

GETTING TO KNOW ... GORDON BILLOWS

by Gordon Billows



“One life to live, one life to give!” as a family man, educator, community volunteer, entertainer, administrator, and a Barbershopper. My family and I have been very fortunate to have a very full, relatively healthy and rich life. “Regrets, we had a few we did it our way!” Interesting how some life experiences trigger the mind to remember certain song lyrics, eh! In updating my autobiography, I decided to search through our family pictures to find a few appropriate pics, a mistake perhaps. After looking at several thousand pictures found in 4 plastic bins and searching through about the same number on our computers, I decided to just touch on a few moments in our lives. Yes, this was a good time to chronologically organize and label all the pics, scan some for this document to share later with relatives and file and save the jpegs on a hard drive. Paula and I knew that our memories would soon get cluttered with all the family activities and highlights, so in '84 we decided to annually diarize the main happenings for our “Billows Christmas Letter”. We keep hard and electronic copies so our family can easily find what we all did each month, of each year – a family history project like an autobiography. Preparing this autobiography for Notes has been more of a pleasure than some might imagine. “Thanks for the memories!”



Raymond Gordon Frederick Billows was born on Jan. 21/45 at 6:20 pm (I recall) at the St. Boniface hospital. I had 2 older sisters, father was a Co-op Dairy milkman, mother a garment industry worker (coincidentally, in the same down town building where our son now lives). Our family lived in St. Boniface, down from Canada Packers (phew!) and moved near United College in '52. I attended King George, Isbister, John M. King, Hugh John MacDonald and Daniel McIntyre Schools, spent one year at United College and then went to the U of M. Graduated with a BSc (Chem. Maths, Physics) and BEd (Admin), was a member of the Tau Kappa Epsilon Fraternity (scroll #183 and same fraternity as Bruce Wilton, Martin Gurvey, and Gary Doer) and served on the Faculty of Ed. student council. Later in life, I had other training as a project planner, a down-hill ski instructor, a government administrator and, a BBS singer.



During high school and university, my summer jobs included working in the Co-op ice cream plant, as a milkman on my Father's Transcona route and for the City Mosquito Abatement Dept. In 1968, after graduating, I was hired as a senior high school Maths and Sc. teacher at Arthur Meighen High School (Portage la Prairie). I taught there for 4 years and really enjoyed the advantages of teaching in a small town just an hour drive from the bright lights of Wpg where my family and other friends were. AMHS staff were a young, active, and dedicated group that were very involved in community activities and partied a lot – life was never dull! In '70, when the drinking age went to 18, we went to the pub after school – some of our student's parents bought rounds of drinks for the teachers. I sort of lived a double life for those 4 years – one in Portage and another in Wpg.



Music and singing has always been a very important part of my life. My mother and father were both very musical and we all sang and played instruments at family gatherings - some good harmony. As a youngster, I took accordion lessons, sang in all my school choirs, the U of M Educ Choir, and the Pan Am Games choir. In Portage, I directed the school choirs and coached volleyball. Two music related school items that are memorable – organizing a very non-traditional “multi-media” Remembrance Day service and preparing some students to perform a few Xmas songs using science equipment. The group was advertised as **B³**, “Billows Beaker Band”. I also sang with the P la P Rotarian choir for two years. Many of the Rotarians were also Barbershoppers and they taught me a few Pole Cat songs for one show. BTW - one show was “black face”, oops sorry! Hmm, like our Justin T?





While in Portage, I directed the Portage la Prairie Indian Glee Club for 3 years. BTW - NEVER saw or heard about any abuse! My 35 Native students lived at the Portage Residential School and attended the public schools, a few were in my classes. We were a very popular entertainment group - did 30 to 40 performances a year, opened the Native Pavilion at Disneyland, performed for a week at the Canadian pavilion at Expo 70 in Osaka, Japan, sang at Folklorama's opening in '70, entertained the Queen and Lieutenant Governor, sang the anthem at the Bombers-Lions football game in Vancouver, recorded the official Manitoba song and also sang at Schmockey Night. It was at the Schmockey Night that I first heard the Winnipeg Golden Chordsmen chorus, directed by Dick Wells. I did not join at that time and never forgot the neat harmony!



I met Paula Dyer on Jan 7/72 at The Left Bank (Hotel Ft Garry nightclub), using the line "Haven't we met somewhere before?" Actually, we both attended Daniel McIntyre at the same time, were in the same mixed choruses (~150 students), but associated with different student groups. Love is such a game changer! Before we met, I had decided to take a year off teaching to explore Europe. A slight change of plans. Paula and I did a Trafalgar (whirlwind) Tour in July, I kissed her good-bye at Heathrow Airport, wiped my tears and stayed to tour Europe and Scandinavia. I had so many fantastic experiences - crossed the Arctic Circle going to Narvik (saw reindeer), ate freshly



cooked shrimp at the docks in Denmark, met some wonderful European families in Hamburg (ship's pilot), Nuremberg (Esso Exec), Bern (Univ. Prof.) and Vienna (actor), drank Bordeaux wine in Bordeaux, went to the opera in Vienna, saw the bulls in Madrid, and SKIED many of the top Alpine resorts (Tignes, Kaprun, Garmisch, Kitzbuhel and St Anton (Valluga!). My daily diary documented the trip – still want to type it out. My plans to stay a year changed after I called Paula collect (just in case) from a German family's residence in Nuremberg and proposed on Nov. 30th. She accepted! I did some important shopping and secretly arranged to fly back just before Xmas. I landed in Wpg on the 21st with only 25 cents in my pocket, enough to call my mother to pick me up. We drove straight to the Legislative Building and I gave Paula an engagement ring in the Minister of Education's file room. We got married February 9/73 and moved into the newly built Adamar Manor on Pembina. I taught Paula to ski on the big pile of excavated earth that was beside the Manor. Getting a teaching position at that time of year was impossible, so I accepted a job with the government. I worked for the Province for 4 years as the Administrative Assistant to the Assistant Deputy Minister of the Division of Research, Planning and Program Development of the Department of Health and Social Development (whew!). Fantastic experiences working for the Health and Education ministers and their ADM's. Working on reports and budgets, reporting meeting details and preparing program reports taught me the importance of precise wording and #'s. For most of her 35 years in government, Paula was the head administrative secretary for Provincial Ministers – Miller, Sherman, Doer, Desjardins, and others. When the governments changed, Paula was always asked to stay in her non-political position. She was a very dedicated and efficient civil servant. We have shared a great lifetime together!



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With both of us in government jobs, extended vacations just could not happen. We continued our snowmobiling, downhill and cross country skiing on weekends throughout the winter months and did shorter camping and shorter vacations whenever possible. In Dec of '74 we traveled back to Nuremberg to visit the family I had met in '72 and where I phoned Paula to propose. We met them at the town



square fountain where the Kris Kringle market was happening. Great reunion with Gunter and Annette Use and an opportunity to introduce Paula to bratwurst and gluhwein! We did a side trip to Innsbruck for some skiing and to Vienna for sightseeing. Surprise, we literally bumped into my parents coming out of the Canadian Consulate office in Vienna. They had been touring around Europe and decided to visit Vienna also. We spent a few days together and were able to take them around to Schonbrunn Palace and Grinzing. The first major trip we took after that was to Tampa/Orlando/Disney/Cape Canaveral in the summer of '76. Of course no trip to Disney is complete without a picture with the Dapper Dans! I never imagined that I would be involved with any of these members 30 years later. As the LOL President, I have communicated with BHS staff member, Chad Bennett (tall Lead) on District business. Also, Paula and I have met several Dapper Dans when visiting chapters in FL. Other vacations we enjoyed in those early married years included skiing Jasper/Banff in '76, Hawaii/San Francisco and skiing Thunder Bay in '77, and Reno/Oshkosh in '78. We visited the SPEBSQSA headquarters in Oshkosh, on Lake Superior's shore in '78! Our lives definitely got busier as we both got involved with Barbershop- ping – me with the Golden Chordsmen and Paula with the Winnipeg Sweet Adelines.



While working for the government, I decided to get more “business experience”. I joined the Jaycees (Winnipeg Junior Chamber of Commerce) and Paula became a Jaycette. As usual, I became very involved and soon became a JC Director responsible/involved with projects like – Tourist of the Week, Paint Up-Clean Up, JC's Dunking Booth and the Santa Claus Parade. JC's provided many excellent personal development opportunities like effective speaking and project/business planning courses. Working on all the projects with young, progressive and creative JC members was a great training ground for me. The Jaycee creed states that “Service to humanity is the best work of life”.



In '75 we bought our first home in a fairly new area of St Vital, just a few blocks from where the shopping centre was being built. We rode our bikes through the mall. I spent most of my free time in the first year finishing the basement and preparing it for entertaining family and friends – gaming area, bar, etc. Paula and I agreed that, as we were planning to start a family, I should return to teaching – did that in Nov of '76. Our family then would have better/more opportunities for travel and recreation. Believe it or not, my heart was still in the classroom working with students. We adopted our

first son, Derek, in '80 and our second son, Craig, in '87. From '76 to 2000, I taught at Isaac Brock, Aberdeen and General Wolfe - Maths, Science, Computer and served as department heads, team leader, Sc. Fair coordinator and Sc. Fair judge. I met Brian Metcalfe when we both worked on Wpg. Div. Sc. Fairs. Herold Driedger and I taught together in General Wolfe.



We built our first home in '85, just in time for Derek to start school. It was quite a traditional styled home (a fireplace, Jacuzzi, and nice brick work) in Lindenwoods - a nice young community, 10 minutes from everywhere. In '87, Craig was able to attend the infant day care program at Derek's school. I always enjoyed building things (thanks Dad) and gardening (thanks Mom) and this home gave me ample opportunities for both. The basement was a “man-cave” with a pool table, air hockey, bar, rec room, etc. and the yard was ideal for landscaping, planting a garden and ample room for entertaining family and friends.



I always enjoyed the challenge of organizing school events - camping and ski trips, science fairs, concerts, field trips, and student exchanges. I organized three exchanges to the Arctic – '96 Cape Dorset (the art centre), '98 Holman (chased a polar bear) and 2000 Igloolik (seal hunt – community supper). The trips introduced ~20 students from General Wolfe to Inuit culture. We lived with the families for 10

days, ate raw caribou and seal brain, ice fished, built igloos, learned about and bought soap stone carving and Inuit art, went out on the land with dog sleds/snowmobiles and participated in Inuit games and community celebrations (throat singing is interesting). It was wonderful to see the incredible bonding



that took place between all the participants. In early May, a few weeks after our group returned to Wpg, the Inuit students came to Wpg and were introduced to a different variety of experiences – an official welcome at the Legislature, McDonalds, roller skating, a BBQ in the park (with some trees in bloom), the Wpg zoo (with some animals in “heat”) and the museum (the polar bear on display in the museum was shot by one of the Igloolik student’s uncle), mall shopping (clothes, etc. were about 1/3 the cost here), horse-back riding, the Narcisse snake dens and high temperatures. Igloolik’s summer temperature seldom reaches 15 degrees and it was about 25 in Wpg when they were here! A bonus for the Igloolik trip – I was able to take our son Craig along on the exchange. Our trip was via Ottawa and I arranged a tour of the Parliament building and meeting with the Nunavut MP. We stopped in Iqaluit long enough to have their Pages tour us around their legislature.



There were many unique experiences and most were captured on film and as pictures. All participants received copies. Another interesting GW event is one of my “elective” courses I planned and took 12 of my Gr. 9 students to the St Boniface Hospital where we attended an autopsy! It was a quite difficult to watch and stomach, but so very fascinating. I got to place the person’s heart on the weigh scale!



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My involvement in the Winnipeg Chapter started in '78, shortly before we started our family. Our busy work and BBS lives did not prevent us at all from having many great family experiences through the years. I celebrated 15 years (1985 – 2000) as a leader with the Lindenwoods 26th Beavers, Cubs and Scouts. It was gratifying for the leaders to be involved with so many good young scouters who were always eager to participate in the planned activities and events - numerous summer and winter camps, jamborees, volunteering at community events, Scout family skiing trips, tours and survival training, and so many other activities associated with scouting. 1200 Scouts camped on the Goldeye’s (Shaw Park) field – very noisy trains! I invited Premier Garry Filmon (my distant cousin) to present citizenship badges to our Scouts. We also had our two sons involved in community sports teams. Paula and I supported their teams and cheered from the grandstands. Our younger son Craig excelled in sports and his Cresentwood Grizzlies football team, coached by Willard Reeves, won the '97 Provincial Atom Championship and in '98 were honoured at a Bomber game for having a perfect record of wins! I was their equipment manager and first aid person. Now hockey player Ryan Reaves was on the team also. A compressed vertebrae fracture at a practice in 2001 ended Craig’s



football career.

Throughout the ~20 years (1980 – 2000) we were always involved in Scouting, Barbershop rehearsals, shows, performances, contests, conventions, working, building our homes, etc. We continued to find time for family and friends, camping, cycling, fishing and travelling to many popular family destinations in Canada and the US. In the winter, we skied in MB nearly every weekend and, during the Christmas and spring school breaks, went to the more challenging ski resorts in Alberta and Montana. Paula (some colourful language) even skied on the Black Diamond runs with her three boys!





We got used to a very full lifestyle over the years but then added volunteering at the Lviv Folklorama Pavilion, starting in '93. Our family was involved with Folklorama for the next ~20 years. Derek and I started with serving guests, cleaning tables, etc and I also MC-ed. Paula and I were the Adult Ambassadors in '94, '99, '02, '03, our sons were Youth Ambassadors, Derek in '95 and Craig in 2000. What a fantastic time we had representing our Lviv Pavilion at all the official social functions and, during the two weeks of Folklorama visiting the other pavilions, welcoming visitors, hosting dignitaries and



learning about the many cultures in Winnipeg. We often met some of my students at their pavilions. I was also the pavilion coordinator from '98 to '05 and then served on the Wpg Folklorama Board as a pavilion inspector for 3 years. It was always a pleasure to welcome personal friends, WGC BBS'ers and even Mark McLaurin (Fargo) to my Lviv Pavilion and give them the VIP treatment.

We bought a '98 Rodeo SUV – it was great for off-roading and for both summer (with 4 bikes on the rack) and winter (with skis and snowboards in a roof cargo box) driving vacations. On the way back from skiing LaReviere, we were slowing down to give assistance to a car in the ditch, hit black ice and rolled, luckily in slow motion - landed right side up and were able to drive home. Some of our driving



trips were to family/tourist destinations in Alberta, Montana, North and South Dakota, Minnesota and Ontario. Adding to all our usual activities, in 2002 we had our “retirement home” built - a modern, open area bungalow. In mid-Dec of '01, Paula was out at a performance so her three boys decided to check out the show homes in the new section of Lindenwoods. We fell in love with the A&S show home, took Paula to see it the next day and signed the papers a week later. The A&S agent was Sherrie Bredesen's brother. Our Shorecrest home sold in 4 days for the price we wanted. We moved to

73 Haverstock Cres in June. It took Derek and I a year to plan and completely develop the basement (two bedrooms, theatre, recreation area, etc.). All this was done in time to build the deck and do some gardening and landscaping. Another wonderful home for our family, another home to continue our tradition for hosting all of the family celebrations, etc. I retired from teaching in Dec. 2000, but got bored in a few weeks. I called the School Division and asked about substituting. I started that afternoon and sub-ed for about 10 years – loved it! Paula retired in 2001 just in time because our Barbershop life was getting much busier.



I have been a member of the Barbershop Harmony Society (SPEBSQSA) and Winnipeg Chapter for 40 years. Paula joined the Winnipeg Sweet Adelines in '79, a year after I became a member. She has been singing in a quartet for over 20 years – Expressions and now Journeys. There were many Barbershopping couples back then and the Winnipeg Golden Chordsmen had a very active group of “Harmony Helpers”. Members from both chapters supported Barbershopping in Winnipeg, quartets from both chapters sang on each other's shows and we participated in each other's events (eg Clear Lake Mini-HEP). I became very involved in the chapter right from the start, serving as chapter secretary, program VP and waving my hands in front of the chorus. I was awarded the BOTY award in '82 and the Dorothy Caselman Lifetime Achievement award in 2006. For about 16 years I was an assistant director and it was always my pleasure to direct the chorus at rehearsals, shows, BBQ's, restaurants, i.e. anywhere we gathered. In the early '80's, the chapter had about 108 members, with about 80 on stage for the annual shows – we sold out



the Concert Hall. I produced the '83 annual show and at the show dress rehearsal the slide of the old

Wpg city hall melted, but I had a spare slide - "Be Prepared". I was also the interim Director of the Winnipeg Sweet Adelines in the early 80's and took them to their Regional competition. Although the Winnipeg SA chapter folded a while back, many of the members (Paula included) joined the Assiniboine Chapter. Paula and I are fortunate to have so many "brothers and sisters" here in Wpg and all over North America. I attended Harmony University in '87 and brought back "Fun in Just One Lifetime" for the Chordsmen and the Winnipeg SA chorus. At one WSA performance, I started them on the "Fun" song, sat down for most of it, then got up to direct the tag. They were rehearsed and it worked – I just had to try it once!

I have spent a good part of my lifetime learning and performing music and for 40 years have been studying BBS craft to enhance my performances. Directing, interpretation, presentation and vocal production have been my focal points – so much to share and so little opportunity. Some people have said that I am a "natural director who brings a dormant sheet of music to life and communicates/directs the emotion and message of the song" - whatever. It is such a pleasure to stand in front of a chorus and have members give back, to me and their audience, the emotion directed – it is magical! I was having a performance evaluation at a training course with Jordan Travis a few years back and asked if I should "tone down" my presentation. He said definitely not, bring the chorus up. This is why at rehearsals I sometimes requested that we "do it in performance mode" or "perform the song not just sing it". Nice to see that RCS is moving towards that performance mode at rehearsals (thanks Zoom). Our audiences pay to be taken on a musical journey and we are the vehicle to do that audibly and visually!

In the past 20 years, whenever and wherever Paula and I travelled, we would always schedule visits to BHS and SA rehearsals, shows, coaching sessions, workshops, conventions, etc. In FL, we usually visit 10 BHS/SAI rehearsals and at least 5 shows. Of course, we visit some of the tourist sites and relax a bit too. We have spent many inspiring hours with International caliber choruses like the Heralds of Harmony, Vocal Majority, San Diego Chorus, Toast of Tampa, Spirit of the Gulf, etc, and with directors/coaches like Tony DeRosa, Joe Connelly, Betty Clipman, Jim Clancy, Dale Syverson, Randy Loo, etc. Then there are the fantastic quartets we have met at the shows, rehearsals, and conventions – like Main Street, Vocal Spectrum, Bling, Lunch Break, Buzz, Signature, Viva, Real Time, so many more. They have all made such a big impact on our understanding, appreciation, enjoyment and philosophy of barbershopping. I am always amazed at the improvements made at the coaching sessions, where each phrase, word, and vowel are put under a microscope and improved in so many ways. Paula and I were at a Heralds of Harmony rehearsal this winter - Tony DeRosa and Clay Hine were working with the chorus on a new arrangement. **SIMPLY BRILLIANT!** We have learned some of the latest BBS craft and techniques and confirmed and tweaked our knowledge. Practicing and mastering the newer techniques is difficult "work", but it is also FUN and personally satisfying! Attending sessions with many of the "not so famous" choruses and directors has also given us important learning experiences and friendships. The FL Sun Coast Chorus comes to mind. Paula and I have been visiting this small chapter for about 15 years, rehearsed with them, helped at their show, have shared bulletin information, cheered for them at conventions, and have gotten to know 103 years "young" Dr. Clare McCearry. We all share a common passion – Barbershopping! In 2017, on our FL vacation we were able to attend both the Sunshine (BHS) convention in Orlando and the Region 9 (SAI) convention in Daytona. Bonus - our son Craig flew down to Orlando, met us at the convention and we toured him around central FL for a week.



My involvement/positions in the Winnipeg Chapter in the last 15 years includes – secretary, web master, board member at large, Lead section leader, assistant director, roster producer, and bulletin editor. I have “shed” all of these roles to make time for my current responsibilities with the Land O’ Lakes District and Sing Canada Harmony. Apart from singing in the RCS chorus, I am involved as the Chapter Historian, Sing Canada Harmony representative and District Chapter Advocate. I have been the historian for a few years and have been working my way through the plastic containers full of Winnipeg Chapter pictures, albums, documents, plaques, records, tapes, programs, etc. There are 71 years of materials in those containers and on my computers.



Several families have also given me their collection of boxes containing Wpg Chapter historical treasures and I have also “inherited” some Wpg and Assiniboine SA historical treasures. I have been organizing a lot of the materials, scanning numerous pictures/documents and producing Power Point presentations, historical displays and articles for sharing with past, current and future Winnipeg members. I am hoping that another Chapter Historian comes along soon to share in this journey into our chapter’s past. In closing this paragraph, I really must add that I thoroughly enjoyed singing and performing in a few quartets over the years. U -Four-ia, the Singing Valentine quartets, Got No Piano, and Tempo.



My involvement, time commitment and responsibilities with the Land O’ Lakes District have also undergone some significant changes over the years. I first served as a District Chapter Councilor with the four Canadian chapters in the Northern Plains Division (SK, MB) in 2007. The District Board was



pleased with my accomplishments and presented with the Vern Zwicky Chapter Councilor of the Year award. In 2009, I was named the District VP of Northern Plains and Red Carpet Divisions responsible for 4 Cdn and 7 US chapters. In 2013 the two Divisions were amalgamated and became the Northern Plains Division with 9 chapters. I was the Chapter Advocate for 6 of the most northern chapters and Chuck Olson from Fergus Falls took care of the 3 southern chapters. Indeed, there was a lot of travelling over the years because I made sure to visit with all my chapters at least once a year to update them on District services and initiatives, install officers, make presentations and to be their voice on the District Board. Frequent emails and phone calls helped to build trust and strong District/Chapter relationships. On occasion, as a show evaluator for the District’s



Standing Ovation program, I would attend chapter shows. I practiced doing show evaluations when attending some of the chapter shows while on vacation. For several years, I also organized coaching/admin tours in my Division. A District coach and I would travel to the chapters, he would coach the chorus and quartets and I would arrange a meeting after with the chapter executive. One of our more successful tours took a full week and involved 2 coaches, 7 of the 9 chapters and 2400 km. In my early years, I was concerned about my budget, but was assured that the District fully supported my efforts in Northern Plains – “keep doing what you have been doing”! In 2016, I was honoured to again receive the Vern Zwicky Chapter Councilor of the Year award, presented by Judd Orff!



A few other District events that Paula and I really enjoyed for many years were the Minneapolis Twins Game BBS Mass Sing and the FLBTMOT visits. In the summer, about 75 – 125 LOL Barbershoppers (with up to 15 Wpg members and spouses at times) attended a Twins game to sing the anthem and provide some 7th inning stretch entertainment. My job was to “warm up” the chorus with Pole Cat songs and the US and Cdn anthems for about an hour before

“show time”. The FLBTMOT, “Friday Lunch Bunch That Met On Thursday”, were ~30+ BBS’ers from many chapters around the Minneapolis area who met downstairs at a bar, ate, sang, gave chapter reports, exchanged stories, planned events and raised money for District. The Lunch Bunch (many famous and not too famous quartet and chapter members) have been presenting and recording their autobiographies. Some of this autobiography will eventually be video-ed at a FLBTMOT luncheon.

My involvement with Sing Canada Harmony (Cdn Charity) began in 2009. As the MB and LOL representative, I encouraged my Cdn Chapters to support SCH and the US chapters to support the Harmony Foundation. My visits/communication with the Northern Plains chapters made it easy for me to promote both these two charities. Over the 11 years, I have processed many SCH scholarship applications that resulted in awards to MB individuals, schools, community groups and Barbershop chapters. It is always a pleasure to make the award presentations! SCH donors see that their gifts come back to support their communities. As I got more familiar and successful with the programs,



I took on and was given more responsibilities (e.g. Marketing and PR, Donor Relations Chair, Presidents Council Chair, and responsible for the development of the Keep a Melody Ringing program). My position with Sing Canada Harmony and our District connected me with many of the Harmony Foundation personnel that I worked closely during the year, at Conventions and Harmony University. Over the years, Wpg Chapter has contributed significantly to SCH’s scholarship fund as evident by the number of Ambassador of Harmony and President’s Council members and the number of past members memorialized and honoured on this “Keep a Melody Ringing” plaque in Nashville. Visiting the Society’s headquarters in Nashville and reading the Wpg members’ names on the plaque does bring back a flood of wonderful memories and tears as well.



In 2016, Judd and I had been discussing me stepping into his position (VP Chapter Support and Education in 2017, however the Board had other plans. I was presented with a proposal, a 6-year commitment – 2 as Exec. VP (training wheels), 2 as District President (commitments, involvements, interactions, challenges, reports, MEETINGS, ETC) and 2 as Immediate Past Pres (?). Paula and I discussed the pros and cons of this giant step on our lives and we decided that I would accept. Paula became “The First Lady” (Del Ryberg gave her that title). I was the second Canadian to ever serve as the LOL President (1st was Gord Gardiner, Regina, 1975). With that honour also came a multitude of responsibilities and challenges. Many challenges came from changes that our Society initiated and Districts needed to implement and do “damage control”. Getting notices of major Society developments minutes before they are announced to members and with little or no input from the District Presidents was definitely problematic, but this is slowly changing. You do not want to go behind the scenes on this! All 17 District Presidents and EVP’s belong to the District Presidents Council that meet separately and with the Society Board at International Conventions (now on Zoom calls). Many of us meet informally at Harmony University in the summers. Counting vacations, District and Society business events, Paula and I spend about two months “on the road”. We enjoy most of this travel and have met so many wonderful Barbershoppers from all over the world. Paula has even gotten used to driving 8, 10, ... hours to MN and WI (stopping to shop helps).



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the last two years (plus) I am busy communicating with District Officers, Committees, Chapter Presidents, President Council and Society members by phone and email, writing articles, researching policy, planning meeting agendas, evaluating programs, tracking chapter reports and membership, etc. It has



always been exciting, rewarding, frustrating, challenging, interesting, involved and so much more. I have never regretted making that proposal decision! At the 2018 spring LOL convention in Greendale, WI, I was honoured to be named the Land O' Lakes Barbershopper of the Year! The Wpg chapter now had two LOL BOTY recipients – Les Gurr 1970 and Gordon Billows 2018. This was indeed a good year because I got two ROYAL FLUSHES (2 X \$1000), my 4th and 5th Royal Flush in 4 years. Playing the slots is one of my vices. In '16, '17 and '18, I went



Nashville for about two weeks, one for meetings and training with BHS staff and then one week to attend Harmony University and represent Sing Canada Harmony. I was passed the Presidential gavel at the 2019 January Leadership Academy Board meeting in River Falls WI and a week later Paula and I flew to Society's Midwinter Convention in Nashville. Finally, we could share the Nashville experience with her – Harmony Hall, Broadway, and the Grand Ole Opry! Good meeting, courses, weather and lots of close harmony. A few weeks later we went on another BBS filled vacation to FL. We always enjoy the Sunshine District Convention in Orlando and their great hospitality. So often we meet some of the members from chapters we visited over the years. We still are not tired of seeing great quartets like



Main Street, Throwback, and Signature, or top choruses like Toast of Tampa and Heralds of Harmony! **Remember the FL Boeing 737 Max flight that was cancelled?** Yup, that was our flight home! MasterCard Trip Interruption Insurance works! That summer, Paula and I flew to historic Salt Lake City for the International Convention at Temple Square and Mormon Tabernacle – FANTASTIC! We shared that experience with many LOL friends, including Ken & Wendy Broadfoot. We decided to add on another week to visit our Nephew and his wife in Reno. The rest of '19 went very well with performances, Sing Canada Harmony and District meetings. Our plans for trips in '20 progressed well – Leadership Academy in WI, Midwinter in Jacksonville FL and Florida for 5 weeks with 7 rehearsals, a coaching session (Clay Hine/Tony DeRosa), 5 shows, and the Sunshine District Convention (on the weekend before returning to Wpg)! All was going good, except we kept hearing more and more about some virus. We met up with the Sunshine District President at the Marriott convention site on the Fri. morning and he just got word from Society to CANCEL! I attended their Board Meeting and we were all invited to go up to the President's hospitality suite later

for food, drinks and entertainment. Unfortunately, there was only one quartet still in the hotel, 2nd place International '19 – Throwback! It was a great evening, great hospitality and a great end to our FL vacation.

We caught our flight home from Tampa on the 17th just before all the flights were cancelled. We decided to quarantine as soon as we got home, just in case. A few days later Paula and I started feeling "sick" and thought it was just "jet lag". Nope, Covid-19! Paula and I had most of the Covid symptoms that you see on the symptom list, mine were severe and I also had double pneumonia! By the time we got tested and got the results, I looked and felt like the "walking dead". I went to Victoria Hospital and was transferred to Health Science Centre because I was "too sick for Victoria". I got the "royal treatment" in the HSC ICU – intravenous, oxygen, medications, many needles, monitoring, isolation, etc. The symptoms slowly lessened and I was eventually sent home to quarantine again, and again after my visit to the lung specialist. I was in quarantine for almost 50 days. Paula and I are very fortunate to be Covid Survivors!

We have all been affected by the Pandemic! Chapters, Districts and Society have adapted and with the aid of technology (Zoom and The Echo), are having virtual rehearsals, shows, conventions meetings, and doing things together virtually that we never imagined! My District and Society business definitely has not slowed down, it is almost more efficient and responsive. As the District President, I participate in 3 or 4 Zoom meetings a week and continue to do my reports, articles, tracking, communications, etc. - business carries on! Your Land O' Lakes, Administration Team is currently planning for our Jan. '21 VIRTUAL Leadership Academy and Society's Midwinter Convention will also be VERY VIRTUAL (International in Cleveland is LIVE, so far)!

In a few weeks, I will cease to be the District President and will serve as Immediate Past President for 2 years. My responsibilities as Chapter Advocate will continue. I have not accomplished everything I wanted to do as President, but know that many of my initiatives will be realized in the coming years. Incoming President, Jay Althof, and our LOL Admin Team has been doing some very good planning for our District's future. We will come out of this Pandemic stronger! It has been an honour to serve as your Land O' Lakes District President 2019 & 2020.

In the coming year, I will be getting reacquainted with Paula and our family, getting fit and healthier, downsizing and finding things in our storage room, purging our computers and emails, possibly dipping into our "job jar" and spending lots of quality time with our grandchildren. We have no travel plans for 2021! Well, maybe to do some fishing trips with our sons in our "bass boat" (I did make time this Fall to study and pass the Boaters Test). Paula and I agree that we would not have had many of these great experiences if it weren't for Barbershopping! Barbershopping took up any "spare time" Paula and I had as our family grew and enjoyed the "good life". We are thrilled to have been part of the two singing organizations. Yes, it's great to be a Barbershopper and as this song says it all:
"One life to live, one life to give one life time!" We did it our way!

This autobiography is dedicated to my family – Derek, Craig and Paula:
Our oldest son Derek (Randi) – (foreman with Big Sky) and our three wonderful grandchildren Elliott ('09), Sebastian ('11), Oliver ('19) and "a bun in the oven".
Our younger son Craig – (successful Firma Currency Trader) and his cat Randy.
Paula – wife extraordinaire!

