in the United States. In Ontario we had investigated some cases of medical persons possibly ending life in a similar manner to these cases and claiming it was just palliative care. As a result, we had written clear guidelines, which were dispersed to medical professionals in the province. In our cases we encouraged the crown attorney to charge a lesser offence, such as administering a noxious substance. In addition, we would seek the person losing their license to practice. This advice was rejected, and the murder cases proceeded.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

The case was brought before a grand jury. I was called to testify, as were the other experts. The date kept being postponed, and eventually I was called when away at the tsunami and told I would not be required because a no bill had been issued in the case. I asked how this could be with the expert testimony. The reply was that no experts were called because the case was too controversial and it was better ended. Not, in my view, a proper result.

New Orleans itself is a city of contrasts. It is a mid-sized city that relies heavily on tourism. It has wealthy areas but also very poor ones. When working at the coroner's office, we had to get out before dark because the area was too dangerous after sunset. On the other hand, it was after sunset when the city came alive with jazz and fine dining. Frank Minyard was very well known in the city, and every night we would go to one of his favourite restaurants. As we entered, the maître would ask him if he wanted his usual table. After being seated without needing a menu, the food just started to come out of the kitchen, and it was very, very good.

The tsunami and Katrina both were huge natural disasters. In both, humans played a role as well.

Deaths in Complex Countries



As illustrated in the earlier chapter on Nigeria, death can threaten the political stability of a country. I experienced this several times, including deaths in Kazakhstan, Colombia, and Lebanon. Each of these experiences posed their own unique set of challenges.

Kazakhstan is a landlocked Central Asian country of about 20 million persons that borders on Russia and China. It was not an organized country until it was taken over by Russia and then became part of the Soviet Union. Russian is spoken as an official language along with Kazakh. Kazakhstan declared independence in 1991, following the breakup of the Soviet Union, and has a presidential system of governance. In recent times, the country has attempted to promote its Kazakh heritage and downplay its Russian influences. Russia promoted the idea of Russians emigrating to Kazakhstan until Russians

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

comprised 50% of the population. Since independence some Russians have left the country and resettled back in Russia. Much of the country's economy is based on oil and mining. The Russians also launched their space missiles from Kazakhstan and trained for the Winter Olympics in the Kazakh mountains.

Human rights in Kazakhstan are usually described as poor by observers, with restrictions on freedom of assembly, speech, and religion. During a crackdown on political speech, an opposition politician was charged with the rape of a woman. The case was weak and definitely appeared to be politically motivated. His conviction stirred tension in the country. Not long after this incident, the daughter of a dissident newspaper writer died after being arrested by police. The police maintained that the woman was drug addicted and arrested for drug possession. According to police, while in custody, she attempted to hang herself. She was found unconscious in her cell and transferred to a hospital, where she died some days later. The family believed that she had been arrested because of her mother's political views and then tortured and raped in jail. They believed that unconscious and unable to be aroused, she was transferred to the hospital.

At this time, Canadian companies had major financial

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

investments in oil and mining in Kazakhstan. Prime Minister Chretien met with the Kazakhstan president at a conference and suggested an independent investigation by someone outside of Kazakhstan might result in a credible explanation for the events that was satisfactory to all. The next thing I knew, I was on a plane going to Almaty, Kazakhstan, along with one of my pathologists. It was not difficult to imagine that this had once been a Soviet satellite country. There were multiple bureaucratic steps to go through in order to enter the country, even though I had a letter from the Prime Minister. All of the office areas were painted the military green that one associates with communist countries. Once we arrived at our hotel, our rooms were immediately upgraded. Our assumption was that the listening devices in these rooms were superior to those in the rooms we were supposed to be assigned. It was automatic to assume that the phones were bugged as well. It was early winter, and the air in the city was heavy with coal dust, which was affecting one's breathing. Much of the city of Almaty had been destroyed by an earthquake, and it had been rebuilt in the Soviet style of the time. This meant most of the buildings were box-shaped and made of cement and, architecturally, very boring.

The president had assured our Prime Minister that we

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

would have full access to any persons or records necessary for the investigation. I was assigned a senior translator by the Canadian Embassy in order to be assured that we were getting accurate translation of our questions and documents. Our first stop was a meeting with the chief of police. We outlined who we wished to speak to, where we wanted to go, and what records we wanted to examine. The chief was a tall man in his mid-50s and, while polite, seemed extremely nervous and wary of us. I assumed this was because he had never had foreigners arrive and tell him exactly what they wanted him to do. He assigned the head of the homicide department and another high-ranking police officer to set up all the meetings and take us everywhere we asked to go.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



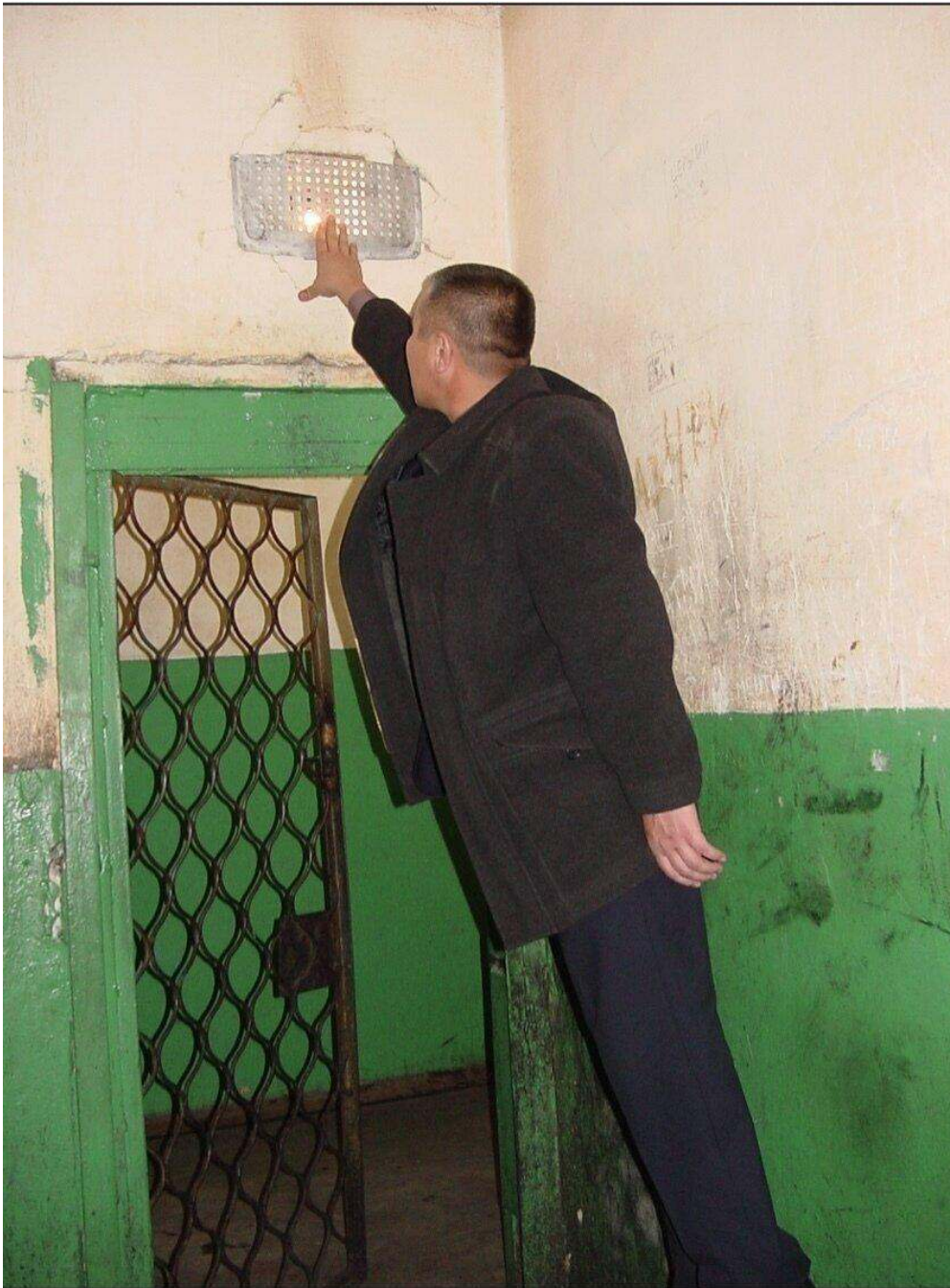
Starting our work

The next morning, we began the investigation with a visit to the site of the arrest. We then went to the police station and reviewed the arrest paperwork and toured the cell where the woman had been placed. We then interviewed the policeman who arrested her, the police who were watching her in the cells, and the police officer who found her unconscious in her cell. The next day, we interviewed the ambulance drivers, the doctors and nurses in emergency, and the staff in the hospital who had looked after her. We toured the hospital as well that day. The third day we visited the morgue. Morgues are not usually thought of as joyous places, but this morgue was

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

particularly depressing. There was not enough storage for the bodies, so some were kept in the cold outside, lying in wheelbarrows. We were anxious to have the cooperation of the pathologist, and so we brought some surplus pathology and medical textbooks with us. We started our meeting with the pathologist by talking in general terms about pathology and giving them the books we had brought. We also arranged to give a lecture to them later in our visit. This approach paid dividends, and we were confident that they were sharing all information with us. The final day of investigation, we went to a mental hospital that dealt with drug addiction. There we reviewed a chart of the woman and spoke with doctors and nurses who had looked after her during some earlier admissions. After agreeing on our conclusions, we met again with the police chief and the mayor of Almonty, who was the president's brother-in-law.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



Examining the cell

From our interviews, tours of the various sites, and review of police and medical records, we were able to reach definite conclusions that we believe represented the facts.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

We were convinced that this woman was in fact a drug addict. The visit to the mental health facility resulted in interviews and chart reviews that showed multiple admissions for drug addiction. As well, ambulance personnel, hospital personnel, and pathologists all remembered healing and healed needle tracks. The police records and interview with the arresting officer seem consistent with a drug arrest. The cell was a fairly standard police cell but did not have some features that our cells have to prevent suicide or attempted suicide. We could demonstrate that a prisoner could use their own clothing to hang themselves within the cell. The monitoring of the cell was episodic, and there were no cameras as monitors. The ambulance attendants were able to confirm where the body was when they arrived, and their descriptions matched the police reports. The hospital staff and pathologists could provide information about the condition of the body. She was unconscious on arrival and thought to be brain dead. Cardiac and respiratory death followed some days later as expected. There were no signs of physical abuse on the body either before or after death. The family was concerned that her clothes had disappeared, but we found the nurse who had thrown out the clothes when she died and no family had come to the hospital. What the family saw as possible rape, after

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

the release of the body to them, was fluid leaking from the body after death. This can appear like that bleeding and trauma. In assessing the credibility of interviews, ambulance attendants, medical personnel, and pathology were given higher credibility than police statements, since these people were not under investigation. In this case the evidence was consistent between interviews, written records, and site visits.



The morgue

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



Staff at the morgue. We gave lectures on forensic pathology which increased the staffs trust in us and ensured their cooperation

One of the days when we finished a little early, the police were taking us to see the site where the Russian Olympic team trained. We got a flat tire on the way, and after a fast repair, they took us instead to a pool hall. The pool table was a huge Russian billiard table, making the game a challenge for a poor player like me. After every game we would sit down for some food and drink. The food would be pickled herrings and horse meat, neither of which would qualify as my favourites. A bottle of very cold vodka would be brought for multiple toasts. The senior police officer would toast us, and then I toasted them. The

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

number two persons went next, and toasts continued until the bottle was empty. That was the signal for another pool game followed by more food and toasting. After three rounds we got to return to our hotel.

The next night we were taken to a nightclub. The toasting continued, as did the pickled herrings, but the meat was stepped up to huge full platters of horse meat, including the organs. The entertainment was a cabaret that included singers and belly dancers. The third night we indicated that we had opera tickets and so could not go out. Every time we left the hotel, whether to go to the embassy or anywhere else, we would note some guys fiddling with a car in front of the hotel. They would then discover they needed parts, which took them in the same direction as we were going. The trip to the Russian opera was no exception; we were followed. At halftime in the opera we had heard enough Russian and departed to walk back to our hotel. When we arrived magically, the police arrived just then as well, and since we were still early, they said we could still go out for dinner.

They took us to a different nightclub, one filled with military and police and their nieces. After the first round of vodka and pickled herrings, the homicide officer mentioned that the girls would be here soon and there

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

was dancing and activity available for the evening. I saw a large honey trap. I immediately said that I thought the Kazakh women were beautiful, but my wife always said, "Look, but do not touch." With that I made the sign of a nutcracker. Without any further translation, the cell phone came out and the girls were cancelled. For many months after this, when I travelled and opened my suitcase, there on top would be a photo of Eileen and beside it a nutcracker. The Kazakh women are, in fact, very attractive, as I recall.

I assumed the meeting with the mayor and the police chief would be very brief. That was not the case. The meeting started with a long discussion about hockey and in particular Kazakhstan players. After several other topics, the conclusion of our investigation came up. By this time the police chief was looking quite relaxed. Undoubtedly, he had been getting reports from his men. We indicated that we felt the death represented an incomplete hanging of a woman with a drug addiction, with brain death immediate and full death some days later. The police chief looked very relaxed until the mayor asked if anyone had failed in their duty and if the police chief should be fired. The police chief went white as a ghost. I explained how cell construction and monitoring could be improved, as could the preservation of evidence

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

when someone is transferred to hospital. However, I explained the chief had been fully cooperative, and I felt he would be fully engaged with any recommendations. The colour came back into the chief's face, and he ended the meeting by stating his great interest in the recommendations. When walking out of the meeting into a large square, the chief asked me to please wait a minute. He got on his phone, and soon a police car with lights and siren roared into the square. An officer ran over with a plastic bag and handed it to the chief. The Chief then reminded me that I had complimented his military-looking hat when we first met. He now wanted me to have his spare hat as a souvenir of my visit. It looks very good on me.

The family and community at large accepted our explanations and conclusions. The investigation ended with tensions reduced.

In April 2002, a group of army bomb squad officers burst into a finance meeting at the Cali, Colombia, parliament building. They warned of a bomb in the building and had sniffer dogs with them. A group of 12 members of parliament and five staff members were quickly loaded onto a waiting bus and taken supposedly to safety. Meanwhile, police technicians defused a small bomb

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

found nearby. The bus headed to the hills surrounding the city, and at this point the soldiers announced that they were not really soldiers but rather belonged to FARC. The five staff members were let off the bus, but the 12 parliamentarians were held as hostages.

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia is a Marxist-Leninist guerrilla group founded in 1964. They financed their activities by kidnappings and ransom, extortion, and the production and distribution of illegal drugs. FARC had a reputation for extreme violence, but they were not alone in that. There were other left-wing guerrilla groups, right-wing paramilitary groups, and even the government troops who committed atrocities.

More than five years passed, and no one had seen 12 kidnapped men, but there were rumours that they were still alive and being moved around different locations in the jungles of Columbia. FARC at this point contacted the government through intermediaries and indicated that 11 of the 12 hostages had been killed in a raid by government soldiers. There had been recent peace talks between the government and FARC, which were brokered by Canada, Switzerland, and Portugal. As a sign of good faith, FARC said they were willing to return the bodies of the 11 men. This is where I got involved. I was having a particularly

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

good round of golf at the Midland Golf and Country Club when I got a page to call someone at the Organization of American States in New York. This organization represents North, South, and Central America and the Caribbean islands and is part of the United Nations. I then had a decision to make. I was on the 15th hole. Do I finish the round and then call or stop and call right away? I figured the call was about deaths, so there was not a big rush. I finished the game and then called.



Banner kept track of how long the hostages had been held

The next day I was on my way to Washington to meet the Secretary General of the OAS. He explained the political

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

situation in Columbia to me and the importance of taking advantage of this offer from FARC. He asked me to lead a team with pathologists from Argentina and Portugal and political advisors from Chile and Argentina. The Portuguese pathologist was part of the international team we formed at the tsunami, so I already knew her and respected her abilities. Language was clearly an issue, so a translator was assigned to us as well.

The following day I flew to Bogota and met for the first time with our team. We next met with the Colombian forensic team. It was important for our team to realize that although we had been invited to Columbia, the legal jurisdiction for the autopsies and forensic tests belonged with the government experts. As with other international investigations, it was important to treat the local professionals with respect and not to be seen as parachuting in to save the day. We discussed at length the importance of the work we were doing, both appearing to be and actually being neutral. The Columbians agreed that the international team would physically do the work of identification and autopsy, but the Columbians would be consulted and observe as the work was being done. During these meetings we mapped out the flow of work, such as fingerprinting, dental identification, autopsy, photography, and sampling, such as DNA. We all realized

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

that once the bodies were in our possession, we would be under tremendous pressure to identify them quickly, gather forensic evidence, and release them to the families. While waiting for the bodies, we used the time to also offer some education to the Columbians. Their team was well trained and was incorporating new science like DNA into their practices. They had a tendency to take a cookbook approach and to want to use all testing possible on cases rather than saving valuable resources by picking what needed to be done on a case-by-case basis. Again they became receptive to this approach.



The international team meets with the Colombian forensic scientists to establish the protocol of how to go forward

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

We next met with the families. It had been nearly six years since the kidnapping, and families were all keen to have the bodies identified and released to them. On this they agreed. On other issues it was clear that there were power struggles for dominance. The families were told of our overall plan and some idea of timelines. We did not know what condition the bodies would be in, and this would affect our work schedule. We managed to gain the confidence of families and indicated to them that we would meet with them and share any information before we made any public statements. Some of the families had an advisor who they wanted involved. We found that he leaked information, some not accurate, to the press, and so we had to be very careful when and what he was told. At the same time we needed to be seen as working with him in order to maintain the confidence of the families.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



Three strong families who did not always agree on the way forward

It had been agreed that the Red Cross would be told by FARC the location of the bodies, and they would disinter the bodies and bring them to us. It was also agreed that they would not photograph the scene or undertake any forensic testing at the site. This was less than ideal but the only way to get the bodies returned. There seemed to be a delay in getting the information, and a meeting was arranged for us to talk with a FARC intermediary. We met in a secret location and outlined our plans for identification and autopsy and agreed to the disinterment

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

restrictions. I saw the meeting as a test by FARC as to whether our team could be trusted to be independent.



The bodies are finally found and recovered

Several days went by with no instructions from FARC, so we became tourists. We had armed guards with us as we moved around, so one day they took us on a trip outside Cali to the Andes mountains. We went through a lot of checkpoints, but at least this time, unlike in Nigeria, no guns were put to our heads. The hotel we were staying at had a flurry of activity and construction for a few days. It turned out that the area hotels and streets were being prepared for a weekend wellness convention. As

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

the weekend approached, it became obvious that wellness was code for plastic surgery, and I mean surgery for all body areas. I was talking to Eileen one day, and she asked what I was doing that day. I told her I was going down to Silicon Valley to people-watch. Another night, I indicated to her we were going out at 9 for what in Columbia is an early dinner. She asked if it was safe. I replied that the streets were filled with beautiful models, so I doubted FARC would be interested in a group of aging forensic experts. I was right.

Finally we got word that the location of the bodies would be shared that day. The Red Cross representatives called several times over the next hours to say that despite the information, they could not find the burials. They indicated they would try one more place, and that turned out to be correct. The 11 bodies arrived by ambulances, and we began our work. Just after we started, the morgue began to shake, and we were told to evacuate because of an earthquake. This fortunately did not last long, and we were soon back at work.

The bodies were amazingly well preserved. We did not know when the ambush occurred, but burial conditions must have been temperate and dry to allow such good preservation. All the bodies were clothed in fresh

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

garments, and no bullet holes were noted. It appeared that the bodies were redressed after death and given a respectful burial. The Columbian officials had gathered photos, dental records, any fingerprints, medical records, and personal DNA samples. Many of the bodies could be visually identified from photos, and the identity confirmed by fingerprints, dental records, or medical records. DNA samples were taken. The Columbians wanted to wait to publicly confirm and release the bodies until the DNA was completed. We overruled them because we were satisfied with other identification methods, and we did not want the delay in releasing the bodies. The DNA would be the final confirmation after the release of the bodies.

The second job of the international team was to conduct the autopsies. The men all appeared well nourished, and there were no obvious signs of torture. The cause of death in every case was the same. Gunshot wounds to the body. In all cases the wounds were from both the front and back, suggesting a group caught in the middle during a raid. The wounds all appeared to be from similar calibre bullets. At first we thought it might be useful to try and figure out the calibre of bullets and who used them, but we were told both sides had supplies of each other's bullets. The Columbian officials were encouraging a conclusion that

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

FARC had staged a supposed raid and shot the men from the front and back. The Columbian military said they had not been involved in a raid in that area, and therefore FARC was responsible. Everyone agreed on the existence of the bullet holes, but there was no conclusive way, with no witnesses, to tell who fired the guns. Our team impressed upon the Columbians that if we speculated and overstated our conclusions, we would lose all credibility.

After reporting our limited findings to the families, I conducted a press conference to share our results. I received questions in Spanish, had them translated into English, answered them in English, and then had the answers translated into Spanish. It took a while, but it was successful. The bodies were released, and the families were satisfied. Next I went to Washington to report directly to the OAS Secretary General and gave him my full report, which was released at a press conference in Washington.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



This was an interesting press conference to conduct in Spanish and English

Some months later the Colombian military conducted a raid on a FARC camp to rescue hostages. One of the men rescued was the 12th parliamentarian. He indicated that FARC had grown weary of moving the 12 hostages around and had staged the deaths to look like the hostages were caught in crossfire. In this case the Columbian forensic people were correct that FARC killed the men, but it would still have been wrong for us or them to try and turn speculation into fact based on what we knew at the time.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

The next year I was invited back to Columbia to give some lectures. By this time talks between the government and FARC had progressed, and FARC had agreed to lay down arms and pursue political solutions. While I was there, the Attorney General asked me to come and see him. He asked my advice on a delicate matter. He had just learned that an army unit that was thought to be very successful was in fact corrupt. The unit had been collecting a bounty on bodies of FARC members they killed. It had just been learned that these were not FARC soldiers but rather young local men they kidnapped, dressed as FARC, and killed. My advice to him was to make the entire sordid affair public, and he said he thought that would be my advice. That is what he did.

Lebanon became an independent country after breaking away from France in 1943. Government power is shared between Maronite Christian, Sunni Muslim, and Shia Muslim leaders. There was a long civil war between 1975-1990. There have also been Israeli occupations and wars and the Syrian occupation of parts of the country between 1976 and 2005. Syria often exerts its influence through the Hezbollah group.

Rafik Hariri was a very wealthy businessman and politician who was Prime Minister of Lebanon 1992-1998

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

and 2000-2004. He is credited for his role in producing the agreement that ended the civil war. Hariri was running for reelection when, on February 14, 2005, he and 22 others were killed by an 1800-kilogram bomb, which was hidden inside a parked van. A suicide bomber detonated the device as Hariri's motorcade was driving by the St. George Hotel in Beirut.

Hezbollah blamed the bombing on Israel, while others suspected Syria and Hezbollah. The United Nations formed an investigative team to prepare a case to go before the World Court, and I was asked to assist. My role was limited, and I needed to be in Lebanon for only a couple of weeks. I was asked to look over the forensic evidence, comment on the quality of it, and make suggestions for future investigation.

Upon arriving in Lebanon, I had been instructed to tell immigration that I was a medical doctor working with the UN. I was not to mention that I was working in forensic medicine and part of the UN investigation. This was because Hezbollah operatives worked in immigration, and I might not gain admission to the country if detected at the border. An American ex-military guy met me once I passed immigration. It was obvious he was carrying a gun. He quickly took me out of the airport, and he drove

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

very fast through the area around the airport. He later explained that this was the Hezbollah-controlled section of Beirut, and on occasion they shot at foreigners in their zone. I was taken to a hotel that was surrounded by barbed wire and guards walking around the perimeter. Our car was carefully searched for bombs before we were allowed to enter the hotel property.

The actual work of the group was done at another site several miles away. Our identification would be checked and double-checked before we drove to the work site, which also was heavily protected. The time we went and the route we took changed every day. The checking for bombs and the constant checking of identification continued at the worksite.

I was both shown pictures of the bomb site and toured the area. It was obvious that once the bomb went off, the area was not properly cordoned off and was likely forensically contaminated. I was made aware that some early identifications had not been done correctly. This resulted in some bodies being released to the wrong families, including some who might have been involved in the bombing. DNA analysis became important in ensuring this was corrected, and so I toured the DNA lab to interview the scientists and review their work. The lab

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

was somewhat makeshift, but I believed they were taking proper precautions and producing accurate work. The investigation eventually centred on a number of Hezbollah members who were believed to be receiving their orders from Syria.

Beirut is sometimes called the Paris of the Middle East because of the strong French influence on the city. It is quite hilly and quite grand in places. One evening I was allowed to go with a guard into the city for dinner at a forensic dentist's apartment. He warned me to stay away from the windows because sometimes shots could be fired at the building. A couple of weeks after leaving Lebanon, he sent me a message that things had deteriorated and his family was only using the part of the apartment away from the windows and the hallway outside the apartment because the windows had been shattered and bullets were coming in.

While in Lebanon, I also got to practice some public health. We ate breakfast and dinner in our guarded hotel, and several people started to get sick with gastrointestinal complaints. I suspected food poisoning. Since I was the only medical doctor and they did not want to involve local professionals, I was asked to investigate. I toured the kitchen and watched food preparation. There were serious

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

problems, and the kitchen was closed. Outside food was brought in while the kitchen was cleaned and the staff trained in proper food handling. Given my total lack of culinary skills, this was certainly stretching my abilities. However, the kitchen eventually reopened, and no one else got sick.

My trip home left very late in the evening. The trip to the airport was even faster than the trip from the airport. Hezbollah was aware of the times of evening flights and sometimes shot at cars going to the airport. Therefore, when traffic was light at night, this part of the trip was done at high speed with no stops at traffic lights.

The killing of Prime Minister Hariri ultimately produced change in Lebanon. There were massive protests called the Cedar Revolution, which helped achieve the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon.

SARS



Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) first appeared in China in November 2002. It is believed the virus originated in bats and was transferred to civet cats and then spread through live markets in China to humans. SARS was the first pandemic since the 1918-1919 Spanish flu, which is believed to have killed between 50 and 100 million people. Public health experts had been warning for years that we were overdue for a pandemic. A pandemic, by definition, is the global spread of a new virus by human-to-human contact for which humans have no resistance. Pandemics are by their nature unpredictable. Different viruses attack different age groups in different ways, for example, being particularly lethal to children or seniors. The attack rate of viruses can vary from being difficult to spread, such as SARS turned out to be, or very easily spread, such as Covid. The lethality of viruses also varies. It is believed that about 11 percent of people who caught SARS ultimately died, while the rate of death with

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

Covid was much less.

It is also important to differentiate between viruses and bacteria. Bacteria are larger, more developed organisms and susceptible to antibiotics. My personal definition of a virus is as follows. Viruses are like a teenage boy. They have no brain, they love to replicate, and your worst fear is they will mutate. This is said by a man, me, who made it through raising four teenage boys.

It is important to remember that SARS, like all pandemics, starts suddenly somewhere in the world, usually in an underdeveloped or developing country, when a virus gets transferred from animal to human and mutates so that it can spread from human to human. It likely will mimic other existing viral illnesses in symptoms but have its own characteristics as to how it spreads, who it affects, and how sick people get. It usually takes time for medical professionals to realize it is new and unique and then more time to figure out measures to help control the spread. Organizations such as the World Health Organization have been created to encourage the necessary dialogue once a country senses an outbreak. Other systems have also been developed as early warning systems. For example, one computer program developed in Canada captures news reports about health issues and looks for

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

patterns of increased comment about some symptoms in the population as being a possible signal of the new virus. Another idea is to study over-the-counter purchases in drugstores to look for a sudden increase in a product such as a cold and flu remedy or an anti-diarrhea product. Sampling sewage water for viral load is a further way of monitoring new outbreaks. SARS is a good example of a situation where these measures did not work. There were some scattered early reports of a flu in Guangdong Province in China, but they were given little attention when China failed to report any concerns.

A doctor from Guangdong Province, who had been treating patients with a quite lethal new flu, travelled to Hong Kong in February 2003. He stayed in room 911 of the Metropole Hotel. Soon after arriving, he developed symptoms consistent with the disease he had been treating in China, and he turned out to be a super spreader. At the same time, an elderly couple from Canada also stayed on the 11th floor of the hotel. They had been given the night's stay as part of their airline package. When they returned home to Toronto, after a few days the wife became ill and was seen at home by her family physician. She had fragile health to begin with, and the long trip did not help. She died at home some days later, and no investigation was done. It is believed that the Toronto couple came into

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

contact with the Chinese doctor while all were waiting for and then rode an elevator together. Ultimately both the husband and the family doctor developed what was then an unnamed illness, and both ultimately died. The doctor survived an extended period in the ICU and appeared to be recovering when he had a fatal cardiac arrest. At the funeral for the Toronto women, mourners came in close contact, with the result that several attendees also caught the disease. This incident was the major case of spread in the community during the Canadian outbreak.



The Ontario epidemic started here

Next, the son of the elderly woman developed respiratory symptoms which worsened and he went to the North York General Hospital emergency department. He personally

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

had no travel history, nor did the hospital ask if any relatives had travelled, so initially he was not isolated. He also proved to be a superspreader and infected staff and patients near him in the emergency room. The original SARS patients had a form of the virus that was extremely lethal. As time went on, the virus mutated and became less lethal but still very dangerous.

This spread was occurring at the same time as word was leaking out of Hong Kong and China that a new disease was spreading. Hospital emergency departments had to become very aware of travel history and the need to isolate patients with infections of unknown cause. In those days hospitals were not set up to isolate large numbers of patients. A passenger returning from Hong Kong to Vancouver became ill on a plane and went straight to the hospital upon landing. He volunteered the information to medical staff that he had been travelling and he was aware of people in Hong Kong being hospitalized with symptoms similar to his. Quite properly, he was isolated. A spread in British Columbia was stopped before it got started. Some BC officials bragged to the press about how well they had handled their first case and how poorly Ontario had done. This observation was not only incorrect, but it also made our job of managing public expectations and actions more difficult. It was great that

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

BC avoided the outbreak, but the circumstances of their first case were significantly different from the North York case. As a result of SARS, hospitals learned valuable lessons. Hospitals ask many more questions about travel, they isolate much more readily, and rooms with multiple beds are being replaced by single-bed rooms.

When the son of the elderly woman died and the doctor and husband also were hospitalized with this unnamed illness, public health became aware of the China and Hong Kong cases. The assumption, correctly, was made that the Toronto cases were probably caused by the same organism as the international cases. North York Hospital was then closed to the public and isolated from the rest of the healthcare system. It was at this point that I became involved because of two of the hats I wore. As Chief Coroner, I was responsible for investigating deaths in the province, and as the Commissioner of Public Safety and Security, I was responsible for managing emergencies in Ontario.

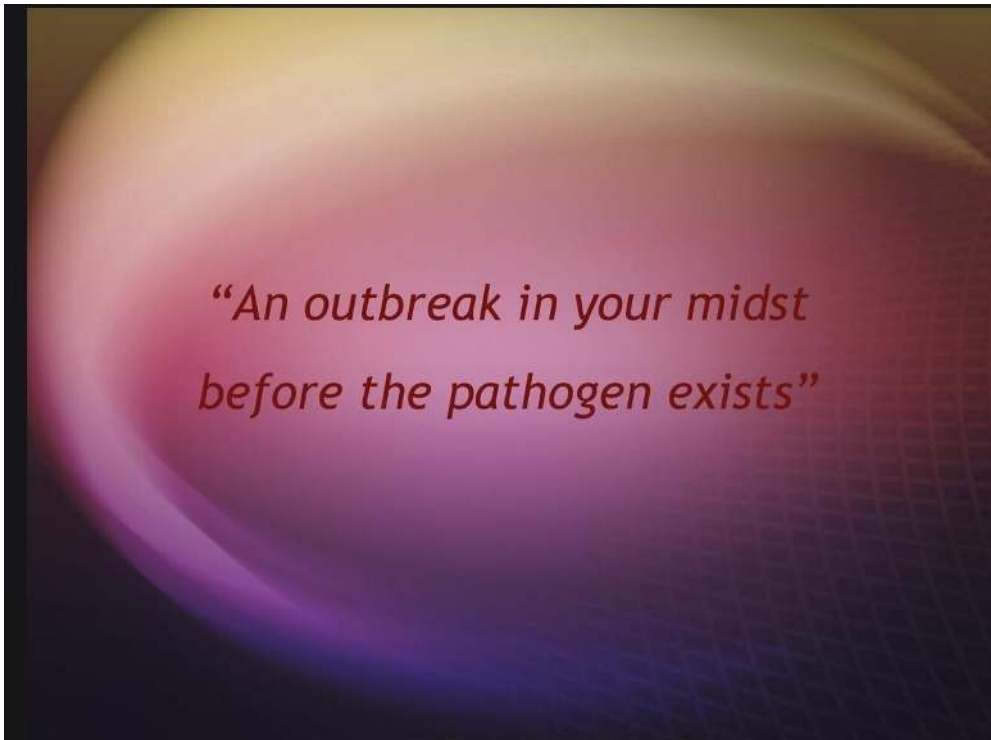
As events were advancing, I was talking to the Chief Medical Officer of Public Health and asked about the North York situation. He related that the situation was still accelerating and the province and Toronto Public Health were talking every couple of days in a phone

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

conference. I was invited to take part the next day. In the interim, I asked him if I could send one of my senior emergency management managers to get a better idea of where and how the Ministry of Health was operating. The manager went over that afternoon and called me at home that night. He related that the outbreak from a provincial point of view was being managed in a small boardroom with a single phone and a single fax machine. It clearly was not high enough priority yet in my view. The next day the call between the city and the province did not go much better. It was obvious that the number of cases was increasing and Toronto Public Health was moving more and more resources into identifying and tracking the spread of cases. Everyone seemed focused on today rather than on where we were going in the future. The cases we were seeing were the tip of the iceberg. They had occurred many days to a week or more earlier, and in the interim the spread had continued. We needed to identify the cases quickly, trace who had been in contact with these persons, and isolate contacts until we were sure they were not infected and able to spread disease. We also needed to figure out how to stop the spread of the disease. In other words, we had a lot of catching up to do. We in fact already had an outbreak in our midst before an organism had even been identified. There was an urgent

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

need to understand much more about the disease before we could possibly stop the spread. To make matters even more difficult, there was no information coming out of China, and no one yet knew what to do to diminish the outbreak. We were on our own.



There was no name to the disease yet but we had an outbreak in Toronto

Immediately after the phone conference I phoned the Ontario MOH and told him we needed to meet. At that meeting, I indicated that the worsening situation required a provincial emergency be declared. This was certainly a health emergency, and the public health professionals would work with the hospitals to identify the cases and trace the contacts. There was also an ever-growing

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

number of issues affecting the various ministries of government. For example, managing a project like this involves large financial expense and considerations for what to do if cases start appearing in jails, if this illness is going to affect children, if we should close the schools, how to reassure countries and companies we are safe to trade with, how to quickly import items such as masks we are short of, and what to do about tourism. They are but a small sampling of issues that needed to be considered. I have not even mentioned the biggest issue: reassuring the public and getting the public's cooperation on measures needed.

The MOH agreed, and we set off in the afternoon to declare the first provincial emergency in the province's history. We met with the Solicitor General and Minister of Health and got their buy-in. Next we went to see Premier Eves. He was aware of the North York General issue but needed education to understand that what we were seeing happened a week or more ago, and so the situation would get worse until we caught up and found ways to stop the spread. With discussion he realized this was not just a health issue but rather a whole-of-government issue with a health focus. We prepared some remarks for the Premier, and a couple of hours later the three of us gave a press conference, at which a provincial emergency was called.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

I recognized, as with all emergencies, understanding the problem and deciding on the first actions to be taken was crucial. A key to this is understanding that you have to operate with the hand you have been dealt. It is easy to focus on shortcomings such as poor planning, limited resources, or, in the case of SARS, no proper computer case system to link cases and help manage them. This leads to a focus on blame rather than action to solve the problem. What needs to be put in place are the simplest actions that will result in the greatest benefit.

My initial action was to put together a team to analyze the problem and decide on first actions. The medical officers of health from Toronto and the province, along with their deputies, were asked to attend a meeting at Emergency Measures Ontario to start at 7 pm. Senior Ministry of Health managers, such as the assistant deputy minister of hospitals, were also invited, as were infection control doctors from North York and some of the teaching hospitals. In total, about 15 people attended the meeting. Using a whiteboard, first I asked that we discuss everything we knew about this new pathogen. It was agreed that the symptoms included fever, muscle pain, cough, sore throat, and often shortness of breath and pneumonia. Close contact, coughing, and sneezing were obvious routes of spread, but we did not know how

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

contagious the disease was. There were early indications from China, Hong Kong, and Toronto that the pathogen was very lethal. What was not known was what the pathogen was, how long the incubation period was, or whether it could be spread to someone before the carrier had symptoms. Everyone agreed that we probably were dealing with a brand new virus. Other things we did not know included what family of viruses it belonged to and when we would have a test for it. It was several days later before the World Health Organization named it SARS. Naming the disease was one part, but at that point we still did not know what virus it was.

Everyone at the meeting agreed that most of the cases seemed to be spreading through hospital contact rather than the community. This meant there was a need to isolate these patients from other patients as soon as they came to the hospital. As mentioned previously, this was easier said than done, because isolation rooms were very limited in hospitals. Anyone entering a hospital would need to be carefully screened for health and travel history, and all medical staff would need to be protected from the patients. An assumption was made that because of transfers of patients between hospitals and with patients able to go to any emergency department when sick, all hospitals in Ontario potentially already had cases,

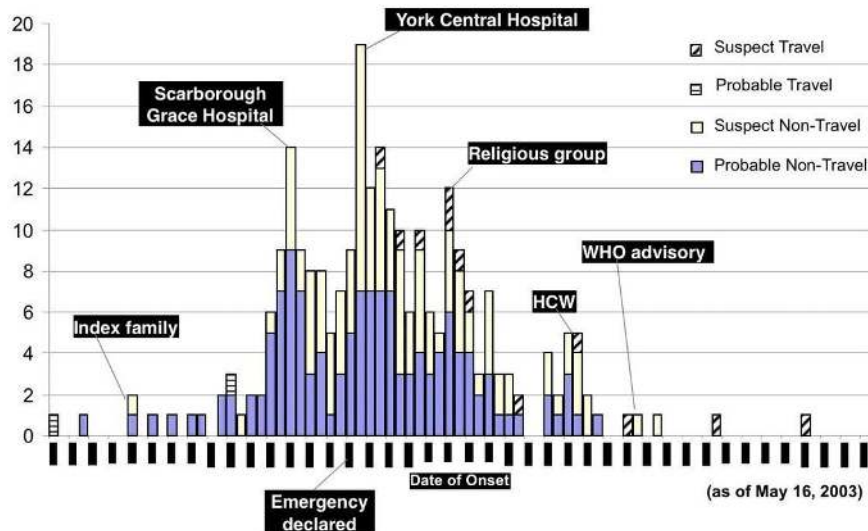
A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

although Toronto hospitals were most likely the most affected. We decided to at first, therefore, concentrate most of our initial efforts on hospitals. Over the next hours we wrote a set of directives to all hospitals in the province. They were sent out at 4 am and were to come into effect immediately. Visitors would not be allowed till further notice, unless there were special circumstances such as terminally ill patients. Everyone entering a hospital would be screened for possible SARS exposure or symptoms. All elective surgery would be postponed for a few days till the measures were in place and operating smoothly, and hospital staff would wear masks at all times. All transfers of patients between hospitals also had to be approved by the province so that we could track where patients were and where they had been. Over the next days, hospitals were asked to search diligently for SARS cases and report them to the province. Toronto Public Health would continue to identify cases in the community and to do contact tracing. Should they identify someone exposed, they would be quarantined in their house for a period of time. All these measures were essentially picking the low-hanging fruit. However, if they were quickly and effectively put in place, we believed we would see a drop in cases in a week to 10 days.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

The next morning after the all-night meeting, I got a call from Premier Eves. He said he was listening to the radio while shaving, and the first item was the shutdown of the health system because of SARS. I explained that the shutdown was not the complete system and that it was temporary, while we built more safety into the hospital system and while we educated medical personnel on what to do. He countered by saying I had not indicated such drastic measures when we met the day before. My response was that our meeting of experts had decided on this course of action, and besides, the day before when I asked about limits on my actions, the answer had been to just fix it. I then asked him what he would have done differently if I had called with this plan at 4 am. His answer was he probably would have said we should delay and think about it for a few days. My reply was that was exactly why I did not call you. That would have been a very wrong reply. This outbreak will multiply exponentially until we put in place measures to stop it. We do not have a second to lose. The action we then agreed upon was that I would go to the cabinet every week and explain what we were doing and why, but in return the cabinet would not second-guess us.

iii. Ontario cases by onset date



Most of the cases spread before the outbreak was known. The measures we took stopped the spread

It quickly became obvious that we faced some supply chain shortages. Ordering all medical staff to wear masks all the time would result in a massive increase in mask use. At that time we quickly discovered that no masks were actually manufactured in Canada, and we had to go on world markets to purchase our needs. Countries fearing they would be hit next with SARS were reluctant to allow the export of unlimited amounts. As well, the price of masks skyrocketed. Ontario spent many millions of dollars on masks, but we did establish a reliable pipeline.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

Masks, however, continued to be a problem. The spread of SARS was not well understood, and so some people advocated for the use of N95 masks. These masks are fitted and much harder to wear for extended periods of time. Our experts did not feel they were necessary for routine wear but rather should be worn only in cases where actual SARS patients were being cared for. The RN nursing union disagreed. We held multiple meetings to reassure the union and try to maintain confidence in what we were doing. The additional problems with N95 masks were that they were very expensive and very difficult to obtain worldwide. As well, there was a big technical problem. We discovered that N95 masks need to be individually fitted to each user, and only certain masks fit each person. We did establish a system for fitting medical people but could not possibly extend it to everyone. As the outbreak progressed, it became obvious that procedures such as intubating SARS patients in the ICU or emergency room were very high risk for medical personnel. In these cases precautions went well beyond N95 masks. Full spacesuit-like isolation gear, including a breathing apparatus, was used to minimize SARS exposure.

The Toronto Transit union requested an occupational and health order from the province to allow all TTC personnel in contact with the public to wear masks. We believed that

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

this would start a stampede of requests for mask use. We did not have an adequate supply of masks, nor did we have evidence of the virus spreading easily in the community. Therefore, encouraging mask use in this case would create a higher level of anxiety in the general population, strain our supply of masks, and probably do nothing to help control the pandemic. The difference between SARS and the later COVID pandemic was that COVID, while much less lethal, did spread in the community, and therefore masking was an important measure in the general population. By the time of COVID, mask manufacturing was done in Canada and could be rapidly increased.

The second night after the emergency declaration, I brought the experts back together for an evening meeting. The issue I wanted explored was whether we should designate a limited number of hospitals as SARS hospitals. Non-SARS patients would be moved out, and new SARS cases would be moved in. China was following this model and was quickly building temporary structures for this purpose. I took the expert group and divided them in half. One group would advocate for SARS hospitals, and the other would not. Each group had one hour to discuss their point of view and come back to the group and convince them of the merits of it. Interestingly, when the groups were brought together, all but one person were

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

in favour of not creating SARS hospitals in the Ontario setting but rather strengthening infection control in all hospitals.

The two evening meetings convinced me of the need for ongoing expertise. Every day issues arose that needed to be thought through. A permanent expert committee was created for the duration of SARS, and its members were seconded and paid by the Ontario government. I would attend the committee meeting every day and give them issues to consider, such as the TTC mask wearing. Some issues needed a rapid answer, some needed a response in a few days, and some were long-term questions which would evolve over time. This committee was dedicated and gave superb advice. They did the important work of thinking through the correct policies we needed to follow, and then another working group made up of Toronto and Ontario public health teams plus Ontario ministries could concentrate on implementing the needed actions. A third group of public health people plus epidemiologists gathered the necessary data on case numbers. When managing a big emergency, it is easy to get totally absorbed in the events of the day and partially ignore what is coming next and ultimately the recovery phase. This committee structure allowed for today's management but also a focus on the future.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

In the early days, we now had a name for the pandemic but no organism identified. At autopsy of one of the early Toronto deaths, samples were sent to the high-security federal lab in Winnipeg for study. Within days an answer came back. The mystery virus was a new coronavirus. This type of virus is called "corona" because it has spikes on it that look like a crown. Covid, it turns out, also is a coronavirus but different from SARS. The identification of the virus turned out to be very important. Until this time the new illness was thought to present with respiratory symptoms. However, the coronavirus family often presents with GI symptoms, like diarrhea. It was then quickly realized that there had been a greater number than normal of patients in the SARS area presenting at the hospital with GI complaints, and probably some of these represented SARS cases. We needed to warn hospitals to also look out for and isolate these cases in the future, and public health had to go back and investigate these cases and contact trace if they were SARS.

A very necessary part of managing any emergency is keeping the public informed and supportive. This is done through a number of ways, including press conferences, interviews, written materials, and informal events. When the SARS emergency was declared, political advisors indicated to me that they thought we should hold a press

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

conference once or twice a week. I said, "No, the press conferences need to be daily." This was going to be a fast-moving event, and we needed to correct rumours and critics in real time, not long after wrong information was circulating. Each morning, before meeting with the various committees, I would meet with the communications director of the Ministry of Health and decide on the theme and messages for the afternoon press conference. Then at 2 pm each day, the panel we had created for the day would talk about the issue of the day and answer questions. It was vital that we never overstate facts and admit when we were unsure. Consistent messaging was essential. I remember several weeks into the daily press briefings, a reporter saying that on a specific day weeks earlier I had said something, and was I being inconsistent with that message from that day. Fortunately, I was able to remember what I said the first time and to explain why today's answer was consistent. The press conferences were carried live in their entirety each day and proved to be very effective. Most days the reporters picked up their stories from our information, and they gave us a daily chance to counter speculative information which might be incorrect. Months after the press conferences ended, I was walking on Yonge Street when an elderly woman stopped me and gave me a big

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

hug. She said she knew me from when I had my daily TV show and just wanted to thank me.

In managing early communication, it is very important to stay out of the blame game. It is good for the press if people are blaming someone for an event or the mismanagement of an event. Debate like this may sell newspapers, but it undermines management of an emergency. People tend to quit listening to the important messaging about what they need to do because the blame game is more juicy. A good example of this occurred during Covid some years after SARS. In the United States there was endless debate about whether the virus originated in a laboratory or in the live markets. This is an important question to consider eventually, but it should not be the public focus when people need instruction as to initial measures to be taken to avoid getting the disease. Where the virus came from was not going to influence what initially needed to be done to combat it, and in fact, it undermined public confidence in the management of the outbreak.

As well as the daily press conferences, I did interviews most days. Canada AM would send a limo at 5 am, once or twice a week, to take me to their studio for an early interview. The same pattern was true for the CBC morning

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

show. I tended to do the Business Network and CityTV interviews in the early evening. The BBC, CNN, and other US outlets often asked for interviews, and these were important for us. It was necessary to get accurate information into these markets because of the effects on tourism and trade. SARS was expensive to manage as a health emergency, but this was only a fraction of the total cost when all the economic factors of trade, tourism, and lost productivity were added in. One weekend, BBC wanted to do an interview with me. I told them I could and to meet me at the St. Lawrence Market Saturday morning. As I walked through the crowded market, a lot of people were coming up and shaking my hand as they thanked us for the job we were doing. The story the BBC produced centred on the fact that the outbreak was affecting hospitals in one part of the city, but otherwise life was normal and safe in the city. This was the message we wanted to convey internationally.

The measures that were put in place the first night were refined slightly as we went along, but as we hoped, they had their desired effect. The number of new cases peaked a few days later and then gradually went down. Until we reached a point of no new cases for a two-week period, the outbreak would not be considered to be over. It was a nervous time watching the numbers trend toward this

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

but fearing we could miss a case and start over. If this happened, at least we knew what to do to stop the spread. It was during this waiting time that we had an incident with the World Health Organization. Our case numbers were sent regularly to the WHO, who were monitoring the situation in countries with outbreaks to determine whether there should be travel advisories against any of them. The epidemiologist that Canada regularly dealt with went on holidays, and another took his place. He misunderstood the stats and invoked a travel advisory against Canada at a time when our numbers were in fact improving and the risk of travel was minimal. As a first measure, we wanted to send a message very loud and clear to the WHO that they were wrong. We invited an infection control doctor onto the afternoon press conference panel, knowing that if the right question were asked, he would explode about the WHO decision. It worked. He exploded, and then we explained to the WHO that he was not a government employee, and of course we could not sanction what he said, although we agreed that an error had been made. After further dialogue the travel advisory was lifted a couple of days later.

Explaining to the United States what we were doing about SARS was most important. We did not want the US to panic and shut the border to people and trade, nor did we

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

want the US to hoard vital supplies such as masks and refuse to export them. Communication again was the key. I met several times for lunch or dinner with the head of the Centre for Disease Control at the US Council General's residence in Toronto. We discussed the measures we were taking and our results to date. The United States did have some cases, but knowing to look for them and isolate patients limited the spread. The CDC took their lead from what was working for us. The CDC director asked me if I would agree to appear as a witness at a Senate hearing on SARS. The day of the hearing was the same day as Bryan, my son, was receiving his page as a constable with Peel Regional Police. I could not miss this event, nor could the hearing date be changed. I indicated to the Premier that I could arrange for someone else to go to Washington. He indicated to me that this was not an acceptable plan, but I could have use of a government plane to get back in time. However, because the government plane could not land and take off from Reagan Airport, near downtown Washington, the timing would not work. What would work is if I quickly got to the airport after the hearing, was cleared onto the commercial flight, was cleared at immigration in Toronto quickly, and was then taken by police car to the ceremony. A limo was arranged for my travels in Washington. I went to Bloomberg News

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

and CNN to do interviews and then did interviews in the rotunda of the Capitol building. Next was the senate hearing. It was just like seeing it on TV, with the senators high above and me, the witnesses at a table in front. The senators were very interested and gentle in their questioning. Immediately following the questioning, I was off to the airport and Canada bound. I made it to the ceremony with 15 minutes to spare. After, someone mentioned to me that before going to the ceremony, they saw me on CBC News World giving an interview from the Senate Rotunda. The person asked when that had been taped. "It wasn't," I replied. "It was live when you saw it a couple of hours ago."

One of the interesting side issues I faced concerned the adoption of Chinese children from orphanages by Canadian families. Foreign Affairs called me at the height of the outbreak and said a group of families were going to China the next week and would return a week later with the children. This adoption process took many months to arrange, and if cancelled, it might not ever take place. On the other hand, we had no clear idea of the health of these children or what exposure to SARS they might have had on reentry. To make matters worse, we could not trust the word of the Chinese government as to the incidence of SARS in any region. We definitely did not want to delay

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

or stop adoption, but we also could not afford to have one of the families accidentally import a new outbreak into Canada. The compromise we came up with was that the families would isolate for a week in Hong Kong after leaving the mainland and then once home shelter again for a week to ensure they did not get exposed in Hong Kong. Upon return to Canada, they agreed to not have any gatherings involving friends and family until a safe period had passed. All but one family readily agreed and saw the need for these measures. One couple initially went along but returned via British Columbia rather than Toronto to avoid the isolation. Fortunately, they did not import SARS. Once home, they complained to the Human Rights Tribunal that we had violated their rights. There was a lengthy investigation, which included my lawyer and me flying to Ottawa twice. In the end, after a long meeting, we explained the situation we faced and told them we also understood their concerns and agreed to disagree. A great deal of time and money had been spent dealing with a situation I felt we had handled correctly and humanely.

While counting the days till we were two weeks without a case, Foreign Affairs asked me to go to Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China to explain to those governments how we had managed SARS. I chose an infectious disease specialist and Doctor Bonnie Henry from Toronto Public

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

Health to accompany me. Bonnie had been in charge of tracking and tracing cases and liaising with the hospitals. She was an all-star in SARS and, not surprisingly, superb when managing Covid in her job as the Medical Officer of Health for British Columbia. On the way across to Hong Kong, I received my briefing on the Canadian politics of China. Since Hong Kong is part of China, it is considered a consulate. Taiwan is considered a province of China by China but a sovereign country by the Taiwanese. Canada does not formally recognize Taiwan as a country, and so our dealings there are as a trade mission. Beijing, of course, is the capital of China, and our embassy is located there.

Hong Kong, as previously mentioned, was the source of the first Toronto case. The outbreak there spread from Guangdong province. The medical officer of health for Hong Kong was a female doctor who was Canadian-trained and went on after SARS to lead the World Health Organization. The outbreak in Hong Kong was large and difficult to bring under control but was in its final phases when we visited. When discussing how we all managed the pandemic, the director mentioned how lucky we were to be able to manage the outbreak without political interference. We also discussed another part of the management, which had Canadian implications. Amy

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

Gardens was an apartment complex where 329 people caught SARS and 33 died. Their primary symptoms were GI in nature. It turned out that the spread was not by respiratory coughing and sneezing but rather because of plumbing. The septic piping had been installed incorrectly, and the virus got into the air from improper venting. This method of spread was unique to this situation but was recognized because of Canada's work identifying the coronavirus and the possibility of GI presentation.

From Hong Kong our group next moved on to Taiwan. The flight and entry into Taiwan proved most interesting. We were isolated on the plane from any other passengers, and when we arrived, immigration wanted us isolated for two weeks. This isolation would defeat the purpose of our trip. After much diplomatic discussion we were allowed into the country and met with the officials managing the outbreak. Before this meeting, the CDC had contacted me and indicated they were having little luck in influencing the management of the outbreak. Taiwan was disinfecting the streets and taking measures to deal with community spread. Some of these measures, like contact tracing and quarantining exposed persons, were necessary, but they were focused almost entirely on community rather than hospital measures. This was the opposite approach to what

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

we had done and we believed would do little to stop their outbreak. After several meetings, the merits of our approach seemed to get through, and they adopted our suggestions. This was another example where not being from the United States was important. The change in direction worked, and Taiwan got the outbreak under control.

While in Hong Kong, I did a lengthy interview with CNN. They produced several versions of the interview, which lasted from a couple of minutes to 15 minutes or longer. Some version played almost continuously while we were in the region. It seemed like every time I turned on the TV in the hotel to CNN, I was being interviewed. When we got to Beijing and we went to our first meeting, it was like everyone already knew me. It was a strange feeling to be so recognized halfway around the world.

The Canadian embassy had arranged a meeting with the mayor of Beijing. The city has a population of nearly 22 million people, and so the mayor is a significant leader. The Canadian ambassador, along with three of us, were to attend what we thought would be a short, "thanks for coming" type of meeting. Seating for formal meetings is very rigid. You wait until you are invited to sit, and the visitors sit to the right of the room, looking toward the

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

back. You also sit according to your rank. Because I was the guest expert, I would be next to the mayor, then the ambassador, followed by our team. I would likely do all the speaking for our group. Just as seen in photos, this left me sitting to the right of the mayor in an oversized stuffed chair with a small end table between us and artificial flowers behind us. Behind the flowers sat the translator. The meeting started with pleasantries but quickly got down to very specific details of what we did and why we did it. The mayor at one point expressed his displeasure with the Chinese federal government for covering up the initial cases in Guangdong province, which allowed the virus to spread undetected to Beijing. The outbreak in Beijing. Had been very large and difficult to manage. The meeting lasted one and a half hours, and at the end my new friend, the mayor, gave me a framed etching of the Great Wall. I remember that day every time I look at that picture. On the way back to the embassy, the ambassador told me he had never been in a meeting with Chinese leaders where they were as candid as had just occurred.

No trip, even if for business, would be complete without touring some sites and doing some souvenir shopping. China was no exception. Embassy staff took us to the Great Wall and to the Forbidden City. Normally both would be very, very crowded, but because of SARS, both

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

were deserted. I have pictures of the Forbidden City with no humans to be seen. My shopping included the Ambassador taking me to Lulu's Golf Land. There I purchased a beautiful five wood for \$20. I am still using it to get out of the ruff, which means it is well used. I think of SARS every time I swing it.

The Canadian journalists were interested in our trip, and I was contacted for interviews as we travelled. I was asked to go to an apartment to meet the local CTV reporter and do a live session on Canada AM. The interview was at dusk, 8 pm, which was 8 am in Canada. The hostess began by asking what I thought about rumours of new SARS cases in Toronto. I was dumbstruck. We had been busy and had not had any contact back home. I gave a very general answer to the effect that the matter was being taken seriously and I was waiting for more information. The second the interview was over, I was on the phone trying to get details of what was happening. It appeared that a man in a nursing home developed SARS symptoms and was evaluated as a possible case. Given that he was in a nursing home and no one else in Canada currently had SARS, it was felt that he did not have the virus. He was not isolated, and ultimately he was transferred to a hospital and again not isolated. Other people, including medical people, started getting sick, and it was recognized

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

that he did in fact have SARS. Toronto and Canada now had SARS 2. Later it was determined that the patient's son had recently travelled and then visited his father and brought him the gift of sickness.

Our team cut short our trip to China and caught the next plane home. It was a very quiet trip as the three of us pondered the job ahead of us. Everyone who worked on SARS 1 was exhausted, and now we faced the infection again. Although we knew what to do to stop the outbreak, we realized it would take at least another month to achieve an end to the outbreak. In the interim, public confidence in what we said and did would be challenged well beyond what we faced in SARS 1. I was particularly upset that the medical team, who evaluated the man, had not learned from our earlier work. They should have isolated him and treated him as SARS until proven not to be the virus. The old medical expression for this is "if it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it probably is a duck." We knew what to do and followed our own formula to end the outbreak fairly quickly. Unfortunately, more people did die in SARS 2. I went to the funeral of a North York General nurse who died of SARS she caught in the first wave. I was asked to do a live interview on CBC, and while I was answering questions, I became overcome with sadness and started to cry on TV. With a little help

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

from the reporter, who I knew quite well, I regained my composure and finished the interview. No matter how many tragic events you are involved in, you never lose the sense of other people's loss, nor should you.

In reality, SARS 1 and 2 were separate outbreaks. In the end Canada had 251 cases and 43 deaths. Our rate of death was about the same as China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, but our number of cases was significantly lower. We had a dedicated and highly competent group of medical professionals involved, and the government left us alone to do our job. Had SARS spread easily in the community, with its high lethality, it would have resulted in many times more cases and deaths.

After the outbreak, both the federal and provincial governments conducted commissions to codify lessons learned for future outbreaks. Whenever an emergency occurs, it is fairly safe to assume that there will be a review after. The key to a good review is to keep them out of the blame game. Whenever complex events are being studied after the fact, there is a tendency to employ a powerful tool called the retroscope. It is much easier to make judgments after the events have all taken place and you know the result. Initially when decisions are made, many of the facts are unknown and the circumstances

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

are unique. Quick decisions need to be made because some action invariably is better than no action. As I mentioned before, you have to play with the cards you are dealt. Therefore, if, for example, in managing SARS, it is determined that in the future we need mask manufacturing in Canada and larger stores for personal protective equipment, then these are reasonable and proper recommendations for the future. The major decisions we made on managing SARS were made in the first hours and then fine-tuned along the way. The commissions study the same issues after the fact for months and years, so their results will be somewhat different and should not be direct criticism or blame. I think the correct saying goes something like, "unless you have walked in my shoes."

The commissions made some excellent recommendations about masks, storing supplies of equipment, limiting the number of places people work in an outbreak, and developing computer systems. Many were implemented over the next years. By the time COVID came along, a number of important lessons had been lost. For example, hospitals were continuing to use part-time rather than full-time nurses in order to save money on wages and benefits. Unfortunately, in an outbreak, personnel are carrying the infection from one institution to another. By the time of Covid, masks were being made in Canada, but when they

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

were checked, the equipment stores had disposable items that were out of date. The equipment in storage needed to be rotated rather than just left for years.

I had a very minimal role in Covid. I think by and large the Canadian government and the provinces did a good job of managing. The United States government did not. The US management is a great case study of why you cannot manage a complex issue in a political manner. As I have mentioned before, there are many financial and public health issues beyond the actual infection that have to be addressed. Preservation of life should be the overriding guideline. When politicians are making promises to open up for political reasons or politicians are touting unproven cures while discouraging available tools, then this to me is not only wrong but also dangerous. The US likes to boast of its fine health care system, yet in SARS the US had the highest death rate per capita in the developed world. What is worse is that politicians have gotten involved after the fact and, with no expertise, are suggesting laws to limit isolating people, limit mandatory masking, limit closing schools, or limit requiring vaccinations. This trend is not confined to the United States. The truckers' blockade in Canada and some of the actions by the Alberta government suggest similar thinking about what can and cannot be done in managing a future pandemic. We have

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

no idea when the next pandemic is coming, where it will start, how it will spread, or how lethal it will be. At the beginning of the inevitable pandemic, there will be no vaccine for a period of time. The only available stopgap measures available will be some combination of isolating people, wearing masks, and closing affected schools and workplaces. At the beginning of SARS, the virus ravaged Italy and New York. Measures like keeping people home and wearing masks were all that was available. By the time the vaccine came, which, by the way, was a medical advancement many years in the making, most of us were thrilled to get the vaccine, and it saved millions of lives. Placing the proposed restrictions on public health to manage future outbreaks could have catastrophic results. It essentially ties both hands behind the managers' backs.

I am very proud of the team I led and the work they did in SARS. There are very few things I would change, even with the benefit of the retroscope, and these things are minor in nature. The SARS virus disappeared in 2004 and has not been seen since. After we successfully ended the Toronto part of the pandemic, a very large rock concert was held at Downsview Park, and The Rolling Stones played. It was a celebration to which all who helped were invited. I was asked to attend the legislature of Ontario. Normally nonmembers are only allowed in the

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

galleries. Once seated on the floor of the legislature, a tribute was given, and I received a standing ovation from the members. I also received the Order of Ontario for my work on SARS. This is an award I am particularly proud of, and managing SARS was one of the greatest highlights of my career.

The Love of My Life



This is the last chapter in this book. It is, however, both the most important and the most difficult to write. That is because it is about the love of my life, my soulmate, Eileen. I do not have the ability to put into words the importance and effect my relationship with her has had on the directions and happiness of my life.

Eileen Crichton was born three months after me in 1949, in Toronto, at Wellesley Hospital, just down the road from Grace Hospital, where I was born. She lived in Toronto, Peterborough, and Guelph but actually grew up wherever there was a hockey rink. Her father, Briggs, was a hockey nut who was drafted before the war by the New York Rangers and coached hockey at many levels throughout his life. He was a larger-than-life character who had a profound effect on his less-than-demure daughter. One such effect was Eileen's lifelong love of hockey, although she never got to play in a competitive league. Eileen's mother, Beryl, never was able to pass her quiet side onto

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

Eileen but did pass on her soft and generous nature. Beryl was quiet and soft except when it came to her boys and hockey. She was incensed at a hockey game when someone roughed up her Brian and reacted as a mother by throwing packaged creamers at the player on the ice. The family managed to mediate a short one-game ban from the arena.

Eileen's parents were both strong practicing Christians, whose faith guided their lives and strongly influenced Eileen. Her Christian faith is the foundation upon which Eileen has built her life.

Eileen was the oldest child, with Glenn next three years later and then Brian five years after that. By the last years of primary school, the family had moved to a farm in Guelph, and Briggs ran a Massey Ferguson franchise. The kids went to a two-room schoolhouse, where Eileen graduated second in a class of four. The top student went on to become an aeronautical engineer. She was the top girl and played volleyball and basketball for the school. Life on the farm was full of hijinks and a certain amount of teasing of Brian. Eileen rode horses and drove tractors, did haying, and generally avoided taking high school too seriously. In fact, she was truant much of the time. She did, however, continue to be very involved in church

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

activities. Most of her spare time was spent in hockey arenas watching her brother progress to major junior A status, with Glenn playing for the St. Catherine's Blackhawks and Brian winning a Memorial Cup with the Toronto Marlies. By this time, Eileen's days of playing goal for her brothers on ponds had ended. After school and during part of the summers, Eileen worked as a cashier and ran the snack bar at a Zehrs grocery store in Guelph. Her brothers and friends found it very useful to have a contact in a snack bar who gave very generous portions.

Part of every summer and some weekends, Eileen donated her talents to Teen Ranch in Orangeville. It is a Christian camp for teens, of which her family was one of the founding members. It specializes in horses and hockey with many other activities to round out the time. During the years, she was a councillor, a cook, and a nurse at the camp. The cook job proved to be especially important for our families' well-being. She was taught to prepare meals for 120 people and can get a turkey dinner, for example, with multiple vegetables, potatoes, and turkey, all to the table at the same time hot and tasting fantastic. Over the years we have done a lot of entertaining, often with big groups, and Eileen has the ability to make it look effortless and gourmet at the same time. An invitation to an Eileen dinner of one of her specialties, such as prime

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

rib, turkey, or spaghetti and meatballs, rarely is refused by friends or family. Our house always has been party central, as was the case of the Crichton home. Anyone was welcome any time, and nothing was too much trouble. In fact, the same held true for money. If Briggs had \$2 and saw a need, he gave away \$5. His daughter learned well and has followed the same practice. I have never met a more giving person in my life.

The choice of what to study after high school was easy for Eileen. She never thought of being anything except a nurse, and with her giving and caring way, she was ideally suited to nursing. A Florence Nightingale she was. She chose Toronto Western School of Nursing. In those days many hospitals had their own three-year nursing programs, and the students lived in the hospital residence while studying and searching for a doctor husband. There were no community colleges, so this system trained all nurses. University degree nursing had not started yet either. After two years of training, the nurses became nurse interns and spent the whole year in the hospital. During the year they took on ever-increasing responsibilities and graduated as registered nurses. This meant that the nursing cap that was worn at all times on the floor now had a black band on it. Another quaint feature of the time was that the nurses always stood when

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

the doctors came into the nursing station. There is not much chance of that practice being revived. Eileen's first job upon graduation was in the shock unit ICU at the Toronto Western, where she stayed for three or four years. She had graduated from nursing near the top of her class and so was hired into an ICU unit despite her lack of experience.

Eileen's next job change proved to be very, very significant. She transferred into the hemodialysis unit of Toronto Western, taking the place of Cathie Young, who was leaving on a maternity leave. That pregnancy resulted in my baby boy, Kevin Young. During the overlap training period, Eileen and Cathie decided it would be nice to double date. Eileen was engaged at the time, so Eileen and Dan and Cathie and Jim all went out a couple of times. I recall being very impressed by Miss Crichton. She had a fun-loving personality, was outgoing, loved sports, and was gorgeous. What a package.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



Subsequently, Cathie went on maternity leave, Kevin was born in December, we moved to Elmvale in the spring so I could establish my practice, and Eileen became unattached as Dan called off the engagement. I thought to myself, at the time, what an idiot he was to give up a treasure like Eileen.

Eileen's career in the dialysis unit continued, and she ultimately became the head nurse of the unit. Our paths might not have crossed any further, but her brother Glenn and his wife, Rossy, had moved back to Canada from Australia and needed money. Rossy began selling hand-sewn articles like placemats and Christmas decorations at home parties. Rossy and Eileen would come to Elmvale a couple of times a year to have a party at the Amelia

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

Street house. These brief contacts I had with Eileen just reinforced my opinion that she was a very special person.

In the late summer of 1979, my life got altered in a very major way. Cathie decided she was more interested in a relationship with my friend Keith. Needless to say, this was a major turning point in my life. I was suddenly single, living in a small town with a very busy medical practice and four young boys all under four. To make matters worse, I had not the first clue how to cook. That particular problem got partially resolved when Henry, who owned the Chinese restaurant, would call the office several times a week and inquire whether I was coming for dinner that night. If I was, he would ask what I wanted to eat. I would finish my office and then go to the backdoor of the restaurant and sit in the kitchen while Henry worked, chatting to him. He had lots to talk about because his wife had just run off with the cook. That did not, however, seem to be at the heart of his problem. He was most upset that they left with the shoebox full of cash from under the bed.

Over the next months I tried to adjust to my new life as a single man with four small boys. I thought about the positive and negative features of my marriage and what had gone wrong. I was determined to not compound

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

one failed relationship with another and thought long and hard about what an ideal future wife might be like. I could not get one person out of my mind. Eileen Crichton. Unfortunately for me, I was aware that following her broken engagement, she had dedicated herself to her career and had no particular interest in another relationship. I also realized that the divorce and the four young children might be a hurdle, but as with any hurdle, that could be overcome. I believed that Eileen would be a fabulous wife and mother. All I had to do was convince her of that. Magically, things worked out very soon after. Our mutual friend Karen phoned one day to say that she and Eileen were going to come and see me on Sunday. I was at the arena teaching Kevin to skate, and they arrived for a short visit. As they were leaving, Eileen told me that if I ever needed someone to talk to, I was welcome to call her. My heart just about leaped out of my body. I had an opening, and all I had to do now was overcome a couple of hurdles.

I forced myself to wait a couple of days before I phoned her and asked her to dinner. I thought I had some idea how she would approach the conversation, so I started the evening by explaining what I thought had gone wrong. Then I said, "So that is the end of Jim and Cathie. From now on it is Jim and Eileen." She looked astounded and

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

asked, "What do you mean?" I replied, "Well, from now on we are an item. I can probably get to the city a couple of times a week to see you, and you can come up to see me." In retrospect it was a bold move, but one cannot argue with success. I did also recognize that in addition to the hurdle of four small children, Eileen had never considered dating a soon-to-be divorced man.

I did manage to secure a further date and several more. I became more convinced with each that Eileen was everything I thought she was and even more. It was almost too good to be true, but then it came to a crashing halt. She backed off, and suddenly I could not seem to reach her by phone, at home, or at work. I even tried phoning her mother to pass the phone to her, but amazingly, she never seemed to be home. Of course 45 years ago there was no internet, email, or messages, so I used the only remaining method of communication. Flowers. After many bouquets and several weeks of reflection, the crisis resolved itself. Eileen phoned late one night to ask some medical advice for a friend. I figured she probably had other sources besides me for this information, and so the call indicated some resolution of her thinking. The relationship could resume, and it certainly did.

At this point, Eileen was living in her parents' apartment

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

in Etobicoke. Her father, Briggs, was managing a Days Inn for the receiver in Cambridge, so her parents were away at the hotel most of the time. No one in Eileen's extended family had ever been divorced, and how the family would deal with the issue, plus the four little children that went with it, remained to be seen. To make matters even worse, Eileen's father had not been totally happy with her earlier engagement, and Eileen had promised him she would not marry without his full approval. I was prepared to win this approval, but because of my circumstances, he did not want to meet me. I did informally meet him. There was a large, very stern portrait of him hanging above the couch, watching my every move. It was very effective.

One night I was visiting the apartment when Briggs and Beryl were away when the door started to open. Eileen muttered something about it being Brian, her brother. The next thing I knew, I was standing and quickly shoved into the hall closet. I could hear Eileen talking to her brother in the rapid, higher-pitched voice she develops when nervous. As embarrassing as it was for a respected doctor to be shoved in a closet because a younger brother came in the room, my embarrassment did not last long. When Brian went into his bedroom, suddenly the closet door opened, and a hand grabbed me by my shirt and

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

pushed me toward the open apartment door and out into the hall. Standing alone in the hall with the apartment door closed, I concluded that Eileen was not ready to introduce me yet to her brother either.

Over the next months our relationship blossomed, and we saw each other frequently and talked every day. It was clear that Eileen had resolved any doubts about being a stepmother or about my divorce. I was more convinced than ever that she would be a fabulous partner and mother to the boys. We were in love, and by this point I had bought the engagement ring. However, the ring was just a ring and could not be given until Eileen had secured her father's approval. The divorce was complete, so it was time. A first meeting was arranged at Glenn's house. I was carefully prepared by Eileen prior to the meeting, and it was strongly suggested I talk a lot about hockey and sports writing right from the start. The room we met in had a wood stove that held a roaring fire. The room had to be 90 degrees, which did nothing to aid my already extreme nervousness that the meeting had to go well. I did as instructed and talked sports from the beginning. After a very brief period, Briggs excused himself and left the room, signalling Beryl and Eileen to follow. Once in the kitchen, his immediate question to Eileen was, "How soon do you intend to get married?" Eileen came back into the

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

room where I was beaming, and the colour returned to my face. The mountain had been climbed.

To seal the deal, we now needed to get officially engaged. Eileen likes to know everything, so surprises are not easy to spring on her. I arranged an engagement party at the cottage I owned at the time. I took her for a long walk on the beach and formally proposed and gave her the ring. When we got back to the cottage, our families and friends were waiting to celebrate.



Briggs and Beryl after we got to meet

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



The bride to be at her wedding shower talking to my mother

The wedding was planned for Friday evening, October 24, 1980, at the St. George's Golf Club in Toronto. The showers and wedding planning went amazingly smoothly until a day or two before the wedding. I got a wedding haircut, and the barber got a little aggressive. When Eileen saw me, the wedding was nearly called off. Eventually she realized she was marrying the man, not the haircut, and the wedding was back on. The weather was cool, but rain held off as we moved from the church to the reception. Everything went well according to plan, and the ecstatic bride and groom left for the Bahamas the next day.

The new reality hit immediately after a short honeymoon.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

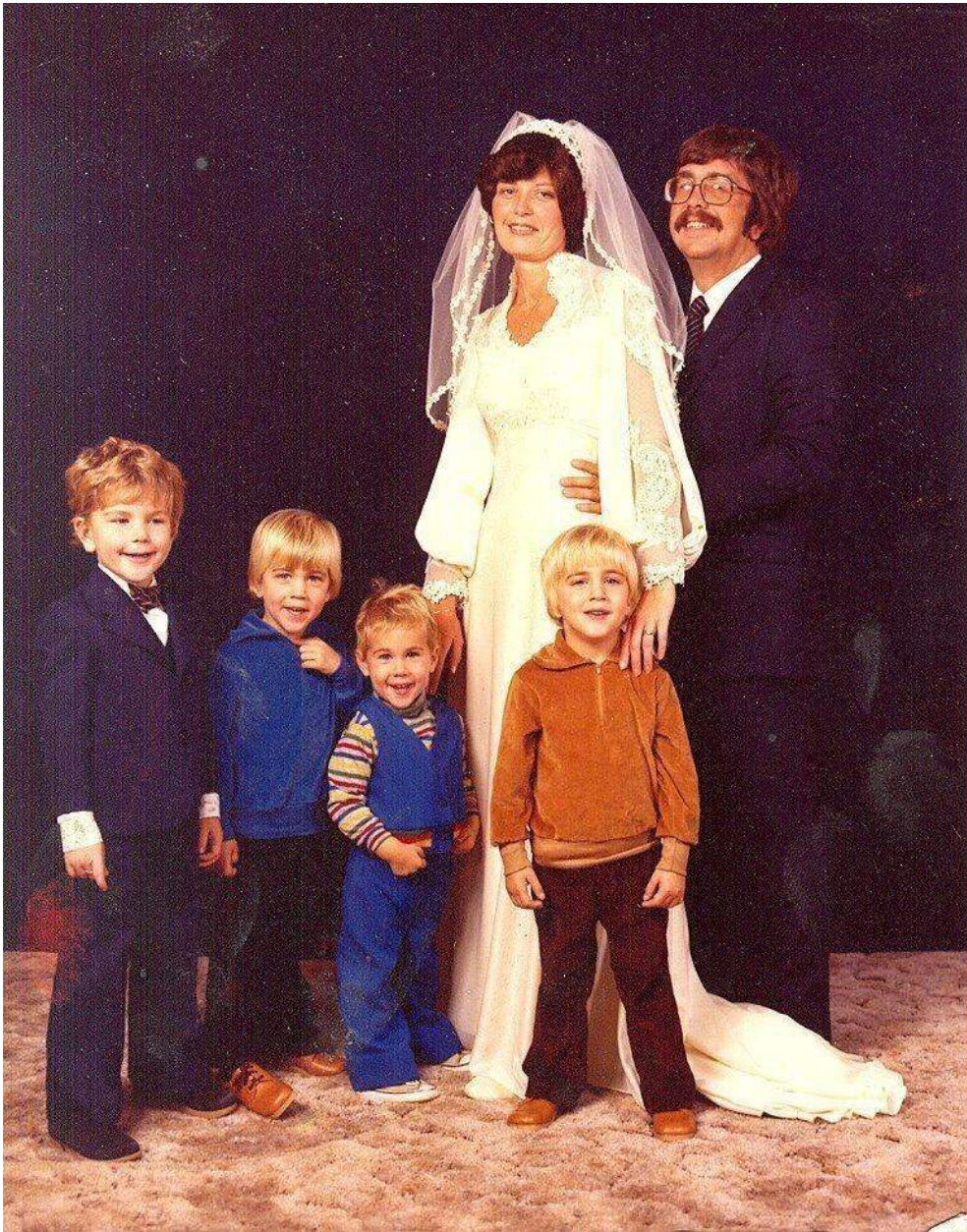
Eileen moved to a village of 1000 persons, my busy practice resumed, and the four boys were with us for a week while their mother took a holiday. We decided that Eileen would work in my office in the afternoons as an office nurse. Immediately, the patients came to admire the new staff member of the office, the new Mrs. Young. This is very important in a small town because there is no hiding from public view, and opinions of people circulate quickly and broadly. We did establish two rules for our working together. First, in the event there was ever an argument over any matter, the argument could not carry over in any behaviour at the office. The second rule was that Eileen could challenge any medical decision I made, in private, but since it was my name on the door and my medical license, then I had the last word. Neither of these rules ever needed to be invoked.

One afternoon, Eileen did threaten my medical license. We had two patients back-to-back with almost the same name. She got them confused, and when taking a new patient back to be seen, advised her to undress and put on the gown she was handing her. She seemed startled by this request and explained she was just asking to be seen for a sore throat. Eileen Young, RN, was terminated from employment that afternoon. Just kidding. By this time the patients liked her and trusted her more than me.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

Becoming a new mother to four boys and working in my office was not quite enough for the energetic Mrs. Young. There was a renal patient in Barrie who needed dialysis twice a week. Toronto Western Hospital asked Eileen if she could set up a home dialysis for her, and this was done. She was the first home dialysis patient in Ontario, and this eventually led to dialysis units being set up outside of hospitals.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



Eileen's new family

Our time together in Elmvale rushed by. Eileen embraced small-town living, the role of doctor's wife, and especially being a stepmother. The boys all quickly figured out that if Dad did not give the answer to a request they wanted,

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

then the solution was to go to Eileen instead. Eventually they all just left me right out of the equation.

The Young and Crichton families grew close and celebrated occasions together. The boys and Rossy and Glenn's children, Adam, Tim, and Rachelle, were close in age and became cousins in every way. Among the cousins there were six boys and only one girl, Rachelle. She was like a daughter to Eileen. She would come and visit, and I often commented on how well dressed she was. It turned out that she would arrive for a visit to our house with a near-empty suitcase and then leave with a full one. A shopping trip to Barrie with Eileen and Rachelle would result in multiple new outfits in all colours and paid for by us.

In the summer of 1982 we took Rachelle with us to Wonderland on a Wednesday. She and Andrew held hands on the swan ride and decided they would be married someday. On the Thursday Rachele got very sick, and Rossy took her to the doctor. The blood work showed acute leukemia, and she was admitted to University Hospital in London. Treatment was immediately started, but by Friday evening she lapsed into unconsciousness. Her condition continued to deteriorate over the weekend, and she died in Eileen's arms Monday morning. Her death

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

five days from her fifth birthday was devastating to the family. I gave the eulogy at her funeral, and it remains one of the very toughest things I have ever done in my life. Recovery for the whole family, but especially for Rossy, Glenn, and Eileen, was very difficult, but after much reflection Rossy and Glenn decided to dedicate their lives to helping others in grief. They founded an organization called COPING, which for the last years has helped thousands of individuals and families deal with their grief through self-help groups. Eileen has served on the board of directors.

By early 1982, we also were discussing a major change to our newly married lives. I was finding office practice repetitive, and Eileen was missing Toronto and her career, so we decided a change of careers was in order. I was appointed the Regional Supervising Coroner for Metropolitan Toronto, and Eileen accepted a maternity leave position as kidney coordinator for transplantation at the Toronto Western Hospital. The woman she replaced never returned to the hospital, so this job launched a 28-year career in transplantation, during which she became a dominant player in the ever-growing field of transplantation.

Working in the city and, at that time, raising the boys on

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

alternate weekends and holidays was a challenge. Fridays after work we would race up the highway to pick up the boys, then back to the city for the weekend and back up the highway Sunday to return the boys. After two years, I was missing the Georgian Bay life too much, and we decided to buy a cottage despite having little money. We downsized in the city and split our money to maintain two places instead of one. 33 Wendake Road was purchased for \$84,000, including furniture, and became our real home. Over time this property and the bay became the emotional home for the entire family, to the extent that we all live in the vicinity now.

Over time our family structure changed as Kevin, Bryan, and Andrew all came to live with us around age 11. Robin chose to remain in Orillia but visited frequently and spent holidays with us. We both had very busy careers and had to be very organized. We also got lots of support from our families. My parents were just down the road at their cottage, and Briggs and Beryl became cottagers and loved to come up weekends. They were also happy to look after the boys if we were going away for a few days. Very quickly, Briggs and Beryl became full grandparents to the boys, and it was reflected in the boys' devotion to them when they ultimately got sick and died. They also taught us both a very important lesson we would use later in

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

our lives. They always treated our kids exactly the same as their blood grandchildren, and everyone was rewarded by close and happy relationships. Certainly as all these relationships were forming, our household transformed into a matriarchal structure with Eileen at the head.

Eileen balanced multiple often conflicting demands with a cheerful ease that amazed everyone. As a new mother, she could not do enough for the boys but was rewarded by a strong and ever-growing devotion by the boys and ultimately their partners and our grandchildren. As my career advanced, there were demands on her time as well. There were banquets, retirement functions, promotions, celebrations of life, and conferences. She not only willingly attended all, often sitting at head tables, but she also charmed all she met. When I saw people in subsequent years, they invariably asked how Eileen was. She was like a secret charm aiding my career. Despite all these demands, her career continued to advance as well.

Returning to Toronto to nurse, Eileen switched from dialysis to organ transplantation. With the advent of new anti-rejection drugs, interest grew to start doing heart transplants again. A few had been attempted in the mid-1970s, including three in Canada at Saint Michael's Hospital when I was a clinical clerk, but the patients all

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

died soon after the operations from organ rejection. Eileen was chosen to be the new heart transplant coordinator. Dr. Tyrone David and our very close friend Dr. Chris Feindel in 1984 started performing the now successful transplants, with Eileen coordinating the follow-up of the patients. Several times during the early transplants, Eileen would go to the operating room and watch the sewing in of the new heart. While there she usually deposited some of her world-famous chocolate chip cookies into Chris Feindel's lab coat pocket as a reward when he finished operation. Another example of Eileen's limitless generosity. In the early days, follow-up of patients included a yearly heart transplant picnic at our cottage. These patients had a big appreciation for the renewed life they had been given, and we enjoyed many good home-cooked meals with their families. At Toronto Western, Eileen was named Nurse of the Year.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



Eileen with the first successful Toronto heart transplant

In the early 1990s Ontario went through a period of often difficult hospital mergers. Eileen had trained and always

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

worked at Toronto Western Hospital. The hospital was a University of Toronto teaching hospital, but it also was a community hospital, which prided itself on being a hospital with a heart. The merger meant that medical services from Toronto General and Toronto Western would be merged, with each distinct service at only one of the hospitals. For example, orthopedics and neurosurgery were housed at the Western, with all translation at the General. Some services, such as kidney transplants, had been done at both hospitals, so the merger meant a decision had to be made as to which hospital protocol should now be followed, or in other words, which hospital had the best program. As can be imagined, this created some considerable tension. Toronto General was known as the academic teaching, somewhat snobby hospital versus the friendly, more patient-centred Western Hospital. Now that Eileen was working at Toronto General, we travelled together to work since we were only blocks apart. After the merger she would get into the car most days and complain about the General and ask me, as coroner, to shut the place down. After several months of this, I finally reached the limit of my patience and suggested it was time for her to carefully assess whether she could get with the program and add to and improve the new merged program or whether it was time to move on to another

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

branch of nursing. After a few days, she committed to transplantation and the merger and settled in for a long and very successful time at the Toronto General.

The new transplant program now included kidney, heart, lung, liver, bowel, and pancreas transplants. Rather than set up separate small individual teams, a wise decision was made to create a multi-organ transplantation organization. At first Eileen managed the heart section and would fill in as the manager of the entire program on occasion. Several nurse managers were hired and subsequently left or were fired. Eileen would be recruited to fill in till a new manager could be hired. She was not eligible to apply for the job because she had only an RN status. The job posting called for a master's degree in nursing. Finally, after another unsuccessful recruitment, the posting was changed, and Eileen became the new full-time manager of the Multi-Organ Transplant team. There were nurses, social workers, clinical trials, staff, and support personnel. All together numbering over 100 people. This job was the pinnacle of her career, and she did it for 15 years till her retirement. A good measure of her success as a manager was that when the hospital would conduct 360-degree evaluations, she got outstanding evaluations from not only those she supervised but also those who supervised her. In retirement she often hears

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

from those she supervised in those years, and the common comment is, "Would you consider coming back to work? You are the best manager we ever had." This stellar reputation proved important in 2024 when Eileen was a patient at Toronto General and was treated as medical royalty.

In 2009 Eileen retired. The betting was that she would have trouble settling into a retirement mode. I wish I had taken that bet because I could have financed an even better, more luxurious retirement for us both. There now was more time for grandchildren, friends, and travel, and we took full advantage of the opportunity. Our health was excellent, and we travelled, including a big trip to Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Thailand, and Hong Kong. In 2010 we did something we had said we would never do. We visited a friend in Florida for a week of golf. On the way down I asked Eileen whether, with the economic recession in the US, she would be interested in a condo in Florida. Her reply was fast and to the point: "Read my lips. Never." After arriving at Countryside in Naples, Eileen went out for a tour and lunch, and we bought a condo the next day. Since then, other than one year during Covid, we have spent many happy months with friends who also bought condos and new American friends, golfing, going to concerts, partying, and enjoying

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

life.

Our idyllic life suddenly took a dangerous turn for the worst in the early fall of 2024. Eileen had always been in outstanding health and was not on any medications. She experienced some shoulder/back pain, and to be sure it was not cardiac, she went to the emergency department. It was not cardiac, but a chest X-ray did show a problem in the upper left lobe of the lung. The subsequent workup revealed a small adenovirus carcinoma of the lung. Apparently older women who have never smoked are being diagnosed with this cancer more often. The cancer was stage one, so surgical removal and yearly follow-up were all that would be necessary. The afternoon of September 24, she was operated on at Michael Garron Hospital in Toronto. She quickly came out of the anaesthetic and was placed in the Intensive Care Unit overnight. At 3am, I received a phone call that Eileen had just had a short cardiac arrest. I immediately left for the hospital, and right as I was entering the ICU, I heard a code blue announcement. As I looked down the hall, I realized that everyone was rushing in and out of her room. I stood in the doorway watching them resuscitate Eileen, an experience I would not wish upon anyone. Dr. Angie Stone explained that for an unexplained reason Eileen was bleeding into the sack around the heart, and

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

this was hindering the heart from beating. This condition is known as cardiac tamponade, and if this condition is not recognized and the arrest is managed in the normal way, then the patient does not survive. A needle was inserted into the cardiac space, and blood was removed to allow room for the heart to beat. After 18 minutes the cardiac arrest was ended, and Eileen was off to the OR to find the bleed. The source was identified and stopped, and in a few hours she was back in the ICU, having been transfused 14 units of plasma. Her whole body was very, very swollen from the plasma, so the endotracheal tube had to be left in, and she needed to remain unconscious and on a respirator. After more than a week the swelling was still massive, and it was not safe to extubate, so it was decided to do a tracheotomy in order that she could wake up. She was still on a ventilator and could not talk. As well, she was in renal failure and atrial fibrillation. When she woke up we had to explain that it was more than a week later and there would be a slow process to get off the ventilator and remove the tracheotomy tube. The very good news when she woke up was that she was mentally herself. There was a lot of physical rehab ahead, but mentally she was as sharp as ever.

Eileen communicated by writing on a whiteboard. At first she had limited energy and poor small motor control, so

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

writing a message was a chore and very frustrating to her. She was not allowed to eat or drink, and this started the Ice War. She was allowed the odd chip of ice to refresh her mouth, but it was meant to be the odd bit. Eileen spent her entire waking hours waving to every nurse who passed her room to please go across the hall to the kitchen she could see and get her some ice chips. They would protest that they thought she was fluid restricted, but reluctantly most went and got her just a few chips. Ice eventually turned to a craving for popsicles, and when the surgeon finally gave in and brought her one he went and bought himself, he got a big hug for his generosity.

Rehabilitating was difficult and lengthy. After several weeks lying in bed, Eileen was too weak to even roll herself over, let alone sit up, stand, or walk. She still had multiple IVs, infusion pumps, the ventilator tube, and various drains, but it was time to get up in a chair. It took three people 20 minutes, but they would manage to get her into a sling, onto a lift, and transport her high in the air into a chair. At first they would do all of this, and after about 10 minutes she would write on the whiteboard that she was tired and wanted to go back to bed. I thought about taking a picture of Eileen floating in the air with all her tubes dangling. I thought it might make an interesting Christmas card. Gradually her stamina improved, and it

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

was time to learn how to sit up in bed, then to stand up, and then to actually take a step. After seven weeks in the ICU, Eileen finally took her first step into the hallway and began her new quest to walk around the full circle of the ICU. This was necessary before she could go to the rehab hospital. By the time she hit the hall, she was a favourite among the staff, and she responded with a regal wave as she walked by. They had only seen her in bed and were amazed how tall she was. The unit had been given some extra money by the government for rehab, and Eileen took full advantage of it. She was meant to have physiotherapy once a day but would coax Kevin, her physiotherapist, into stopping by at the end of the day to take her for an extra walk.

After 10 weeks Eileen was ready for transfer to the Toronto Rehabilitation Institute, which is run by her old hospital group, the University Health Network. The ICU staff had resisted sending Eileen up to the ward before transfer because it would have meant less physiotherapy. The rehab hospital were nervous about taking a patient directly from the ICU but relaxed when they saw how hard she had worked.

Obviously the time at Michael Garron had been very stressful, but Eileen had received excellent care, and they

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

had saved her life. Had she not been in the ICU when she arrested and had the cardiac tamponade not been recognized and treated correctly, then she would have died. Following the long arrest, our Kevin arrived at the hospital. Angie Stone immediately called him by name. It turned out that they had done some rotations in training together. We quickly then realized she had grown up in Elmvale, and Eileen and I knew her father very well. He was a local funeral director and Rotarian. In fact, I think I may have looked after Angie a few times when she was young and I covered for her doctor. During Eileen's stay in the ICU, Angie would come into Eileen's room on her way into work and chat about people and life in Elmvale. Chris Feindel also came to the hospital the morning of the arrest. The thoracic surgeons had done some of their training with him and were well aware of his worldwide reputation. When he showed up, they were both respectful and committed to giving good care to his friend.

The transfer to TRI was like going into boot camp. There were two physiotherapy and two occupational therapy sessions a day, and the patient was expected to be up walking and exercising when not in therapy. The care was excellent, and after two weeks she was finally home. Her appointments all became outpatient, but there was exercise to be done every day. By January we were

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

confident that she was stable enough to go to Florida for the winter. The warm weather helped, and Eileen initially did well and walked up to three kilometres in a day. Suddenly in early March she plateaued and then started to get worse. We hurried home just in time for round two of hospitalization.

She was admitted to Toronto General, and after a few days of testing, it was established that she had subacute bacterial endocarditis. This is a slow-burning infection that eventually settles into the heart. By this point the infection had settled into the area around the aortic valve and was well on the way to totally destroying the valve; it was also sending out showers of infected emboli to the spleen, kidneys, and brain. The immediate problem was to begin antibiotic treatment for the infection and operate to replace the valve. Normally one would wait to operate until the antibiotics had time to work, but in this case the valve was too damaged and needed to be replaced immediately. Fortunately for Eileen, she had her good friend Chris Feindel watching over her, and he quickly arranged for Tyrone David to operate. When heart transplants started again 40 years ago, Tyrone and Chris were the surgeons, and Eileen was the nurse coordinator. Throughout this stay Tyrone would tell the staff that Eileen was his nurse, which was code for look after her

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

well. At the time of the operation, Tyrone was 81 but still absolutely world-class.



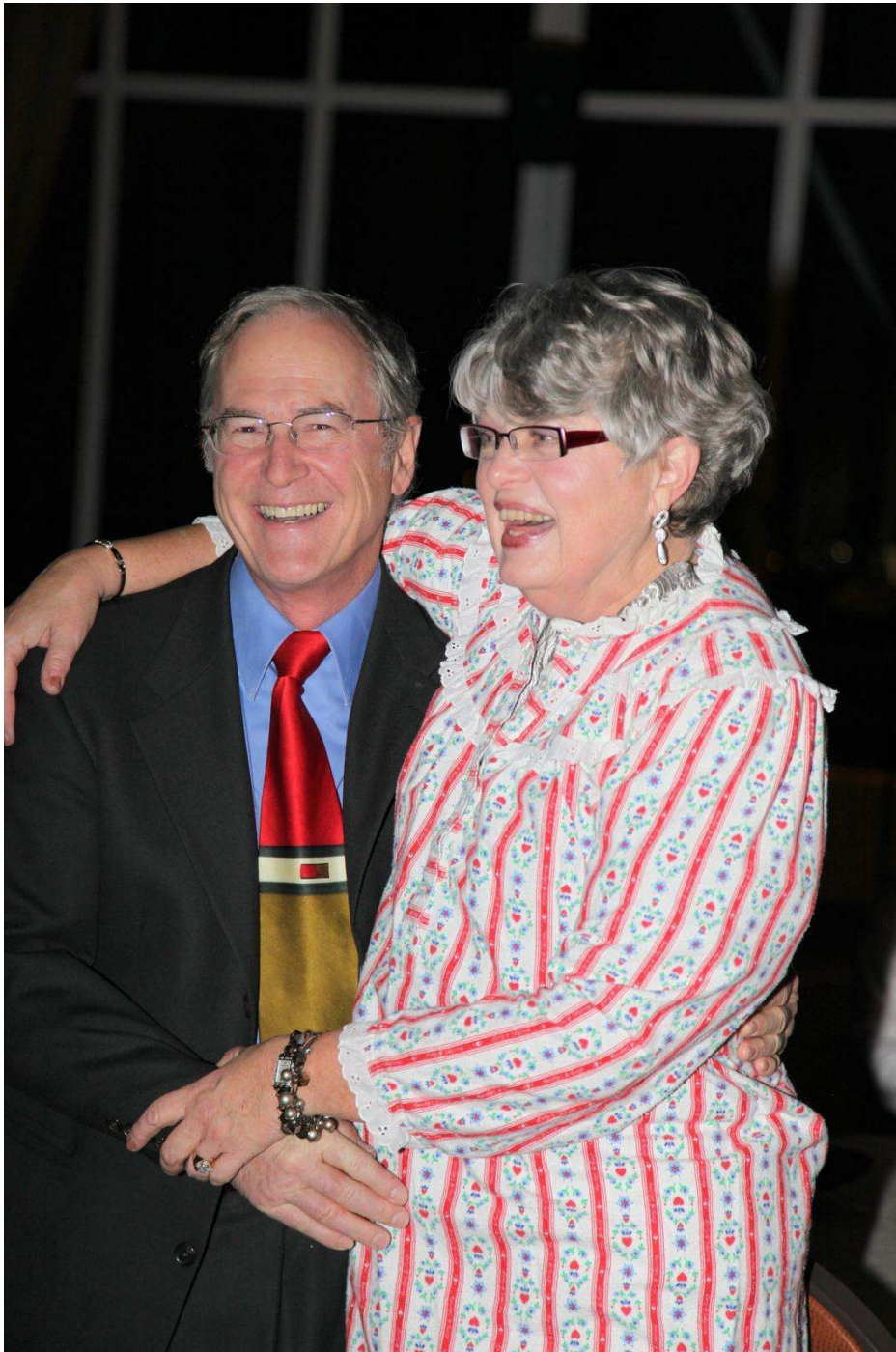
Eileen with Tyrone Davis at her retirement party

The operation went well, and Eileen was back in an ICU after. She again went into kidney failure and atrial

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

fibrillation, and an MRI showed she had suffered some stroke damage, probably from the earlier arrest and the infected emboli. She had to start again, learning to sit in bed, stand up, and begin to walk. After a couple of weeks, she was transferred to the floor for further foot rehabilitation. Slowly she improved and was ready for transfer back to TRI when in the middle of the night she developed cardiac tamponade again. Tyronetook her back to the OR at 4am, and then she returned to the ICU. She was anticoagulated with a drug that could not be reversed at that time, which meant that despite the surgery, she continued to bleed. At 4 pm she again went back to the OR, and post-op this time the bleeding could be controlled. She needed more blood transfusions and dialysis in the next days but eventually made it back to the floor.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



Eileen with Chris Feindel at her retirement party

Her recovery started anew but did progress to the point that she was transferred to the stroke floor of TRI. Over

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

the next month she again had extensive occupational and physiotherapy aimed at her general conditioning but also to minimize any stroke damage. Happily her slight left-sided weakness and small motor issues in her left hand improved, as did her kidney function. Her mental skills were as good as ever. With much prayer and hard work on her part, she left for home 10 weeks after entering the hospital, somewhat weak but on the path of an unbelievable recovery. Again, the care she received this time was world-class and saved her life, for which we are eternally grateful.

During the two hospitalizations, Eileen was in the hospital 22 weeks and had five operations. I was able to be with her every day of that time and try to ensure everything was being done for her. It was quite taxing, particularly the times when she developed complications in the ICUs. I was able to do this because of family and friends. Andrew, Jordan, Bryan, Sarah, Robin, Kevin, and Jess dropped everything, including work, to be a support overnight at the beginning and when Eileen was sickest. Eileen's brothers- and sisters-in-law, Glenn and Rossy and Brian and Judy, spent evenings with Eileen when she was very sick. Chris Feindel and Kevin were my medical team that helped me sort out medical issues such as whether to do a tracheotomy and who to do the valve replacement. The

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

drive home every day would have killed me, but Barry Malcom kindly lent me his apartment for the entire two hospitalizations, plus his medical expertise as well. Barry and Janet Beed and Chris and Mary Ann Feindel planned my evenings to ensure I had a break from the hospital regimen with them, and John and Susan Kingdom and Jayne and Joe Wilkinson provided gourmet dinners and great conversation. I heard regularly from a huge number of friends and family who offered support and wrote a blog every day to keep people informed. We could not have gotten through the experience without friends and family.

As I am writing this, Eileen is continuing her amazing recovery. We plan to go to Florida again this winter and Italy next September. We are moving from our cottage/house because it is time to downsize, and it is better to do it by choice and when we are well. We are really looking forward to the new chapter in our life in our special new apartment. We have been blessed with a fabulous marriage, great family, friends, and careers.

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



The cottage during our retirement time

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



Our bright living room



Many family dinners here

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES



The backyard with my pond and viagra waterways

- The question could be asked as to what makes Eileen so special. Her outgoing and fun-loving personality certainly is an important part of her makeup. Her optimistic outlook on life makes her a joy to be with. She is very intelligent and very, very effective at any task she puts her mind to. She is fun to be with. She is a very low-maintenance wife who has spoiled me with her care of me but, more importantly, allowed me to progress through my career with total support. At the same time she charted an amazing career for herself. Her support for her boys and grandchildren is never-ending, and she cherishes our friends. She is the most generous person to everyone that I have ever met. Most importantly, she has a very strong Christian faith. She grew up in a Christian family and has used her Christian values to guide her life every day. This combination of strengths has made her

A FANTASTIC LIFE OF CHALLENGES

The Love of My Life. I am eternally grateful for her and to her.

