

A Jasper Park Lodge reunion



By Mary Cook

Fifty years ago, seven bright-faced young lads, all students at Ottawa Technical High School, set out on an adventure of a lifetime. Most were pupils of Doug Gray, the teacher who ran the printing department at the school. Gray thought it would be a great experience to send these kids off to Jasper Park Lodge to work for the summer. None had been away from home before in their lives.

At the time, no one anticipated that that journey of a half century ago would be repeated this year for old times' sake, with all but one returning to Jasper Park Lodge for a reunion taking place in April. And to celebrate the occasion, the Lodge is rolling out the red carpet for the Ottawa boys who share warm memories of a time in their lives when the adventure of going by train thousands of miles away from their homes and families left an indelible impression in their minds and hearts.

A young Dan Hudson was the first to go, followed shortly after by the six others. The trip would take three days and three nights on the train. "My mother packed me a sandwich. One sandwich. By the time I was barely out of Ottawa my lunch was gone. It was a long trip."

Even without the anticipation of arriving at an exotic Lodge they had only read about, the train trip was an experience in itself for these young lads in their mid-teens.

Glen May's parents wondered about the wisdom of their youngest going off to goodness knows where, but finally approved the trip. Glen said they had to sleep on the train seats, but Cec McVeigh remembers you could buy a small pillow for a quarter which made the three all-nighters only slightly more tolerable. His mother packed a lot of food, so he didn't go hungry.

For Doug Munro, his most vivid memories of the train trip are wrapped up in the spectacular scenery of Northern Ontario. "And then there was total isolation

between communities. There were miles and miles of blackness with nothing there. It's so vivid in my mind even from 50 years ago," he said.

Of course, Dan Hudson's one sandwich, ran out long before the trip ended, and a couple of American tourists noticed he wasn't eating, so they paid for his train meals for the rest of the trip. "We would have been pretty hungry if they hadn't come to our rescue, because we had no money," he said.

Raymond Fink remembers boarding the train at Union Station in Ottawa at midnight. "This was going to be quite an adventure for a 16-year-old."

The trip they thought would never end brought them to Jasper Park Lodge and into jobs that saw them wash dishes, clean kitchens, act as bus-boys, polish silver, print the daily menu, and generally do the myriad of menial jobs allotted to young teenagers out to earn a few dollars over a summer.

Dan Hudson said, "When I got to the Lodge I was put on the printing machine to make up the daily menu. I was very familiar with the machines because that's what I was taught at school in Ottawa."

Ed Larmour was sent to the kitchen, handed a pair of striped pants and white smock and put to work scraping dishes that seven to eight hundred people had used for three meals a day. "The kitchen was huge. And at least there was a dishwashing machine. I also had to polish silverware." Of course, these would be chores that would be completely foreign to these young lads who came from homes where in those days fifty years ago, Mother looked after the job of running the house and that included washing the dishes!

The Ottawa teens became friends. They slept in what was known as "Cabin K," which was not much more than 24 x 24 and part of a rectangular cabin with three sets of bunks.

Like kids going off to summer camp for the first time, they were lonesome. Letters from home were anticipated and cherished. But the long days, and \$25 a week pay were not without adventure. There were horse-back rides into the mountains, getting chased by bears, rubbing shoulders with a few celebrities of the era, panty-raids, which none of the lads would elaborate on, and with Cec McVeigh admitting to sending a box of small pieces of silverware home to his mother as a surprise. She promptly mailed it back to him with orders to put it right back where he got it!

The teacher who pulled the whole plan together 50 years ago, Doug Gray, sadly

feels he is not well enough to make the trip back with his former students. “We all regret Doug will not be with us,” Ed Larmour said. In spite of an intensive search, no one was able to locate Gary Langille to join the reunion. However, six of the former Ottawa Technical High School students and their wives will board the train at the Fallowfield Depot on April 3rd and head west.

Ed Larmour has been instrumental in organizing the logistics of the return trip, and praises the ready acceptance of Jasper Park Lodge for their participation in what he calls “the reunion of a lifetime.”

The Lodge will place them in the positions they held 50 years ago, with the exception of Dan Hudson whose job it was back then to print the menu (the old printing machine is long since gone). Paying them for their time in 2010 presented a bit of a problem for the Lodge, now owned by Fairmont Hotels. They couldn't have several cheques floating around for menial amounts, not knowing when, or if, they were going to be cashed. So the “boys” will be paid with facsimile cheques, which they no doubt will add to the bits and pieces of memorabilia they have saved from the same place, but from another time.

This time, the train trip will be taken with much more comfort. No more sleeping sitting up in the seats, or eating from a bag lunch packed by a mother. They expect the Lodge will be different too. But whatever the trip offers, the most anticipated part of it will be the renewing of old friendships and the sharing of cherished memories of a half century ago.

This article originally appeared in the March 2010 issue of Forever Young Newspaper.