

**“Therefore, it is with reluctance that I relieve you of your undertaking to remain single, and grant you permission to be married”**

That was the final paragraph of a memo received by 8767 O/C Todd DW (Air) in December 1969.

Notwithstanding that not so gentle rebuke from Commodore W.P. Hayes, Robin and I were married on May 30 1970 a week (or maybe two) after my seniors marched off the square. The story, however, did not start then. It was the end of Recruit Phase at College Militaire Royal de Saint Jean (CMR), the running of the obstacle course, lots of inter collegiate sports and, of course, a dance complete with young ladies bussed in from Montreal to be dates for the Preps who had been cloistered at CMR for almost two months. In late October 1966, my bride to be took a military bus from Livingston Hall, the student nurse’s residence of the Montreal General Hospital, to be a date for an unknown Officer Cadet at the College. At CMR Robin reluctantly got off the bus and, along with dozens of other young ladies, was led into Vanier Hall to the expectant gaze of dozens of young Preps. To make it even more interesting her future husband was not even there! I had made the College basketball team and was getting ready to play a game that afternoon, so I asked a friend to get a date for me. Little did she know that that “pick up” by another young cadet would lead to a 50th Wedding Anniversary last May during the first wave of Covid 19.

A little context to set the scene for the younger readers and to refresh those that might have lived through those ground-breaking years. In the 1960’s and the decades before and intermittently for many years after when you “signed up”, it was part of the deal that your first and only love was the College. While there were many stories of cadets marching off the square for the last time to be met with cries of “Daddy, Daddy”, marriage was never officially acknowledged or condoned. In the mid and late 1960’s, however, subtle changes began to be introduced. Seniors could have cars! The number of overnight leaves were increased (in quarters by reveille), and you could leave the college in appropriate civvies! I am sure there were many other changes but, the only one that mattered to Robin and me was the potential to be married before grad.

When I finished CMR in 1969 and headed down the road for two years at RMC I left my, by then fiancée, as a newly minted RN with plans to be married after my graduation in 1971. But, in the fall of 1969 rumours started that the “undertaking to remain single” could be challenged. In fact, a third-year classmate applied and was married early in his third year. Bottom line, Robin and I decided we could make it work if permission was granted. Her skills as an RN were easily transferable and getting a job in Kingston would not be a problem, so a May 1970 wedding, when I finished third year, was planned. Memos were written, meetings were held with the padre and the Squadron Commander, and in December the Commandant signed off. Some of the more pointed admonitions and restrictions included in the memo where:

1. “My views and the problems inherent in trying to mix a successful marriage and the life of a Cadet have been pointed out to you.”
2. “It will be extremely difficult for you to devote the time, effort and loyalty to be a good leader within the College if you are married.”
3. No College facilities could be used, no uniforms (i.e., no Scarlets wedding) to be worn and no reference in any announcements that I was an Officer Cadet at RMC could be made.

With that chilling memo behind us the May wedding planning began. While not top of mind at the time I thought the pushing of college traditions and norms eliminated any hope of a Bar position. I’m sure the same thought ran through the minds of the dozen or so other Third Years that had decided to take the early plunge. To the credit of those deciding the Cadet Wing appointments the fact that

marriage was in the offing for some did not seem to impact the selection of the Senior Year Cadet Slate. When the CSLs of 5, 6 and 7 Squadrons took their positions in September 1970 Fort Champlain quickly was dubbed Honey-Moon Hall.

After a short honeymoon and settling into our one-bedroom apartment on Stanley St, I was off to what was then CFB Borden for my second summer training learning the fine points of becoming a Logistics Officer. A lot of miles were racked up on the three-hour (when the traffic was good) weekend commute. With Robin's work at KGH sometimes it was not even a full weekend. Once the rooks arrived and our last year as cadets really got going it seemed like Robin and I were often like ships that pass in the night. With her shift work and my college obligations for six squadron, varsity, and intermural teams and oh yes academics, it was often just a peck on the cheek as I rushed home to drop her off at the hospital for her 2300H shift. Then, heading back to the college the next morning for reveille before she got home.

As with most newly-weds that first year of married life was a blur. In our case even more so with all the college parades, balls, sports, and a myriad of other activities not the least of which was getting ready for graduation. We did it all, enjoyed it all, and looking back we realize it was an accomplishment that has served us well over the years. Like many writers in *E Veritas* have highlighted, RMC laid the foundation for being a successful officer and leader. For Robin and me it also laid a foundation for a long and successful marriage. When faced with challenges, and like all married couples there have been challenges, we could look back and recall our time at RMC. Yes, the challenges were different and we were younger but, the ability to face the situation, problem solve and come up with a way a head was honed during that first hectic year of married life.

With a successful graduation and one more summer commuting to Borden behind us, we headed off to Victoria for our first of eight postings in five provinces over the next 17 years. Our first son was born in Victoria just weeks before a posting to CFS Beaverlodge in Northern Alberta. Two more sons and a daughter were born over the next ten years. And like many military families all born in different provinces. Add in Robin and me we have 6 of 10 provinces accounted for. Each posting was special in its own way, even Post Grad and Staff College! An unusual circumstance, without us even knowing it at the time, helped shaped our future years. Normally after Post Grad you are posted to work for your Sponsor, in my case the old DPSA, but that did not happen. Instead, I was posted to CFB Cornwallis to be the Base Comptroller. The three years at Cornwallis was a wonderful posting. We fell in love with Nova Scotia and it confirmed the realization that I really enjoyed command positions more than staff positions.

Fast forward four years. We left Winnipeg for Ottawa in 1987 with a promotion to yet another Finance Staff posting. While challenging and interesting (including six months as an acting Director) it really was not my cup of tea. So, when I got a call from a former DGSS, now working in private industry, offering me a new challenge in an Aerospace Company in Nova Scotia we took the plunge. The company was focused on the repair and overhaul of military aircraft, so it was an easy transition. Moving from Ottawa in December 1988 in the middle of a school year was another challenge for the family but, we got through it. Coincidentally, and not known at the time, we purchased our new home from an Ex-Cadet a couple of years ahead of me.

With the knowledge that we would be staying put for awhile, pursuing other interests became possible. Volunteering for different not-for-profit organizations brought an immense level of satisfaction. And again, those lessons learned at CMR and RMC; problem solving, organization, providing leadership and the ability to get the job done, often with limited resources, served me well.

My second career was almost as long as my military time and just as interesting and exciting. After Robin's retirement from her reactivated nursing career in 2009, I continued to work part time on a contract basis for a couple of years giving me an easy transition to full retirement. Retirement priorities were supporting our parents and travel. That, and building a summer cottage on P.E.I. on an acre water lot we purchased 10 years before. Retirement, like many readers I am sure, did not go exactly to plan! But again, we faced the challenges of losing parents, a cancer diagnosis (now well behind me), moving to PEI for four years to try out Island life, and getting serious about travelling. Then 2020 and Covid 19.

Our Covid interruptions and disappointments seem almost trivial when compared with those of others around the world. Our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary River Cruise and youngest son's wedding can and will be rescheduled. With the Atlantic Bubble we were able to spend most of the summer and fall at our island cottage thankful for the almost isolation it provided. Our first year as a married couple was full of new experiences, adaptations and patience while we figured out the best way forward. It seemed almost fitting that our 50<sup>th</sup> year as a married couple would be nothing different.

Stay Safe Everyone.

