

# Chapter 3

## *2011 was a tempestuous year*

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### *New year's crazy weather*

The week following Christmas was dreary with grey skies, but very little snow. However, there was something of a warming trend, and over the New Year, most of the accumulated snow either melted or was washed away by rain as the temperature rose well above freezing. The peak was 46 deg.F (8 deg.C), and it was 52 deg.F (11 deg.C) in Toronto—most unusual. It was good, of course, for anyone traveling over the holiday period. We were even beginning to see patches of grass, but a sudden drop in temperature quickly brought the melting to an end, and heavy snow on January 4th turned everywhere white again, with more snow forecasted for the rest of this week and over the weekend.

Monica's mystery rash still left traces that stubbornly refused to go. So, she was beginning to wonder if there was something else, apart from the laundry detergent and fabric softener, that she was reacting to. When we got our new beds, we changed the type of mattress cover. We have always had mattress pads, but this time we also bought mattress protectors made from a thin towelling fabric coated with a layer of vinyl. Monica's chiropractor suggested the vinyl as being another possible cause of her rash. So, as changing back to the old laundry detergent only partially solved the problem, it was now time to test the vinyl theory.

We hadn't heard of any cancelled appointments for the specialist, but Monica went to see her doctor for another consultation. My annual physical checkup showed no abnormalities, and the blood test was good with the lowest PSA rating in years: 0.87. The only area that the doctor wanted more information on was my lung capacity efficiency, so I had three chest X-rays and a pulmonary test.

I received a letter from my father, who was recovering from major surgery on his bladder. The old soldier was still carrying on regardless; even driving to the local supermarket. While in the hospital he gave himself a reality check. Coming to grips with his own mortality, he mentioned a few details for settling his personal estate.

January produced strange weather; with cold and snowy conditions followed by above freezing for a day and possibly some rain. Then we had a deep freeze with overnight temperatures of -4 deg.F (-20 deg.C), and ice formation on the INSIDE of the windows at home. Although actually the daytime was quite nice even at 5 deg.F (-15 deg.C), and we went out for a long walk around town, ending up at the lighthouse and overlooking the frozen harbour.

Indoors, the memoir collection was starting to take shape, but I knew it was going to take years to flesh it out completely. A sort of writing exercise spasmodic in nature—put aside for a while, or picked up on the

spur of the moment when a thought or memory stimulated by old photographs popped up unexpectedly. There were some challenges where layout was concerned, as I was using my old Apple PowerMac G4/450 Cube, and it was stretched to the limit. Problems using Microsoft Word obliged me to go back to the drawing board, and I recomposed everything on Aldus PageMaker—a more versatile software for manipulating text and images. Also, I could make decent PDFs from PageMaker.

On Friday, January 21st, we attended the local Chamber of Commerce *Spirit of Success Awards Gala Dinner*. We went to last year's dinner because Heritage Goderich had been nominated for an award in one of the many categories, and as the official chair I felt obliged to attend. We had no intention of going this year until a letter from the Chamber of Commerce informed me that I, personally, had been nominated in the 'Community Spirit Award' category. So, like last year, we felt obliged to attend in case I won. However, unlike last year when the meal was very good, this year's was poor and definitely not worth the price of admission. When the awards were handed out, we discovered that the 'Community Spirit Award' category had the most nominees of all the categories, and it was won by another nominee.

At the end of January, Monica was plagued by another skin problem—quite different to the rash she had. When it was at its worst, her body was covered with large areas where the skin gradually turned a bright red, and burned and itched like crazy. She looked as if she had a severe sunburn. Calamine lotion calmed it down until it flared up once more, which was usually several times a day. Her doctor couldn't decide whether it was being caused by an allergic reaction or a skin problem. Just in case she had become allergic to the main blood pressure tablet—the same one that he took her off when she had the rash—he took her off it again. He then put her on a short course of Prednisone, and since finishing that she has been taking an antihistamine tablet every day. Although she was still having flare-ups, they weren't as frequent or as intense as before. Her doctor seemed pleased that some progress had been made, and he gave her a prescription for hydrocortisone cream, as well as some capsules to help alleviate the itching. Whether it was the Prednisone, the capsules, the antihistamine tablets or a combination of all three, but something was working as we already saw an improvement.

Our weather continued to be very wintry. We had lots of snow, and wild days with very strong winds that created whiteout conditions and huge drifts. Even we were finding the amount of snow that we have had so far this winter incredible, and more was in the forecast. Although it was snowing gently when one day we went out for a hike, the sun broke through the clouds, and we ended up having a beautiful afternoon, which was a real bonus since sunny days have been few and far between this winter.

### *Birthday, socialising, and reunions*

Monica's 72nd birthday was celebrated at Thyme on 21—our local fine dining restaurant. With it also being Valentine's Day, the restaurant had a special menu for the occasion with a choice of four appetizers and three *entrees*. At the end of the meal, we were brought two plates, and on each one was a different dessert. One had a warm chocolate brownie with ice cream while the other had a slice of vanilla cheesecake with raspberry sauce. The idea, since it was Valentine's Day, was to share each one, which we did; the cheesecake with raspberry sauce being the preferred one for both of us.

We made a reservation to go again for dinner the following Sunday evening. As February 14th had really been more about Valentine's Day than Monica's birthday, we decided to make the second outing a belated birthday celebration, and enjoyed yet another fabulous meal.

In between those two special evenings, we also went out for lunch at Eddington's fine dining restaurant in Exeter. It was our first out-of-town trip this year. Anyhow, we had received a gift certificate from the owner, and as the certificate was valid for the entire month, we waited for a day of good weather, which turned out to be almost springlike with the temperature climbing to 46 deg.F (8 deg.C). Although it was overcast, it didn't spoil our drive through the countryside, and we still had a lovely day out.

The weather was even nicer the following day. The cloud had given way to a clear blue sky, and with the warm temperature it really felt like an early taste of spring. It was far too nice to stay indoors, so after lunch we walked down to the harbour and all along the boardwalk. There was still lots of snow around, as well as ice out on the lake. Unfortunately, it was just a taste of spring, and it was only a few days later that it turned cold again and we had more snow.

Monica's skin disorder continued to improve, but we were still no wiser as to the cause. She consulted her doctor for another assessment, as we needed to know the basis of the malady and any long term remedy. Her doctor had been keeping an eye on the situation, although as yet he hadn't referred her to the experts. She was now almost free of the awful itchiness, but the pink patches were still persisting. They appeared for seemingly no apparent reason, and while some of them could be itchy, most of them just gradually faded away. Her skin was also very sensitive, and the slightest bit of pressure left a mark. A continuous dosage of medication and application of hydrocortisone cream helped to alleviate the discomfort. Monica expected to remain on this course of treatment until the skin problem had completely cleared. Only then, would her doctor put her back onto the blood pressure medication that he took her off in the beginning. Then, if the problem returned, we would know that she had become allergic to that particular medication, and a different prescription would be needed to treat her blood pressure.

Out of the blue, Monica received a letter from Fay (née Bates) Wathen, a former schoolmate (Barr's Hill in Coventry), who said that she had been meaning to get in touch for two years. When she finally got around to sending an e-mail, it had been bounced back. She presumed that we had changed our e-mail address, which we did in the summer of 2009. So, she printed the message and sent it by regular post. She also sent scans of photos taken at Barr's Hill. Monica e-mailed her back, and attached a copy of a photo of Fay taken during a school trip to Germany that both she and Monica went on in 1954.

Well, it transpired that Monica and Fay could be meeting as soon as the end of April or early in May. Fay, her husband, Brian, and their two daughters, were scheduled to visit their son/brother who lived in the nearby city of Waterloo. Monica mentioned that we went to the theatre in St. Jacobs, and Fay knew where we meant, as well as Benjamin's restaurant, where we always went for dinner before driving home. So, meeting there for lunch was one possibility. However, it was also suggested that, if they would like to see more of Southwestern Ontario, for them to visit us at home. Incidentally, Fay's comment after seeing a fairly recent photo of Monica—" ... apart from the colour of your hair, you haven't changed a bit!!"

**T**hroughout March, both Monica and I succumbed to a bout of the common cold, which continued for days on end. Of course, there was the attendant misery associated with bronchial coughs, fever and generally feeling pretty low. We lost weight, too, as our appetites diminished and recurring winter weather curtailed outside activities. At the time, many folk bemoaned the spread of the illness around town.

Later in the month, our head colds gradually dissipated. There were some lingering coughs, but the sneezing and streaming symptoms eventually went. Irritating, but at least it wasn't full-blown flu as neither of us had the shakes and shivers. It took basically three to four weeks for the illness to go through its natural cycle from incubation to full recovery.

Monica's skin complaint remained the same, and aside from when she was suffering from her head cold certainly hadn't worsened, so the hydrocortisone cream has helped in that respect. Monica now reached the point where she really wanted to know the cause, and so her doctor was convinced that she should see a specialist. An appointment was arranged for her to see an allergist in Stratford, Ontario. We hadn't pushed for it before, because to see a specialist necessitated an out-of-town trip, which we wouldn't have been too keen on doing during the winter.

**T**he second week of April was a busy one for us socially. We went out for lunch here in town with friends, Tina and Marris Bos, and the following day drove to the city of Sarnia to have lunch with Diane and Mike Knight, who live in Windsor, Ontario. Sarnia is roughly halfway between Goderich and Windsor, and we usually get together twice a year and meet at Crabby Joe's family restaurant where we sit and chat long after we have finished eating.

The day after that we started with a social evening at the home of our friends, Rosemarie and Geoff Edwards, then we all went to the Park House tavern for dinner. During the evening, they surprised us with the news that not only were they moving, but that they had bought an apartment condominium in Stratford. We knew that they were thinking of moving, but expected that it would be within town. They came here from Toronto 14 years ago after Geoff took early retirement, and as a retirement project for himself—he is a very capable handyman—they bought a house that had been neglected. Over the years, they transformed it into the kind of home that is featured in glossy magazines. They also transformed a large garden. Now, though, they were finding the house too big for their needs, and the garden more work than they want. So, having lived in an apartment condominium in Toronto and liked that lifestyle, they wanted something similar, and with nothing like that here in town, they had no choice but to move away.

The social gatherings continued into May when Monica's former schoolmate, Fay Wathen, her husband, Brian, and their two daughters, Lisa and Louise, visited us. They arrived in good time for us all to have lunch at Thyme on 21 fine dining restaurant. Then, even though it was spitting with rain when we left, they said that they would like to see the downtown area. So, we walked to The Square, and then around it, before returning here for a cup of tea. We wanted to take them down to the lakefront, but the weather was too miserable, and there wasn't really time anyway. Monica was so pleased to see Fay again after all this time. The ladies were hoping to stay in touch and gradually catch up on each other's activities over the last 50 years. As well, we hoped that Fay and Brian would visit again next year, and have another reunion.





*After a Heavy Snowstorm, No. 5 Coburg Street, Goderich, Ontario, January, 2011.*



*Monica Celebrating her 72nd Birthday, Goderich, Ontario, February, 2011.*



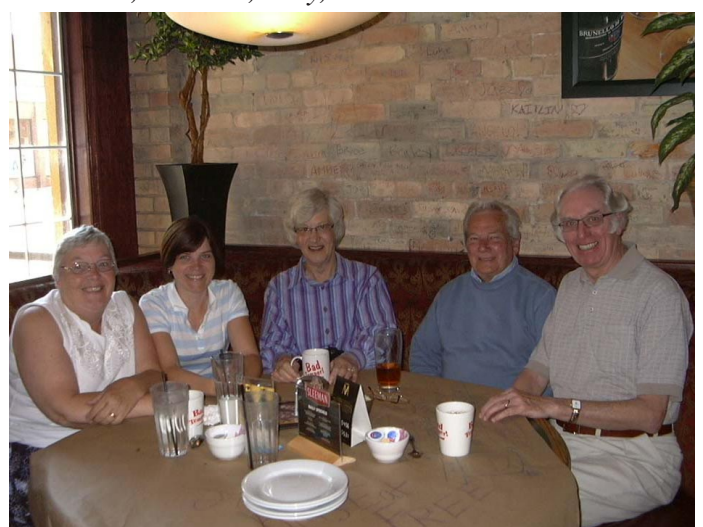
*Monica Relaxing on the Boardwalk on a Springlike Day, Goderich, Ontario, February, 2011.*



*Barr's Hill Reunion with Monica and Fay Wathen, Goderich, Ontario, May, 2011.*



*The Wathen Family: Lisa, Louise, Fay and Brian, with Monica, Goderich, Ontario, May, 2011.*



*Sue, Lindsey, Monica, Roger, Barry at Crabby Joe's Restaurant, Woodstock, Ontario, May, 2011.*

The following week, we had a get-together with our longtime Coventry friends, Roger and Sue Moore, who were visiting their daughter and their son and his family. Lindsey, their daughter, was kind enough to take her parents to meet us for lunch. We went to Crabby Joe's family restaurant in Woodstock that we always go to when we meet them, and even sat at the same table. It has become quite a tradition. We had our usual 'four hour' lunch, during which we dragged up old stories and generally put the world to right. It was great seeing them again, and as the day was bright and sunny, the journeys to and from Woodstock were pleasant ones.

## *Theatre and more tempestuous weather*

This year's theatre opened with our local amateur group's latest production; a comedy called *Is He Dead?* It was quite funny, and considering it was performed by amateurs, they did very well. There were two more theatre outings in May. The first was in the auditorium of the University of Waterloo to see the little known Gilbert & Sullivan operetta, *Princess Ida*, performed by an amateur group.

Then, the following week, we went to Toronto and stayed over two nights at the Holiday Inn, Yorkdale. While there, we went to see *The Railway Children*. Another topnotch show with realistic special effects and superb acting. The live show was really true to the story, and considering the stage limitations made for great entertainment. The stage was actually a huge tent that had been erected over existing railway tracks still in use by the Toronto Railway Heritage Centre. Wooden platforms were constructed on either side of the tracks, and the audience sat in long rows parallel to the platforms. The locomotive 'steamed' into the tent just before the intermission and at the end of the play. The rest of the time, moveable sections of the stage, which filled in the space between the platforms, were pushed or pulled by stagehands along the tracks to wherever they were needed for each scene. It was very ingenious how it was done, and it really brought the story to life. It was a fantastic show and definitely worth going all the way to Toronto to see. To ensure the locomotive was of the same vintage as depicted in the story, the one that appeared in the play was shipped over here on loan from the National Railway Museum in York. We could remember the story being serialised on *Children's Hour* back in the 1950s, and thought that we would like to see it again for old time's sake.

In mid-May, all levels of government had to struggle with an unprecedented natural disaster. The Manitoba provincial government took drastic measures to prevent an uncontrolled flooding of large tracts of the countryside by breaching a dyke on the Assiniboine River, and allowing a controlled flow of water to escape onto prime farmland. Although the possibility existed of flooding hundreds of acres (and about 100 homes), the alternative (uncontrolled flooding) would be even more catastrophic, as over 650 properties and much more acreage would've been affected. One good decision was to deploy hundreds of troops to help provide backup support for rescue and evacuation transportation. Similarly, soldiers were out in other parts of the country affected by spring flooding, and many inundated homes in the Richelieu River valley, Québec, were being patrolled by the Army.

By way of complete contrast, tinder dry conditions brought about a hazardous situation in Manitoba's neighbouring province of Alberta. A raging forest fire virtually consumed the entire town of Slave Lake (population: 7,000). Gale force winds of over 62 mph (100 km/h), whipped up the fire and fanned the huge



flames before the authorities could warn the residents, so that a mandatory evacuation had to be done quickly. Fortunately there weren't any injuries, but people escaped with only carloads of personal effects as the fire engulfed their homes.

At the beginning of June, we saw the Broadway musical, *Hairspray*. Not knowing anything about the story, which was set in Baltimore, MD, in 1962, the show seemed at first to be just a musical romp with a lot of upbeat songs and fast paced dance numbers. However, it turned out that there was a more serious side to the story—the integration of black youth into a predominantly white community. It was an excellent show and we thoroughly enjoyed it. Later in the month, we saw *Italian Funerals & Other Festive Occasions*.

## *An appointment and visit in London*

We knew that Monica's appointment with an allergist in Stratford wasn't until November. Her doctor's receptionist tried to find another allergist with a shorter waiting list, but we assumed she had been unsuccessful. However, the day we went to Waterloo to see *Princess Ida*, we returned home to find a letter from the London Health Sciences Centre, and an appointment for Monica to be at the Allergy Clinic on June 8th.

On arriving at the clinic, we were greeted by the allergist's very friendly secretary. After completing a lengthy questionnaire, a nurse technician interviewed Monica and performed a standard allergy susceptibility test, which consisted of 40 'jabs' with short needles chemically treated with solutions of common allergy agents (such as pollen, dust mites, etc.) on one of her forearms. After 10 minutes, the 40 prick marks were examined for degrees of severity to try and isolate any particular agent or agents. Not one prick mark was worse than any of the others. However, it was recorded that the pressure marks intentionally made by a ballpoint pen showing the numbers 1 – 40 remained on her skin and didn't dissipate. This suggested to the nurse that the condition may be something called dermatographia. Following the test, we were shown into another examining room to meet a young female student intern. The intern asked many questions and performed a rudimentary cardiopulmonary examination. She also wrote a short report based on the interview. When she was finished, the allergist joined us and was given a verbal assessment of my condition by the intern. Although it was obvious that he was testing her, he did it in a pleasant and non-demeaning way so that not only was he learning about Monica's problem, but he was also coaching her. As well, he instructed her how to fill out the necessary requisition for blood work. Unfortunately by that time the laboratory was closed, so that had to wait until the next appointment in August. During her assessment, the intern also mentioned dermatography, but the allergist disagreed with that diagnosis. He said that Monica had a form of hives and prescribed more medication in addition to what she had been taking for the last five months.

We had also heard from my cousin, Don. He and his wife, Claire, hadn't long returned home after spending two months in Florida, and were wondering about the four of us getting together for lunch one day. So, when we told them about Monica's appointment at the Allergy Clinic, they immediately invited us around to their house in London, Ontario, to have dinner with them. That particular day was the hottest one so far this year, 97 deg.F (36 deg.C), so we all sat out in their garden and chatted over some cold drinks. We stayed outside until dinner was ready, and then went into their air conditioned house. With an hour and a half

journey ahead of us, we had hoped to leave by 8 o'clock so that we got home before dark. However, we had so much catching up to do that we didn't leave until 10 o'clock and by then, of course, it was already dark. Anyhow, it was lovely to see them.

One of the topics of conversation was the progress of my memoirs. During the previous two months, I had virtually completed Chapter 2, together with periodic revisions to the cover art and Chapter 1 text. Plus I added the *About the author* biography and a few appendices with miscellaneous anecdotes such as family life and adventures during both World Wars.

## *Adventure in Washington DC*

I had joined the Local 1863 Retirees Club, and volunteered to go on a course, conducted at the William W. Winpisinger Education and Technology Center, Lace Placid, Hollywood, Maryland, dealing with recording the history of individual IAM&AW union local lodges. I thought it important to record the history of my former local lodge, since it no longer existed after the Volvo Motor Grader Ltd. plant closed on June 25th, 2009. John White, another Local 1863 retiree, also volunteered to go, and as he had been to other courses at Hollywood, it was arranged that I would go in John's car and he would do the driving.

John took his wife, Barbara, in their luxury model car, which made the estimated 13 hour journey comfortable for me sitting in the back. There were a couple of hairy moments when the car's GPS navigation system or traffic volume caused problems. The worst was when we approached Washington DC, and the GPS directed us off-course and we ended up in the downtown Black Ghetto—totally lost. After some urgent reprogramming of the GPS, we then got caught up in a surging crowd of thousands of spectators that was spilling out of the baseball stadium—and we were running dangerously low on petrol (gas)! We eventually found a service station and continued to the training centre after eating dinner at a nearby Irish pub.

The week of training was intensive, but the training centre was well appointed with large hotel rooms and full dining facilities. Also, there was an outdoor swimming pool, tennis courts, 9-hole golf course, exercise room, sauna, extensive computer labs, and a welcoming bar with pool tables, juke box, dartboards and card tables. After a full day of tuition and homework assignments, it was gratifying to wander down to the bar for unlimited alcoholic consumption. All this, including travelling expenses, was paid for by the training centre.

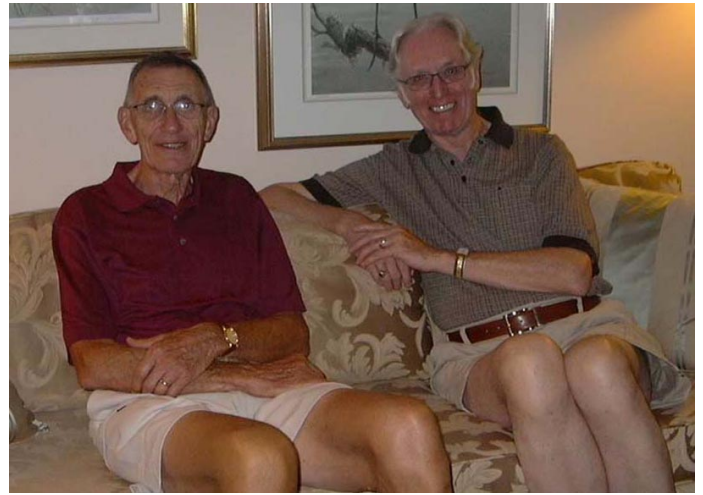
The course was topnotch with two PhD instructors and a class of well seasoned, mainly retired students. We were required to work on a gruelling assignment and present it in front of everyone for evaluation. I was able to fall back on much of my Heritage Committee experience for the subject of my homework, and after 5-1/2 hours of computer generated text and images, produced a presentation that was considered well done by my peers and the professors. It was party time after that episode and much beer was consumed as a justified reward.

However, there was a major setback during the week. Before we left, John knew that his 86-year old father was not very well and, in fact, was hospitalised. The news filtered down that the old fellow had rallied





*Steam Train Featured in “The Railway Children”, Roundhouse Park, Toronto, Ontario, May, 2011.*



*Cousin Don and Barry, at Don and Claire’s House in London, Ontario, June, 2011.*



*Traci Drummond, Barry and Charlie Micallef at the 3W Education Center, Hollywood, MD, June, 2011.*



*Barry and Monica Celebrate their 37th Wedding Anniversary, Goderich, Ontario, July, 2011.*



*Exterior of the Heritage Canada Southern Railway Station Building, St. Thomas, Ontario, August, 2011.*



*Monica in the Restored Interior, Canada Southern Railway Station, St. Thomas, Ontario, August, 2011.*

and the improvement looked good. Then, midweek, he took a turn for the worse and died. John and Barbara immediately returned by road. This left me in Hollywood without any means of getting back home.

The training centre's director told me that a contingency plan would be put into effect. At the centre's expense, I was provided with airline tickets to get me back to Canada. After the graduation ceremony, all the students prepared to leave; many by bus to the nearby Baltimore/Washington International Airport. There were delays on the highway between the training centre and the airport that caused some concern because of the flight departure schedules, but we eventually made it there on time. Following check in and security clearance, I went to the departure lounge and waited for my first flight (Baltimore to New York City). As time went by, we were informed that because of severe weather conditions in the New York area, all flights in and out were delayed. This was a problem for me, as my connecting flight (New York City to Toronto) relied on a smooth transition between flights. The ticketing clerk then booked me on the second flight out of New York City to Toronto as a precaution. The severe weather did not improve, and eventually all flights in and out of the New York area were cancelled. I was now marooned in Baltimore.

Fortunately, the ticketing clerk was able to find another flight the same evening: this one, Baltimore nonstop to Toronto. It seems like the travel agent must have overlooked this flight when initially processing my journey. Anyhow, it was a quick return through the terminal building to another airline's check in counter. The check in clerk still didn't have all the paperwork (transmitted electronically) from the other airline so couldn't process my boarding pass. Eventually the clearance came through and a boarding pass card given to me. This meant going through security again (major screening because of new regulations) and a wait for the flight, which left a little late but arrived roughly on time.

Now I had to get from Toronto to Goderich—at best a two hour drive; there being no direct bus or train service. At times I had been communicating with Monica by payphone, as I didn't have a mobile (cell) phone, and she co-ordinated a private limousine service to send a driver and pick me up at the airport. I had just made my last call to her when the driver arrived, and I was finally on the last leg of this marathon journey; eventually arriving home at 1:00 a.m. Sunday, June 25th.

## *Prelude to disaster*

**O**n July 12th, Monica and I looked back over the past 37 years to our wedding, and celebrated the anniversary at the fine dining restaurant, Thyme on 21. 'Mein Host' there treated us to a cocktail, then we indulged in goat cheese croquettes served on a bed of salad greens, followed by succulent steaks and a decadent dessert; all helped down with a bottle of Australian *Shiraz* wine.

We attended an amateur theatre production called, *Narcisse*. The play was written by a local person, and the story revolved around the grandiose scheme conceived by Narcisse Cantin, a French Canadian born and raised in the nearby hamlet of St. Joseph. He envisioned building a huge shipping canal between St. Joseph on the shore of Lake Huron, and Port Stanley on the shore of Lake Erie. The idea was for ships to bypass the long journey through the St. Clair River, Lake St. Clair and the Detroit River. This reduced the sailing time to the St. Lawrence River, the Erie Canal and destinations in the Northeastern USA, Europe and East Africa.



Narcisse sunk much of his own money into the venture, but the outbreak of the First World War stopped all activity and eventually the scheme became stillborn.

The play was staged in the grounds of St. Peter's Church near St. Joseph, where an outdoor theatre had been created by using bales of straw to build walls around where the audience sat. There was no actual stage, and the backdrop was the countryside behind the church. On the July evening we went, the temperature was extremely high, but we were lucky enough to get some seats in the shade. However, the actors performed in the full sun, but all of them—and many were young children—still carried on and did a marvellous job. We thoroughly enjoyed the show.

In early August, we saw the allergist at the London Health Sciences Centre for a follow-up report on Monica's skin problem. The results of her latest blood tests showed everything was good, with no abnormal readings for thyroid, lupus or rheumatoid arthritis. The expert gave us a medical synopsis, and it would seem that Monica's immune system was being fooled into thinking that she had an infection, and produced lots of histamine to fight it. The allergist preferred the immune system to eventually realise its mistake and stop producing more histamine than it needed. Apparently, this could happen just as suddenly as it started, and in 60 percent of people with the problem, it took between six months and two years. In the meantime, Monica was to continue taking as much antihistamine medication as was necessary to control the symptoms.

Later in the month, we decided to make a three-day mini trip to St. Thomas, a small city just south of London, Ontario, and visit three tourist attractions. We stayed at the Holiday Inn Express hotel located in London. Now, over the years, we have always found hotels in the Holiday Inn chain to be very good. However, this one was poorly managed, and we had a number of issues.

To make matters worse, of the three tourist attractions, only the first one was really worth visiting. It was the Canada Southern Railway Station, a beautiful building erected in 1873, and gradually being restored to its former glory. In the 1900s, St. Thomas was known as The Railway Capital of Canada, and as many as 30 different railway companies had tracks going through the city at various times. Strangely enough, because of the terrain in Upper New York State, the route between Chicago and New York City was shorter through Canada than through the US. St. Thomas became an ideal community for the railway companies to use as a staging point to transfer freight onto branch lines, and maintain rolling stock. We also visited the Elgin County Railway Museum, which was housed in a former railway maintenance workshop. The building required a lot of work doing to it, and the contents also needed to be displayed much better. To be fair, though, the museum was run by volunteers and had very little financial backing. Last on our list was the Elgin County Museum. However, it consisted of only one room on the top floor of the Elgin County Courthouse and wasn't much of a museum at all. On the positive side, we did have a very good meal both evenings—one at a restaurant specialising in seafood, the other at a steakhouse.

We continued with our theatregoing, and saw *Murder at the Best Western*. A comedy with only three characters, it was well acted and very funny. Then we saw *How the Other Half Loves*; another comedy and even funnier than *Murder at the Best Western*. It had more of a story as well as having more to laugh at. The third outing was to see *Blue Suede Shoes: Memories of the King*.





travelled straight along West Street towards the centre of the town. Commercial properties—optician’s practice, architect’s office, Town Works Department, and insurance company buildings—on West Street collapsed like a house of cards. Further along the street, century-old brick buildings crumbled as roofs were ripped off, and façade rubble collapsed into the road and buried parked vehicles.

Next to bear the brunt was The Square—the town centre and commercial heart with its many shops, cafés, banks, iconic court house and surrounding parkland. Virtually all the trees, many over 100 years old, were torn out by the roots and tossed around like matchsticks. The heritage buildings that ring the court house suffered incredible damage with roofs delaminated and most windows blown out. More façades crumbled into the street, and several older structures just became flattened.

The tornado continued along St. David Street totally wrecking the Victoria Street United Church in its path. Many of the private houses along St. David Street and neighbouring Park Street were virtually destroyed, and everywhere trees and power line poles were snapped and splintered. After crossing Picton Street where the car body repair shop and car wash buildings collapsed under the force, the funnel cloud ravaged the old Volvo factory building and Sifto Salt evaporator plant, scattering cement blocks and steel cladding over the entire area. It only took the storm about 10 to 15 seconds to track across the town.

On its way out of town, the storm cut a complete swath through acres of woodlot behind the cemetery, and then continued into the country where it demolished several homes and outbuildings in the nearby hamlet of Benmiller. It crossed the Maitland River,, and scythed through more dense bush before finally losing force and breaking up in Ashfield/Colborne/Wawanosh township.

### *From our perspective*

**O**ur first indication of the approaching storm was when the electricity supply was cut off. The second was when hailstones—the size of golfballs—started to rain down. This was the precursor that alerted us to seek immediate shelter. We rushed into the bathroom as it is an inside room with no windows, and hearing the characteristic roar of the tornado, we hid in the small room until the deafening noise of the falling hailstones on the roof ceased.

After what seemed like an eternity—but was actually only a few minutes—everything went quiet, and we emerged from the bathroom. By then, it had stopped raining, and the sun was starting to break through the clouds, so we went outside to have a look around. Except for several pieces of debris on the front lawn, everywhere looked amazingly normal. The apartment building and our car didn’t appear to have sustained any damage from the hailstones. However, as we looked down our road—just four streets away—it was obvious that a major catastrophe had taken place, and gradually over the next few hours, the full extent of that catastrophe emerged. The scene was reminiscent of any community that had been ‘blitzed’ and, indeed, a familiar sight in post war Europe. After eating a makeshift supper, we went out for a walk to have a look around, but with tree branches and downed power lines everywhere, it wasn’t the smartest thing to do, so we soon went back home. It started to get dark not long afterwards anyway, so with the electricity still cut off, we went to bed.

Although we didn't hear it because we were busy on our computers, apparently Environment Canada did issue a warning, but only 12 minutes before the tornado struck. We had already had two thunderstorms earlier that day, so when we heard thunder again, we didn't expect that the third storm would be any different from the previous two. Miraculously, only one person—a salt mine employee—was killed when the structure in which he was working collapsed. There were several people injured, but none seriously. It would have been a very different story if we hadn't had the earlier storms. Normally, during the summer months, there is a flea market every Sunday in the downtown core, and it always attracts a lot of people, but because of the rain, it had closed earlier than usual that particular Sunday. The number of people killed and injured would have been considerable if the market had still be open.

The electricity was still off the next morning when we got up. Just as we finished eating a makeshift breakfast, we had a visit from our next door neighbour, Ben Landman, who told us that he was going to start up an electrical generator, and that he had come to connect our fridge to it. To do this, he and I had to move the fridge/freezer out of the kitchen and into the middle hall. We then had a cable running from there, across the floor in the den, out of the window and over the fence into Ben's back garden (yard). Not long after we got that all set up, Ben's wife, Barbara, visited with a jug of hot coffee. She did that every morning, and Ben kept the generator going until Friday, September 26th, afternoon when power was finally restored. Thankfully, the town's water and sewage treatment plants weren't affected by the tornado, so we still had running water and were able to flush our toilet.

A state of emergency was put into effect, and the entire downtown core was made off-limits for fear of unstable buildings and asbestos dust contamination, and the police were patrolling to prevent people sneaking in and perhaps getting injured. Many of the shopkeepers and apartment tenants weren't able to return to their premises for safety reasons. Loss of business revenue and, of course, living accommodation was a huge impact, but liability was also a major concern both by individual property owners and the municipality. Merchants and tenants were allowed entry as soon as some of the buildings were deemed safe. At least the town centre started to show signs of life, which was a tremendous boost to public morale.

Clearing of debris was put into full swing, as was also the restoration of utilities such as electricity and natural gas. Over the next couple of days, I lent a hand clearing debris from affected properties. Although hard work, it was amazing how quickly a team of about 20 people (including children) were able to remove rubbish from yards and gardens into fairly orderly piles at the side of the road to be picked up by demolition crews. The saddest part was the gathering of personal belongings, children's toys, and someone's memorabilia and then pitching them on the piles of debris. At one place, a crew came in with chain saws to remove a huge tree that had flattened three cars in a driveway and crashed through a house. Across the street the neighbouring house was only slightly damaged—again characteristic of a tornado. Soon, roofs were being covered by tarpaulins, and minor repair work was on the go by general contractors who appeared as if by magic; hoping to make easy money on somebody else's misfortune.

With so many heritage properties damaged or destroyed, it was hoped that some of the buildings in the downtown core could be saved and not demolished. So, a special restoration committee, which I was part of, was assigned to oversee the reconstruction. Special funding was made available, and, fortunately, some of



*Devastation in The Square as Seen from the Top of West Street with Ninety-nine Percent of all the Trees in Courthouse Park Totally Destroyed or Extensively Damaged, and the Huron County Court House Having Sustained a Direct Hit from the Tornado's Vortex.*



*The Top of West Street Showing the Destroyed Façade of the Masonic Building, and Rubble Strwn across the Road. A Scene Reminiscent of a War Zone.*





*Storm Cell and Waterspout Approaching Goderich Harbour, Goderich, Ontario, August 21, 2011.*



*Destruction Caused to the Sifto Salt Mine Storage Sheds, Goderich, Ontario, August 21, 2011.*



*Destruction Caused to West Street, The Square and Court House, Goderich, Ontario, August 21, 2011.*



*Destruction Caused to the Victoria Street United Church, Goderich, Ontario, August 21, 2011.*



*Destruction Caused to the Sifto Salt Evaporator Plant, Goderich, Ontario, August 21, 2011.*



*Funnel Cloud Cutting Across Huron County on the Outskirts of Goderich, Ontario, August 21, 2011.*



the foremost experts in the field were at our disposal. I was also involved in some of the decision making to ensure that the heritage element wasn't overlooked.

Life for us gradually returned to normal, but only when we were within our own four walls. Every time we went anywhere near 'tornado alley' and saw the devastation, we were reminded of that terrible afternoon. As well, we were used to walking to the downtown core for such things as the bank, post office and other services, but that was a 'no go' area. The closest intact bank was in the nearby town of Clinton. Door-to-door mail delivery was suspended, and a temporary post office was set up in the local shopping mall where I stood in line for an hour to get our post. Fortunately, neither the hospital nor the medical clinic sustained any damage, but our optician's practice was completely demolished and our dentist's office received substantial damage.

## *Tornado aftermath*

In the weeks following the tornado, the town slowly recovered. Actually, we were amazed at how fast some things did happen. As previously mentioned, the downtown core was declared a 'no-go' area and was inaccessible to the general public. Even from a distance, though, the damage looked so extensive that we thought it would be ages before any of the shops and businesses could reopen.

The first indication that things were starting to return to normal was the resumption of door-to-door mail delivery. Small as it may seem, that was a big morale booster. Then, on September 9th—less than three weeks after the tornado struck, and even though the worst effected parts were still cordoned off, and many of the buildings still had windows boarded up and tarpaulins over what was left of their upper storeys—the mayor officially reopened the downtown core to both pedestrian and vehicular traffic. Only a small number of shops had reopened, as several of the downtown merchants resumed business in buildings that were not severely damaged, and were given the green light by the health authorities. While all this was encouraging news, unfortunately a lot of buildings were so badly damaged that they were beyond repair and would have to be demolished and rebuilt. They stood out as stark reminders of that terrible afternoon, and whenever we went downtown, we came home with very mixed feelings.

Generally, the regular day-to-day activities resumed. Other mundane distractions, such as the resumption of school, helped to steer people's mind away from the topsy-turvy atmosphere that the townspeople were going through. Emphasis was put on fundraising drives; and benefit concerts, sports matches, and other oddball festivities sprouted up in the community. There was even a goodwill visit from two Royal Canadian Navy warships. As part of the 'showing the flag' exercise, two work parties of naval ratings were deployed by their officers to help the civilian clean up crews remove debris from the downtown core and the local cemetery, which was also in the tornado's path. The two ships—coastal defence craft—were open for public tours. This proved so successful that queuing for an hour was typical due to the large crowd.

Although the focus of recovery was on the downtown core, the number of houses with extensive damage was considerable, and like the commercial buildings, some were damaged beyond repair. A house down our road had already been demolished in readiness for rebuilding, but it was only the first of several that would

eventually have to be torn down. Unfortunately, the biggest change in the look of not only our neighbourhood, but also the entire length of ‘tornado alley’, was the loss of so many trees, and even though new ones would eventually be planted, it would take generations for them to grow to the size of some that were lost.

We were very fortunate that our two favourite restaurants in town—Thyme on 21 and the Park House tavern—suffered only minimal tornado damage. There were nine other restaurants in the downtown core, and only two reopened for business. The building in which a third restaurant was located sustained significant damage, so its future was in doubt. The remaining six, including Bailey’s, where we went occasionally, were all in the buildings that needed to be rebuilt..

## *Life and death*

As the town’s pulse reverted to almost normal, crews were hard at work repairing the damaged properties and parks. There were still some large areas of destruction, and selective demolition has taken place—primarily for safety reasons. I attended a Town Council meeting in which the agenda contained a great deal where reconstruction was concerned. Several heritage permit applications were approved, which meant that certain damaged designated structures had been given the green light for work to be done. More businesses restarted as the health authorities gave their clearance to resume operations. We were anxiously waiting for the local butcher shop to reopen. The butcher had to install brand new freezers, which was probably was a good thing as his previous units were old and not energy efficient. The tornado may have done him a favour.

The October weather was now typically autumnal and particularly pleasing with mild temperatures and lots of sunshine. One day, we went for a hike on a favourite trail following a pleasant lunch. Then trips to the Drayton Festival Theatre where we saw, *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, and the madcap comedy, *Who’s Under Where?*—well performed with precise timing, slapstick, and a script full of innuendoes and double-entendres. We thoroughly enjoyed both shows. There was one more performance before the season ended, *Blood Brothers*, a thought-provoking story about class distinction.

In general, we were keeping relatively healthy. My medical situation had only one wrinkle, which was a nagging pain in my tail bone. I saw my doctor as I was concerned that there could have been a connection with my prostate situation, or a problem caused by lifting heavy debris during the tornado clean up. He examined me and concluded I was suffering from coccydynia, or inflammation of the coccyx. A short course of anti-inflammatory pills reduced the pain, so no further worries. Monica’s skin condition was such that she could go for days without it hardly bothering her, and then have a bad day when it itched a lot. The allergist told us the medical name—urticaria with dermatographism.

My memoirs were progressing, as I penned my early years at Barnsbury School for Boys, and started the recollections at the Camden Road Upper School. Fortunately I had some early records, and from them compiled a chart showing the relationship of percentages and academic grades. Surprised myself a little in that my level of achievement at Laycock Junior Mixed Primary School was better than I originally thought (more figures above 50% than below), and the Barnsbury grades peaked in my fourth form before taking my

GCE 'O' levels a year later. However, there will be lots more to include in this chapter, which should end when I left school in 1962 and headed out into the wide world of work.

We planned a mini-trip around an outing that I helped organise for the LL 1863 Retirees Club. It was a tour of the antique car restoration firm, RM Auto Restoration, with workshops and a museum located near the community of Blenheim, Ontario, about 2-1/2 to 3 hours drive from Goderich. We drove to the city of Chatham a day earlier, but it was a miserable journey with rain, heavy at times, all the way until we were almost there. We had planned on stopping in Arkona and going for a hike in the Rock Glen Conservation Area, but that was a definite nonstarter with all the rain. Our 'Plan B' was to visit the Chatham-Kent Museum once we got to Chatham, but even though we asked a postman (mailman) for directions, we couldn't find it. We had also hoped that our friends, Diane and Mike Knight, from Windsor could meet us when we were in Chatham, but they were otherwise occupied and so our get-together didn't happen. At that point, we decided that it just wasn't our day for doing things, so we went and checked in early at the Holiday Inn Express hotel.

The next day, with club members and guests, we visited the facilities of what is considered the premier classic car renovation company in North America, and one of the foremost auction houses for classic automobiles that sold vehicles worth multi-million dollars at auction venues around the world. The visitors were given the opportunity to view many antique and exotic model cars and motor cycles in the museum next to the restoration workshops. Mario Van Raay, General Manager, Restorations, escorted the group through the workshops and explained the various skills needed to restore classic, often one-of-a-kind, cars using traditional methods and authentic materials. The bodywork and upholstery were restored, and the mechanicals thoroughly overhauled. When rebuilding engines and running gear, many of the parts were recreated. A fully equipped carpenter's shop was essential for automobile frames made of wood. Paintwork, meticulously applied, was often superior to the original finish. A chassis dynamometer ensured the end product's performance came up to specifications. All the visitors enjoyed the opportunity to be up close to rare examples of ultra-expensive performance and personal luxury cars.

The following day, we decided to drive home via the village of Dresden and visit Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site, as it had been on our places to visit list for sometime. Anyhow, the site included an interpretive centre with very informative displays on the life of the Rev. Josiah Henson and his involvement with the Underground Railroad, the primary purpose of which was to assist runaway slaves on their journey to freedom in Canada. It was his memoirs that inspired Harriet Beecher Stowe to write the book, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Also on the site were the house that Josiah Henson had lived in during his later years, a pioneer church similar to the one he had preached in, and the cemetery where he is buried. We found it all very interesting and well worth visiting. Then, as it was such a lovely afternoon and we still had enough time, we did what the rain prevented us from doing two days earlier. We stopped in Arkona and went for a hike in the Rock Glen Conservation Area where the main attraction was a waterfall. While it was quite picturesque, we have seen much better ones, and as the hiking trails weren't very extensive, we won't be returning there.

We received some belated sad news. Monica's first cousin, Trecia, died on August 30th, 2011, at age 79. Few details came from Monica's other cousins, Derek and Cheryl. However, Trecia's widowed husband,

Reg Gregory, phoned rather than write a letter, as he wanted to put us more in the picture. Trecia died peacefully in her sleep. Reg said that he had heard her whimpering around 4 o'clock, and had got up and comforted her. Then, when he got up at 7 o'clock, she had already passed away. There was a large gathering at the funeral with over 160 family and friends in attendance. The family requested donations to the Alzheimer's Society, as Trecia was stricken with this disease. As there had been so many trees lost here in the tornado, instead of making a donation ourselves, we purchased a tree in Trecia's memory.

Another death in my immediate family was first cousin, Ian. He passed away in Hatfield, Hertfordshire, on October 12th, 2011 at the age of 62. Once more, a huge blow to his mother, Aunt Win, who had lost her 59-year old daughter, Avril, on December 31, 2007, and her younger brother, Uncle George, in 2008.

There was a milestone celebration on my side of the family, when on October 16th, 2011, my aunt Kath celebrated her 100th birthday. We went to London, Ontario, to join Kath's son, Don, his wife, Claire, their daughter, Shannon, with husband, Brad, and children, Paige and Evan, and some close friends. Claire had organised a lunchtime get-together at the long-term retirement home in London where Kath lived. It was a memorable occasion, with greeting cards from the Queen and other significant dignitaries added to the balloons and birthday gifts. A special cake decorated with the three numeric candles—100—added to the occasion. Kath received a telephone call from her grandson, Brent, in Vancouver, BC, and it was amazing to see a centenarian speaking on a 21st century mobile (cell) phone.

### *Thanksgiving—something we all appreciated*

October's exceptionally fine weather encouraged us to stroll along the lakeshore boardwalk. We noticed increased activity in the commercial harbour, with no less than three huge freighters—including an ocean-going vessel—being loaded with cargo (rock salt from the mine and grain products from the silos). This showed that at least two of the town's major employers were working as usual, despite both installations having been damaged by the tornado. Repairs were done to the buildings, and in the case of the mine, several structures were demolished and replaced.

The rest of the town underwent various types of damage control. The Huron County Court House, which took the brunt of the storm, was being completely gutted and repaired. While this was happening, a temporary court house was set up in the form of prefabricated trailers (Portakabins). This ensured that judicial work could continue unhampered, brought more people into the town centre, and reduced the perception of a 'ghost town' image. The local ice cream/confectionery shop reopened and helped draw customers downtown. Some demolition took place, with new construction happening at the same time. Private houses were being repaired—many with new roofs—and replacement trees were also sprouting up.

The weekend following our Chatham trip was the Thanksgiving public holiday, and the sunny, warm weather that started while we were away continued right through the weekend. After breakfast on Saturday, we went for a long hike on the Goderich to Auburn Rail Trail (GART) where we noticed some nice patches of colour along the river valley. In the evening, we had the first of our Thanksgiving dinners at home. Then, on the Sunday evening, we went to the fine dining restaurant, Thyme on 21, where we had our second,



traditional Thanksgiving dinner of roast turkey with all the fixings followed by pumpkin pie.

On Monday, we visited friends, and the following day went ahead with a projected day out to Owen Sound. We try to hike the trail from Harrison Park to Inglis Falls and back through the Inglis Falls Conservation Area twice a year—spring and autumn—and according to the weather forecast it was going to be the last really nice day for quite a while. Not only did we have a lovely hike, but we also timed it right this year to see the salmon swimming up the Sydenham River to spawn. It was fascinating to watch them as they fought their way through the rapids.

Our last theatre outing for this season was to see *Blood Brothers*. We saw the play several years ago and thoroughly enjoyed it, but this production was a musical version. During the intermission, we were uncertain as to whether the music detracted from the powerful story, but at the end we both agreed that it was a fantastic show and well deserved the standing ovation it received.

Only about ten little kids in costume knocked at the door on Halloween night. The first visitor, however, was our own special little girl, Jessica, disguised as a witch, who arrived with her parents. We had a nice visit with them before they resumed their trek for more ‘trick or treat’ candies.

As the weeks went by, the town was recovering well, as more shops reopened in the downtown core. Damaged buildings were gradually being demolished and new ones replacing them. There was a huge push on planting saplings to replace the hundreds of trees that were decimated by the tornado. Other aspects of the community coming back to life were: the annual Santa Claus parade; the Festival of Lights and the replacement court house clock that chimed at every quarter hour (this was really missed for a long time, as it formed part of the ‘heartbeat’ of the town)—all huge morale boosters.

Fundraising for the Goderich Tornado Relief Fund was in full swing. We went to a benefit concert, which was a quickly improvised song and dance performance that entertained a complete sellout crowd of 650 patrons. Neighbouring municipalities also sent cheques, as well as individual initiatives by schools, service clubs, businesses and special interest groups. A fundraising dinner was organised at the fine dining restaurant, Thyme on 21, It was a four course meal with a different wine for each course. All the food and wine was donated by the restaurant’s various suppliers. The staff also agreed to work for nothing and to have their evening’s wages—plus a portion of their tips—added to the donation. Although we went on our own, we knew many of the other guests and it was like being at a big house party. It was a fabulous evening.

Another very enjoyable event was an unexpected theatre outing. We had thought that going to see *Blood Brothers* was our last theatre show for this year, but that was before we heard about a special *Fundraising Variety Show* being put on in aid of the Goderich Tornado Relief Fund. The show, which was a sellout, was the combined effort of several theatrical companies. Between them, they lined up some of the country’s finest talent, and a mix of singers, musicians, dancers and even a magician entertained for nearly three hours. It was a great show, and like the fundraising dinner at Thyme on 21, all those who took part—including the MC, who kept the audience amused between the acts with his humorous anecdotes—as well as the backstage people, donated their time for the cause.

As our friends, Diane and Mike Knight, from Windsor, Ontario, were unable to meet us when we were in Chatham, we had to arrange another date for a lunchtime meeting. We agreed to meet in Sarnia at Crabby Joe's family restaurant where we have met before. We like it there because they don't mind us sitting and chatting long after we have finished eating. Even though we are in touch regularly by e-mail, we always seem to find lots to talk about, and we were there nearly four hours!

## *Mild weather and a 'green' Christmas*

After a mix of weather in October, the first few days of November were exceptionally nice, and because the temperature reached 61 deg.F (16 deg.C) one particular afternoon, we just had to go for a walk to the harbour and along the lakeshore boardwalk, stopping at the end to sit for a while in the sunshine. It was lovely. However, the weather pattern soon turned seasonal with lots of snow on the ground. Still, the forecasters predicted a warm Christmas week, and most—if not all—of the accumulated snow would probably be lost; possibly meaning a 'green' Christmas.

The recent stretch of mild weather helped the construction crews in their repair work around town, and new roofs, windows, siding and even complete houses materialised. Previously displaced businesses in the downtown core returned to their repaired properties and the local Business Improvement Association (BIA) estimated that approximately 71% of the retail/professional outlets were back in operation.

We celebrated my 38th anniversary of emigration on November 4th, and my 66th birthday on November 25th; both occasions at the fine dining restaurant, Thyme on 21.

Monica started to experience a 'trigger' thumb on her right hand. Actually, it was more of a nuisance than anything, and it only really bothered her when she tried to do something that required a bent thumb. She had the same problem with her left thumb about 20 years ago, and surgery had corrected it. She was expecting that it would be the same this time; although when she mention her condition to her chiropractor, he considered she may not need surgery. He said that he had been quite successful in treating 'trigger' fingers and thumbs, and showed Monica how to massage and stretch her thumb as part of the therapy. However, Monica's doctor made an appointment with a specialist in Stratford in February.

Our friends, Robin and Barb Hewitt, invited us to their place for a Christmas get-together with them and Jessica. Their house was a 20 minute drive away from Goderich, but Robin came and picked us up, and we took a taxi back home. As predicted, the 'green' Christmas Day was spent quietly at home, and our long standing friends, Shirley and Norris, invited us to visit them on Boxing Day. The usual crowd was there, but this year, for the first time since they were married, Shirley and Norris' granddaughter, Katie, and her husband, Stuart, were visiting. Following their wedding, they lived in Montréal for about a year. Later, they moved with jobs to Holland, and anticipated staying there for the foreseeable future.

The day after Boxing Day, we had a phone call from our landlord to say that he and his son-in-law would be coming the following day to replace our living room window. We knew that we were to get a new window but didn't know when they would come to do the work. When we got up the following morning, it





*Two Royal Canadian Navy Coastal Defence Craft, Goodwill Visit, Goderich, Ontario, September, 2011.*



*LL 1863 Retirees Club Visit to RM Auto Restoration, near Blenheim, Ontario, October, 2011.*



*Monica outside the Pioneer Church at Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site, Dresden, ON, October, 2011.*



*The Waterfall at Rock Glen Conservation Area near Arkona, Ontario, October, 2011.*



*Aunt Kath Celebrates her 100th Birthday with Cake and Family, London, Ontario, October, 2011.*



*Barry and Monica with their Christmas Cake on Christmas Day, Goderich, Ontario, December, 2011.*



was snowing and blowing so hard that we could hardly see across the road at times. We expected a phone call from our landlord to say that they wouldn't be coming, but undeterred by the weather, they still came. It was the coldest day of this winter up until then with a temperature of 21 deg.F (minus 6 deg.C) and not only was the big window removed, but the front door was also constantly being opened as the workmen came in and out. We were able to shut off the living room heating, and stayed in the nice and warm den by controlling its individual thermostat. Anyhow, the men did a great job; the new window being a vast improvement over the old one.

We went to Thyme on 21 fine dining restaurant on New Year's Eve for their gala dinner—a special four course dinner. Although we were among the last to leave the restaurant, we were home around 10.30 p.m. We had planned on staying up to toast in the New Year and had even put a half bottle of sparkling wine in the fridge to cool. However, we both agreed that we had had a wonderful evening and didn't want anything more to eat or drink, so as we were tired, we decided to go to bed. It was the first time for many years that we hadn't stayed up to see in the New Year. We must be getting old!!